

Stephen King: Survivor Type

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Sooner or later the question comes up in every medical student's career. How much shock-trauma can the patient stand? Different instructors answer the question, in different ways, but cut to its base level, the answer is always another question: How badly does the patient want to survive?

January 26

Two days since the storm washed me up. I paced the island off just this morning. Some island! It is 190 paces wide at its thickest point, and 267 paces long from tip to tip

So far as I can tell, there is nothing on it to eat.

My name is Richard Pine. This is my diary. If I'm found (*when*), I can destroy this easily enough. There is no shortage of matches. Matches and heroin. Plenty of both. Neither of them worth doodlysquats here, ha-ha. So I will write. It will pass the time, anyway.

If I'm to tell the whole truth--and why not? I sure have the time!--I'll have to start by saying I was born Richard Pinzetti, in New York's Little Italy. My father was an Old World guinea. I wanted to be a surgeon. My father would laugh, call me crazy, and tell me to get him another glass of wine. He died of cancer when he was forty-six. I was glad.

I played football in high school. I was the best damn football player my school ever produced. Quarterback. I made All-City my last two years. I hated football. But if you're a poor wop from the projects and you want to go to college, sports are your only ticket. So I played, and I got my athletic scholarship.

In college I only played ball until my grades were good enough to get a full academic scholarship. Pre-med. My father died six weeks before graduation. Good deal. Do you think I wanted to walk across that stage and get my diploma and look down and see that fat greaseball sitting there? Does a hen want a flag? I got into a fraternity, too. It wasn't one of the good ones, not with a name like Pinzetti, but a fraternity all the same.

Why am I writing this? It's almost funny. No, I take that back. It *is* funny. The great Dr. Pine, sitting on a rock in his pajama bottoms and a T-shirt, sitting on an island almost small enough to spit across, writing his life story. Am I hungry! Never mind, I'll write my goddam life story if I want to. At least it keeps my mind off my stomach. Sort of.

I changed my name to Pine before I started reed school. My mother said I was breaking her heart. What heart? The day after my old man was in the ground, she was out hustling that Jew grocer down at the end of the block. For someone who loved the name so much, she was in one hell of a hurry to change her copy of it to Steinbrunner.

Surgery was all I ever wanted. Ever since high school. Even then I was wrapping my hands before every game and soaking them afterward. If you want to be a surgeon, you have to take care of your hands. Some of the kids used to rag me about it, call me chickenshit. I never fought them. Playing football was risk enough. But there were ways. The one that got on my case the most was Howie Plotsky, a big dumb bohunk with zits all over his face. I had a paper route, and I was selling the numbers along with the papers. I had a little coming in lots of ways. You get to know people, you listen, you make connections. You have to, when you're hustling the street. Any asshole knows how to die. The thing to learn is how to survive, you know what I mean? So I paid the biggest kid in school, Ricky Brazzi, ten bucks to make Howie Plotsky's mouth disappear. Make it disappear, I said. I will pay you a dollar for every tooth you bring me. Rico brought me three teeth wrapped up in a paper towel. He dislocated two of his knuckles doing the job, so you see the kind of trouble I could have got into.

In med school while the other suckers were running themselves ragged trying to bone up--no pun intended, ha-ha--between waiting tables or selling neckties or buffing floors, I kept the rackets going. Football pools, basketball pools, a little policy. I stayed on good terms with the old neighborhood. And I got through school just fine.

I didn't get into pushing until I was doing my residency. I was working in one of the biggest hospitals in New York City. At first it was just prescription blanks. I'd sell a tablet of a hundred blanks to some guy from the neighborhood, and he'd forge the names of forty or fifty different doctors on them, using writing samples I'd also sell him. The guy would turn around and peddle the blanks on the street for ten or twenty dollars apiece. The speed freaks and the nodders loved it.

And after a while I found out just how much of a balls-up the hospital drug room was in. Nobody knew what was coming in or going out. There were people lugging the goodies out by the double handfuls. Not me. I was always careful. I never got into trouble until I got careless--and unlucky. But I'm going to land on my feet. I always do.

Can't write any more now. My wrist's tired and the pencil's dull. I don't know why I'm bothering, anyway. Somebody'll probably pick me up soon.

January 27

The boat drifted away last night and sank in about ten feet of water off the north side of the island. Who gives a rip? The bottom was like Swiss cheese after coming over the reef anyway. I'd already taken off anything that was worth taking. Four gallons of water. A sewing kit. A first-aid kit. This book I'm writing in, which is supposed to be a lifeboat inspection log. That's a laugh. Whoever heard of a lifeboat with no FOOD on it? The last report written in here is August 8, 1970. Oh, yes, two knives, one dull and one fairly sharp, one combination fork and spoon. I'll use them when I eat my supper tonight. Roast rock. Ha-ha. Well, I did get my pencil sharpened.

When I get off this pile of guano-splattered rock, I'm going to sue the bloody hell out of Paradise Lines, Inc. That alone is worth living for. And I am going to live. I'm going to get out of this. Make no mistake about it. I am going to get out of this.

(later)

When I was making my inventory, I forgot one thing: two kilos of pure heroin, worth about \$350,000, New York street value. Here it's worth el zilcho. Sort of funny, isn't it? Ha-ha!

January 28

Well, I've eaten if you want to call that eating. There was a gull perched on one of the rocks at the center of the island. The rocks are all jumbled up into a kind of mini-mountain there all covered with birdshit, too. I got a chunk of stone that just fitted into my hand and climbed up as close to it as I dared. It just stood there on its rock, watching me with its bright black eyes. I'm surprised that the rumbling of my stomach didn't scare it off.

I threw the rock as hard as I could and hit it broadside. It let out a loud squawk and tried to fly away, but I'd broken its right wing. I scrambled up after it and it hopped away. I could see the blood trickling over its white feathers. The son of a bitch led me a merry chase; once, on the other side of the central rockpile, I got my foot caught in a hole between two rocks and nearly fractured my ankle.

It began to tire at last, and I finally caught it on the east side of the island. It was actually trying to get into the water and paddle away. I caught a handful of its tailfeathers and it turned around and pecked me. Then I had one hand around its feet. I got my other hand on its miserable neck and broke it. The sound gave me great satisfaction. Lunch is served, you know? Ha! Ha!

I carried it back to my "camp," but even before I plucked and gutted it, I used iodine to swab the laceration its beak had made. Birds carry all sorts of germs, and the last thing I need now is an infection.

The operation on the gull went quite smoothly, I could not cook it, alas. Absolutely no vegetation or driftwood on the island and the boat has sunk. So I ate it raw. My stomach wanted to regurgitate it immediately. I sympathized but could not allow it. I counted backward until the nausea passed. It almost always works.

Can you imagine that bird, almost breaking my ankle and then pecking me? If I catch another one tomorrow, I'll torture it. I let this one off too easily. Even as I write, I am able to glance down at its severed head on the sand. Its black eyes, even with the death-glaze on them, seem to be mocking me. Do gulls have brains in any quantity'? Are they edible?

January 29

No chow today. One gull landed near the top of the rockpile but flew off before I could get close enough to "throw it a forward pass," ha-ha! I've started a beard. Itches like hell. If the gull comes back and I get it, I'm going to cut its eyes out before I kill it.

I was one hell of a surgeon, as I believe I may have said. They drummed me out. It's a laugh, really: they all do it, and they're so bloody sanctimonious when someone gets caught at it. Screw you, Jack, I got mine. The Second Oath of Hippocrates and Hypocrites.

I had enough socked away from my adventures as an intern and a resident (that's supposed to be like an officer and a gentleman according to the Oath of Hypocrites, but don't you believe it) to set myself up in practice on Park Avenue. A good thing for me, to; I had no rich daddy or established patron, as so many of my "colleagues" did. By the time my shingle was out, my father was nine years in his pauper's grave. My mother died the year before my license to practice was revoked.

It was a kickback thing. I had a deal going with half a dozen East Side pharmacists, with two drug supply houses, and with at least twenty other doctors. Patients were sent to me and I sent patients. I performed operations and prescribed the correct post-op drugs. Not all the operations were necessary, but I never performed one against a patient's will. And I never had a patient look down at what was written on the prescription blank and say, "I don't want this." Listen: they'd have a hysterectomy in 1965 or a partial thyroid in 1970, and still be taking painkillers five or ten years later, if you'd let them. Sometimes I did. I wasn't the only one, you know. They could afford the habit. And sometimes a patient would have trouble sleeping after minor surgery. Or trouble getting diet pills. Or Librium. It could also be arranged. Ha! Yes! If they hadn't gotten it from me, they would have gotten it from someone else.

Then the tax people got to Lowenthal. That sheep. They waved five years in his face and he coughed up half a dozen names. One of them was mine. They watched me for a while, and by the time they landed, I was worth a lot more than five years. There were a few other deals, including the prescription blanks, which I hadn't given up entirely. It's funny, I didn't really need that stuff anymore, but it was a habit. Hard to give up that extra sugar.

Well, I knew some people. I pulled some strings. And I threw a couple of people to the wolves. Nobody I liked, though. Everyone I gave to the wolves was a real son of a bitch. Christ, I'm hungry.

January 30

No gulls today. Reminds me of the signs you'd sometimes see on the pushcarts back in the neighborhood, so TOMATOES TODAY. I walked out into the water up to my waist with the sharp knife in my hand. I stood completely still in that one place with the sun beating down on me for four hours. Twice I thought I was going to faint, but I counted backward until it passed. I didn't see one fish. Not one.

January 31

Killed another gull, the same way I did the first. I was too hungry to torture it the way I had been promising myself. I gutted and ate it. Squeezed the tripe and then ate them, too. It's strange how you can feel your vitality surge back I was beginning to get scared there, for a while. Lying in the shade of the big central rockpile, I'd think I was hearing voices. My father. My mother. My ex-wife. And worst of all the big Chink who sold me the heroin in Saigon. He had a lisp, possibly from a partially cleft, palate.

"Go ahead," his voice came out of nowhere. "Go ahead and thort a little. You won't notith how hungry you are then. It's beautiful ..." But I've never done dope, not even sleeping pills.

Lowenthal killed himself, did I tell you that? That sheep. He hanged himself in what used to be his office. The way I look at it, he did the world a favor.

I wanted my shingle back. Some of the people I talked to said it could be done--but it would cost big money. More grease than I'd ever dreamed of. I had \$40,000 in a safe-deposit box. I decided I'd have to take a chance and try to turn it over. Double or triple it.

So I went to see Ronnie Hanelli. Ronnie and I played football together in college, and when his kid brother decided on internal med, I helped him get a residency. Ronnie himself was in pre-law, how's that for funny? On the block when we were growing up we called him Ronnie the Enforcer because he umped all the stickball games and reffed the hockey. If you didn't like his calls, you had your choice--you could keep your mouth shut or you could eat knuckles. The Puerto Ricans called him *Ronniewop*. All one word like that. *Ronniewop*. Used to tickle him. And that guy went to college, and then to law school, and he breezed through his bar exam the first time he took it,

and then he set up shop in the old neighborhood, right over the Fish Bowl Bar. I close my eyes and I can still see him cruising down the block in that white Continental of his. The biggest fucking loan shark in the city.

I knew Ronnie would have something for me. "It's dangerous," he said. "But you could always take care of yourself. And if you can get the stuff back in, I'll introduce you to a couple of fellows. One of them is a state representative."

He gave me two names over there. One of them was the big Chink, Henry Li-Tsu. The other was a Vietnamese named Solom Ngo. A chemist. For a fee he would test the Chink's product. The Chink was known to play "jokes" from time to time. The "jokes" were plastic bags filled with talcum powder, with drain cleaner, with cornstarch. Ronnie said that one day Li-Tsu's little jokes would get him killed.

February 1

There was a plane. It flew right across the island. I tried to climb to the top of the rockpile and wave to it. My foot went into a hole. The same damn hole I got it stuck in the day I killed the first bird, I think. I've fractured my ankle, compound fracture. It went like a gunshot. The pain was unbelievable. I screamed and lost my balance, pinwheeling my arms like a madman, but I went down and hit my head and everything went black. I didn't wake up until dusk. I lost some blood where I hit my head. My ankle had swelled up like a tire, and I'd got myself a very nasty sunburn. I think if there had been another hour of sun, it would have blistered.

Dragged myself back here and spent last night shivering and crying with frustration. I disinfected the head wound, which is just above the right temporal lobe, and bandaged it as well as I could. Just a superficial scalp wound plus minor concussion, I think, but my ankle ... it's a bad break, involved in two places, possibly three.

How will I chase the birds now?

It had to be a plane looking for survivors from the *Callas*. In the dark and the storm, the lifeboat must have carried miles from where it sank. They may not be back this way.

God, my ankle hurts so bad.

February 2

I made a sign on the small white shingle of a beach on the island's south side, where the lifeboat grounded. It took me all day, with pauses to rest in the shade. Even so, I fainted twice. At a guess, I'd say I've lost 25 lbs, mostly from dehydration. But now, from where I sit, I can see the four letters it took me all day to spell out; dark rocks against the white sand, they say HELP in characters four feet high.

Another plane won't miss me.

If there is another plane.

My foot throbs constantly. There is swelling still and ominous discoloration around the double break. Discoloration seems to have advanced. Binding it tightly with my shirt alleviates the worst of the pain, but it's still bad enough so that I faint rather than sleep.

I have begun to think I may have to amputate.

February 3

Swelling and discoloration worse still. I'll wait until tomorrow. If the operation does become necessary, I believe I can carry it through. I have matches for sterilizing the sharp knife, I have needle and thread from the sewing kit. My shirt for a bandage.

I even have two kilos of "painkiller," although hardly of the type I used to prescribe. But they would have taken it if they could have gotten it. You bet. Those old blue-haired ladies would have snorted Glade air freshener if they thought it would have gotten them high. Believe it!

February 4

I've decided to amputate my foot. No food four days now. If I wait any longer, I run the risk of fainting from combined shock and hunger in the middle of the operation and bleeding to death. And as wretched as I am, I still want to live. I remember what Mockridge used to say in Basic Anatomy. Old Mockie, we used to call him. Sooner or later, he'd say, the question comes up in every medical student's career: How much shock-trauma can the patient stand? And he'd whack his pointer at his chart of the human body, hitting the liver, the kidneys, the heart, the spleen, the intestines Cut to its base level, gentlemen, he'd say. the answer is always another question: How badly does the patient want to survive?

I think I can bring it off.

I really do.

I suppose I'm writing to put off the inevitable, but it did occur to me that I haven't finished the story of how I came to be here. Perhaps I should tie up that loose end in case the operation does go badly. It will only take a few minutes, and I'm sure there will be enough daylight left for the operation, for, according to my Pulsar, it's only nine past nine in the morning. Ha!

I flew to Saigon as a tourist. Does that sound strange? It shouldn't. There are still thousands of people who visit there every year in spite of Nixon's war. There are people who go to see car wrecks and cockfights, too.

My Chinese friend had the merchandise. I took it to Ngo, who pronounced it very. high-grade stuff. He told me that Li-Tsu had played one of his jokes four months ago and that his wife had been blown up when she turned on the ignition of her Opel. Since then there had been no more jokes.

I stayed in Saigon for three weeks; I had booked passage back to San Francisco on a cruise ship, the *Callas*. First cabin. Getting on board with the merchandise was no trouble; for a fee Ngo arranged for two customs officials to simply wave me on after running through my suitcases. The merchandise was in an airline flight bag, which they never even looked at.

"Getting through U.S. customs will be much more difficult," Ngo told me. "That, however, is your problem."

I had no intention of taking the merchandise through U.S. customs. Ronnie Hanelli had arranged for a skin diver who would do a certain rather tricky job for \$3,000. I was to meet him (two days ago, now that I think of it) in a San Francisco flophouse called the St. Regis Hotel. The plan was to put the merchandise in a waterproof can. Attached to the can was a timer and a packet of red dye. Just before we docked, the canister was to be thrown overboard--but not by me, of course.

I was still looking for a cook or a steward who could use a little extra cash and who was smart enough--or stupid enough--to keep his mouth closed afterward, when the *Callas* sank.

I don't know how or why. It was storming, but the ship seemed to be handling that well enough. Around eight o'clock on the evening of the 23rd, there was an explosion somewhere belowdecks. I was in the lounge at the time, and the *Callas* began to list almost immediately. To the left ... do they call that "port" or "starboard"?

People were screaming and running in every direction. Bottles were falling off the backbar and shattering on the floor. A man staggered up from one of the lower levels, his shirt burned off, his skin barbecued. The loudspeaker started telling people to go to the lifeboat stations they had been assigned during the drill at the beginning of the cruise. The passengers went right on running hither and yon. Very few of them had bothered to show up during the lifeboat drill. I not only showed up, I came early--I wanted to be in the front row, you see, so I would have an unobstructed view of everything. I always pay close attention when the matter concerns my own skin.

I went down to my stateroom, got the heroin bags, and put one in each of my front pockets. Then I went to Lifeboat Station 8. As I went up the stairwell to the main deck there were two more explosions and the boat began to list even more severely.

Topside, everything was confusion. I saw a screeching woman with a baby in her arms run past me, gaining speed as she sprinted down the slippery, canting deck. She hit the rail with her thighs, and flipped outward. I saw her do two midair somersaults and part of a third before I lost sight of her. There was a middle-aged man sitting in the center of the shuffleboard court and pulling his hair. Another man in cook's whites, horribly burned about his face and hands, was stumbling from place to place and screaming, "HELP ME! CAN'T SEE! HELP ME! CAN'T SEE!"

The panic was almost total: it had run from the passengers to the crew like a disease. You must remember that the time elapsed from the first explosion to the actual sinking of the *Callas* was only about twenty minutes. Some of the lifeboat stations were clogged with screaming passengers, while others were absolutely empty. Mine, on the listing side of the ship, was almost deserted. There was no one there but myself and a common sailor with a pimply, pallid face.

"Let's get this buckety-bottomed old whore in the water," he said, his eyes rolling crazily in their sockets. "This bloody tub is going straight to the bottom."

The lifeboat gear is simple enough to operate, but in his fumbling nervousness, he got his side of the block and tackle tangled. The boat dropped six feet and then hung up, the bow two feet lower than the stem.

I was coming around to help him when he began to scream. He'd succeeded in untangling the snarl and had gotten his hand caught at the same time. The whizzing rope smoked over his open palm, flying off skin, and he was jerked over the side.

I tossed the rope ladder overboard, hurried down it, and unclipped the lifeboat from the lowering ropes. Then I rowed, something I had occasionally done for pleasure on trips to my friends' summer houses, something I was now doing for my life. I knew that if I didn't get far enough away from the dying *Callas* before she sank, she would pull me down with her.

Just five minutes later she went. I hadn't escaped the suction entirely; I had to row madly just to stay in the same place. She went under very quickly. There were still people clinging to the rail of her bow and screaming. They looked like a bunch of monkeys.

The storm worsened. I lost one oar but managed to keep the other, I spent that whole night in a kind of dream, first bailing, then grabbing the oar and paddling wildly to get the boat's prow into the next bulging wave.

Sometime before dawn on the 24th, the waves began to strengthen behind me. The boat rushed forward. It was terrifying but at the same time exhilarating. Suddenly most of the planking was ripped out from under my feet, but before the lifeboat could sink it was dumped on this godforsaken pile of rocks. I don't even know where I am: have no idea at all. Navigation not my strong point, ha-ha.

But I know what I have to do. This may be the last entry, but somehow I think I'll make it. Haven't I always? And they are really doing marvelous things with prosthetics these days. I can get along with one foot quite nicely.

It's time to see if I'm as good as I think I am. Luck.

February 5

Did it.

The pain was the part I was most worried about. I can stand pain, but I thought that in my weakened condition, a combination of hunger and agony might force unconsciousness before I could finish.

But the heroin solved that quite nicely.

I opened one of the bags and sniffed two healthy pinches from the surface of a flat rock, first the right nostril, then the left. It was like sniffing up some beautifully numbing ice that spread through the brain from the bottom up. I aspirated the heroin as soon as I finished writing in this diary yesterday--that was at 9:45. The next time I checked my watch the shadows had moved, leaving me partially in the sun, and the time was 12:41. I had nodded off. I had never dreamed that it could be so beautiful, and I can't understand why I was so scornful before. The pain, the terror, the misery . . . they all disappear, leaving only a calm euphoria.

It was in this state that I operated.

There was, indeed, a great deal of pain, most of it in the early part of the operation. But the pain seemed disconnected from me, like somebody else's pain. It bothered me, but it was also quite interesting. Can you understand that? If you've used a strong morphine-based drug yourself, perhaps you can. It does more than dull pain. It induces a state of mind. A serenity. I can understand why people get hooked on it, although "hooked" seems an awfully strong word, used most commonly, of course, by those who have never tried it.

About halfway through, the pain started to become a more personal thing. Waves of faintness washed over me. I looked longingly at the open bag of white powder, but forced myself to look away. If I went on the nod again, I'd bleed to death as surely as if I'd fainted. I counted backward from a hundred instead.

Loss of blood was the most critical factor. As a surgeon, I was vitally aware of that. Not a drop could be spilled unnecessarily. If a patient hemorrhages during an operation in a hospital, you can give him blood. I had no such supplies. What was lost--and by the time I had finished, the sand beneath my leg was dark with it--was lost until my own internal factory could resupply. I had no clamps, no hemostats, no surgical thread.

I began the operation at exactly 12:45. I finished at 1:50, and immediately dosed myself with heroin, a bigger dose than before. I nodded into a gray, painless world and remained there until nearly five o'clock. When I came out of it, the sun was nearing the western horizon, beating a track of gold across the blue Pacific toward me. I've never seen anything so beautiful . . . all the pain was paid for in that one instant. An hour later I snorted a bit more, so as to fully enjoy and appreciate the sunset.

Shortly after dark I--

I--

Wait. Haven't I told you I'd had nothing to eat *for four days*? And that the only help I could look to in the matter of replenishing my sapped vitality was my own body? Above all, haven't I told you, over and over, that survival is a business of the mind? The superior mind? I won't justify myself by saying you would have done the same thing. First of all, you're probably not a surgeon. Even if you knew the mechanics of amputation, you might have botched the job so badly you would have bled to death anyway. And even if you had lived through the operation and the shock-trauma, the thought might never have entered your preconditioned head. Never mind. No one has to know. My last act before leaving the island will be to destroy this book.

I was very careful.

I washed it thoroughly before I ate it.

February 7

Pain from the stump has been bad excruciating from time to time. But I think the deep-seated itch as the healing process begins has been worse. I've been thinking this afternoon of all the patients that have babbled to me that they couldn't stand the horrible, unscratchable itch of mending flesh. And I would smile and tell them they would feel better tomorrow, privately thinking what whiners they were, what jellyfish, what ungrateful babies. Now I understand. Several times I've come close to ripping the shirt bandage off the stump and scratching at it, digging my fingers into the soft raw flesh, pulling out the rough stitches, letting the blood gout onto the sand, anything, anything, to be rid of that maddening horrible *itch*.

At those times I count backward from one hundred. And snort heroin.

I have no idea how much I've taken into my system, but I do know I've been "stoned" almost continually since the operation. It depresses hunger, you know. I'm hardly aware of being hungry at all. There is a faint, faraway gnawing in my belly, and that's all. It could easily be ignored. I can't do that, though. Heroin has no measurable caloric value. I've been testing myself, crawling from place to place, measuring my energy. It's ebbing.

Dear God, I hope not, but ... another operation may be necessary.

(later)

Another plane flew over. Too high to do me any good; all I could see was the contrail etching itself across the sky. I waved anyway. Waved and screamed at it. When it was gone I wept.

Getting too dark to see now. Food. I've been thinking about all kinds of food. My mother's lasagna. Garlic bread. Escargots. Lobster. Prime ribs. Peach melba. London broil. The huge slice of pound cake and the scoop of homemade vanilla ice cream they give you for dessert in Mother Crunch on First Avenue. Hot pretzels baked salmon baked Alaska baked ham with pineapple tings. Onion rings. Onion dip with potato chips cold iced tea in long long sips french fries make you smack your lips.

100, 99, 98, 97, 96, 95, 94

God God God

February 8

Another gull landed on the rockpile this morning. A huge fat one. I was sitting in the shade of my rock, what I think of as my camp, my bandaged stump propped up. I began to salivate as soon as the gull landed. Just like one of Pavlov's dogs. Drooling helplessly, like a baby. Like a baby.

I picked up a chunk of stone large enough to fit my hand nicely and began to crawl toward it. Fourth quarter. We're down by three. Third and long yardage. Pinzetti drops back to pass (Pine, I mean, *Pine*). I didn't have much hope. I was sure it would fly off. But I had to try. If I could get it, a bird as plump and insolent as that one, I could postpone a second operation indefinitely. I crawled toward it, my stump hitting a rock from time to time and sending stars of pain through my whole body, and waited for it to fly off.

It didn't. It just strutted back and forth, its meaty breast thrown out like some avian general reviewing troops. Every now and then it would look at me with its small, nasty black eyes and I would freeze like a stone and count backward from one hundred until it began to pace back and forth again. Every time it fluttered its wings, my stomach filled up with ice. I continued to drool. I couldn't help it. I was drooling like a baby.

I don't know how long I stalked it. An hour? Two? And the closer I got, the harder my heart pounded and the tastier that gull looked. It almost seemed to be teasing me, and I began to believe that as soon as I got in throwing range it would fly off. My arms and legs were beginning to tremble. My mouth was dry. The stump was twanging viciously. I think now that I must have been having withdrawal pains. But so soon? I've been using the stuff less than a week!

Never mind. I need it. There's plenty left, plenty. If I have to take the cure later on when I get back to the States, I'll check into the best clinic in California and do it with a smile. That's not the problem right now, is it?

When I did get in range, I didn't want to throw the rock. I became insanely sure that I would miss, probably by feet. I had to get closer. So I continued to crawl up the rockpile, my head thrown back, the sweat pouring off my wasted, scarecrow body. My teeth have begun to rot, did I tell you that? If I were a superstitious man, I'd say it was because I ate--

Ha! We know better, don't we?

I stopped again. I was much closer to it than I had been to either of the other gulls. I still couldn't bring myself to commit. I clutched the rock until my fingers ached and still I couldn't throw it. Because I knew exactly what it would mean if I missed.

I don't care if I use all the merchandise! I'll sue the ass off them! I'll be in clover for the rest of my life! *My long long life!*

I think I would have crawled right up to it without throwing if it hadn't finally taken wing. I would have crept up and strangled it. But it spread its wings and took off. I screamed at it and reared up on my knees and threw my rock with all my strength. And I hit it!

The bird gave a strangled squawk and fell back on the other side of the rockpile. Gibbering and laughing, unmindful now of striking the stump or opening the wound, I crawled over the top and to the other side. I lost my balance and banged my head. I didn't even notice it, not then, although it has raised a pretty nasty lump. All I could think of was the bird and how I had hit it, fantastic luck, even on the wing I had hit it!

It was flopping down toward the beach on the other side, one wing broken, its underbody red with blood. I crawled as fast as I could, but it crawled faster yet. Race of the cripples! Ha! Ha! I might have gotten it I was closing the distance except for my hands. I have to take good care of my hands. I may need them again. In spite of my care, the palms were scraped by the time we reached the narrow shingle of beach, and I'd shattered the face of my Pulsar watch against a rough spine of rock.

The gull flopped into the water, squawking noisomely, and I clutched at it. I got a handful of tailfeathers, which came off in my fist. Then I fell in, inhaling water, snorting and choking.

I crawled in further. I even tried to swim after it. The bandage came off my stump. I began to go under. I just managed to get back to the beach, shaking with exhaustion, racked with pain, weeping and screaming, cursing the gull. It floated there for a long time, always further and further out. I seem to remember begging it to come back at one point. But when it went out over the reef, I think it was dead.

It isn't fair.

It took me almost an hour to crawl back around to my camp. I've snorted a large amount of heroin, but even so I'm bitterly angry at the gull. If I wasn't going to get it, why did it have to tease me so'? Why didn't it just fly off?

February 9

I've amputated my left foot and have bandaged it with my pants. Strange. All through the operation I was drooling. Droooling. Just like when I saw the gull. Drooling helplessly. But I made myself wait until after dark. I just counted backward from one hundred . . . twenty or thirty times! Ha! Ha!

Then . . .

I kept telling myself: Cold roast beef. Cold roast beef. Cold roast beef.

February 11 (?)

Rain the last two days. And high winds. I managed to move some rocks from the central pile, enough to make a hole I could crawl into. Found one small spider. Pinched it between my fingers before he could get away and ate him up. Very nice. Juicy. Thought to myself that the rocks over me might fall and bury me alive. Didn't care.

Spent the whole storm stoned. Maybe it rained three days instead of two. Or only one. But I think it got dark twice. I love to nod off. No pain or itching then. I know I'm going to survive this. It can't be a person can go through something like this for nothing.

There was a priest at Holy Family when I was a kid, a little runty guy, and he used to love to talk about hell and mortal sins. He had a real hobbyhorse on them. You can't get back from a mortal sin, that was his view. I dreamed about him last night, Father Hailly in his black bathrobe, and his whiskey nose, shaking his finger at me and saying, "Shame on you, Richard Pinzetti . . . a mortal sin . . . damt to hell, boy . . .damt to hell . . ."

I laughed at him. If this place isn't hell, what is'? And the only mortal sin is giving up.

Half of the time I'm delirious; the rest of the time my stumps itch and the dampness makes them ache horribly.

But I won't give up. I swear. Not for nothing. Not all this for nothing.

February 12

Sun is out again, a beautiful day. I hope they're freezing their asses off in the neighborhood.

It's been a good day for me, as good as any day gets on this island. The fever I had while it was storming seems to have dropped. I was weak and shivering when I crawled out of my burrow, but after lying on the hot sand in the sunshine for two or three hours, I began to feel almost human again.

Crawled around to the south side and found several pieces of driftwood cast up by the storm, including several boards from my lifeboat. There was kelp and seaweed on some of the boards. I ate it. Tasted awful. Like eating a vinyl shower curtain. But I felt so much stronger this afternoon.

I pulled the wood up as far as I could so it would dry. I've still got a whole tube of waterproof matches. The wood will make a signal fire if someone comes soon. A cooking fire if not. I'm going to snort up now.

February 13

Found a crab. Killed it and roasted it over a small fire. Tonight I could almost believe in God again.

Feb 14

I just noticed this morning that the storm washed away most of the rocks in my HELP sign. But the storm ended... three days ago? Have I really been that stoned? I'll have to watch it, cut down the dosage. What if a ship went by while I was nodding?

I made the letters again, but it took me most of the day and now I'm exhausted. Looked for a crab where I found the other, but nothing. Cut my hands on several of the rocks I used for the sign, but disinfected them promptly with iodine in spite of my weariness. Have to take care of my hands. No matter what.

Feb 15

A gull landed on the tip of the rockpile today. Flew away before I could get in range. I wished it into hell, where it could peck out Father Hailley's bloodshot little eyes through eternity.

Ha! Ha!

Ha! Ha!

Ha!

Feb 17(?)

Took off my right leg at the knee, but lost a lot of blood. Pain excruciating in spite of heroin. Shock-trauma would have killed a lesser man. Let me answer with a question: How badly does the patient want to survive? *How badly does the patient want to live?*

Hands trembling. If they are betraying me, I'm through. They have no right to betray me. No right at all. I've taken care of them all their lives. Pampered them. They better not. Or they'll be sorry.

At least I'm not hungry.

One of the boards from the lifeboat had split down the middle. One end came to a point. I used that. I was drooling but I made myself wait. And then I got thinking of . . . oh, barbecues we used to have. That place Will Hammersmith had on Long Island, with a barbecue pit big enough to roast a whole pig in. We'd be sitting on the porch in the dusk with big drinks in our hands, talking about surgical techniques or golf scores or something. And the breeze would pick up and drift the sweet smell of roasting pork over to us. Judas Iscariot, the sweet smell of roasting pork.

Feb?

Took the other leg at the knee. Sleepy all day. "Doctor was this operation necessary?" Haha. Shaky hands, like an old man. Hate them. Blood under the fingernails. Scabs. Remember that model in med school with the glass belly? I feel like that. Only I don't want to look. No way no how. I remember Dom used to say that. Waltz up to you on the street corner in his Hiway Outlaws club jacket. You'd say Dom how'd you make out with her'? And Dom would say no way no how. Shee. Old Dom. I wish I'd stayed right in the neighborhood. This sucks so bad as Dom would say. haha.

But I understand, you know, that with the proper therapy, and prosthetics, I could be as good as new. I could come back here and tell people "This. Is where it. Happened."

Hahaha!

February 23 (?)

Found a dead fish. Rotten and stinking. Ate it anyway. Wanted to puke, wouldn't let myself. *I will survive.* So lovely stoned, the sunsets.

February

Don't dare but have to. But how can I tie off the femoral artery that high up? It's as big as a fucking turnpike up there.

Must, somehow. I've marked across the top of the thigh, the part that is still meaty. I made the mark with this pencil.

I wish I could stop drooling.

Fe

You . . . deserve . . . a break today . . . sooo... get up and get away ... to McDonald's ,.. two all-beef patties ... special sauce... lettuce... pickles... onions... on a . . . sesame seed bun . . .

Dee... deedee... dundadee . . .

Febba

Looked at my face in the water today. Nothing but a skin-covered skull. Am I insane yet? I must be. I'm a monster now, a freak. Nothing left below the groin. Just a freak. A head attached to a torso dragging itself along the sand by the elbows. A crab. A *stoned* crab. Isn't that what they call themselves now? Hey man I'm just a poor stoned crab can you spare me a dime.

Hahahaha

They say you are what you eat and if so I HAVEN'T CHANGED A BIT! Dear God shock-trauma shock-trauma THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SHOCK-TRAUMA

HA

Fe/40?

Dreaming about my father. When he was drunk he lost all his English. Not that he had anything worth saying anyway. Fucking dipstick. I was so glad to get out of your house Daddy you fucking greaseball dipstick nothing cipher zilcho zero. I knew I'd made it. I walked away from you, didn't I? I walked on my hands.

But there's nothing left for them to cut off. Yesterday I took my earlobes

left hand washes the right don't let your left hand know what your right hands doing one potato two potato three potato four we got a refrigerator with a store-more door hahaha.

Who cares, this hand or that. good food good meat good God let's eat.

lady fingers they taste just like lady fingers