

seasickness." Lieutenant Commander Crowley then took me to his quarters.

"Virgil, I've been given the authority to offer you a deal. One that will keep you out of jail."

"What kind of deal?"

"Well, the "Aggressive" sails tomorrow on a two-week fishery patrol. If you agree to sail with us, and don't try anything funny, then we will suspend your jail time."

I just sat there, my mouth open, this look of astonishment on my face at this man's obvious stupidity.

"I guess, Mr. Crowley," I said, "that you have been asleep for a long time. I am CHRONICALLY SEASICK! I have a disease, one that prevents me from going out to sea. I get seasick! I can't eat! I lose weight! Where the fuck have you been?"

"So the answer is 'no'?"

"The answer is 'no.'"

"You know, the Captain talked to your parents. They would like to talk to you."

"Fine. Where are they?"

"Right outside." And he opened the door and there they were. They came in. Solemn. My Mother had been crying, I could tell. But not the old man. He was the stiff emotionless robot I had know all my life.

"Hi, Tiger," said Mom, "How's it going?"

"Mom, I'm not going out to sea, ever again."

"Okay, I understand. You know best."

"I'm going to jail, y'know."

"Yes, we heard."

"Are you really going to get my car?"

"We're going to make it sort of a vacation. Thought we'd stop over in Florida to see your aunt and uncle."

"Good."

"Listen, Virgil, I uh," she looked at my father, "we're sorry that we couldn't help you. You know that we love you, don't you?"

Mom's voice could always make me start crying, and I felt the urge to burst into tears right then, so I breathed deeply and looked at Dad and held them back.

"Yeah, I know."

"Is there anything that you need? Money for smokes? Anything?" asked my father.

"Nope, I'm alright." Of course, I didn't have a dime.

He dug into his wallet anyway and produced a twenty dollar bill. "Here, just in case."

"No, that's alright, Dad. You're gonna need it on your trip."

"Take it, son, please?"

And I did, but I couldn't hold back the tears any longer. Mom put her hand on my shoulder, but Dad just stood there, not knowing just how to react.

"Where's your bike? He asked.

"It's up in the parking lot."

"Want us to leave it here?"

"Yeah, I'll need some way to get home, when I get out."

They took my guitar and all of my other things that I couldn't take to the brig with me, said one last 'goodbye' and headed up the pier.

Crowley said "It's time to go," and we piled into his car for the drive to Newport. On the road again, I thought.

When we arrived, the sun had disappeared behind the overcast, and the air was cooling towards evening. He shook my hand, wished me good luck, and I thanked him.

"See you in forty-five days," he said, and he got into his car. "Oh, I almost forgot to give you this mail."

There were letters from bill-collectors, a letter from Mom, two copies of Sports Illustrated from the subscription she got me for Christmas, and a five-by-seven manila envelope which was addressed to me in New York, in fine calligraphy.

Curious, I opened it immediately as Crowley drove off. There was a picture of me, standing on top of the World Trade Center in New York, staring out over the

city. I remembered the day, and I could see myself in isolated reflection. There was a note.

Dear Virgil,

I never saw anyone so hypnotized by anything before. I don't know what you were thinking about, but I had to talk to you, and that's when I asked you to take our picture. Maybe you'll tell me someday what was going on in your mind that day. I hope you don't think this is stupid, and I hope you remember me. Please write. Hannah.

And she wrote her address at the bottom. And her phone number.

"I will, Hannah Wakeman. I will."

The days in the brig passed quickly. I got laundry duty, and we watched TV and played pool and cards and smoked cigarettes, and I wrote to Hannah, told her what had happened. The truth. And she wrote back to me, believing in me, giving me hope, something to look forward to.

I wrote stories, too. One, I called "The River," was kind of a ghost story, about a woman who comes back

from the dead to make love to this young guy who had been chosen to keep the circle of the living dead going, those who emerge from the black cold river every night to feed on the living.

Another one was about a schizophrenic Viet Nam veteran who maniacally drove a fork lift at a boat yard on a remote resort island. Through flashbacks to the battlefield, he convinces himself that the fork lift is alive, with a personality and a mind of its own. Eventually, the two become at odds with each other and the final battle scene takes place inside the boathouse during a violent thunder storm as the great machine destroys itself, and the boathouse, and the man.

And I wrote one about a great guitarist who, while working in a cabinet shop, has his left hand almost cut off by a saw blade. Though he loses the use of his fingers, he eventually learns how to play the guitar again, left-handed.

The stories were therapy, really, and I learned to look upon them as such. Someday, I reasoned, I might be able to write about all that had happened to me in the past eighteen months, and I tried while I was in jail a couple of times. But it never seemed to work; some facet of my life kept the words from flowing like they did with the other stories. I don't know what.

Finally, the day came for my release. I walked out the front door of the brig with new eyes. The van awaited me, carried me right back to my ship, where I received my honorable discharge.

I shook the various hands that were presented me, friends that I never really knew. I stepped down over the gangway, took a deep breath and looked out over the harbor for one last time.

Here was my line. My fence, my border, my physical limitation. There were others inside, ones that I had built for myself, there to protect my fragile heart and soul from the world that I had found so intimidating. Erected initially to stop the pain of childhood, but, nondiscriminatory, standing firm in the face of any emotion, they were a huge part of me, and I panicked with the notion that I had no idea of how to tear them down.

I removed my hat and held it by the brim, clean and white, for a moment, then tossed it into the water, bobbing there briefly before beginning its slow journey out with the going tide.