

FURY

Journal Entry - The first day of the rest of my life.

It's night-time right now; the FURY is rocking gently, and McCormick's finally fallen asleep on one of the bunks after having lost his lunch and his supper over the side of the boat. Poor kid. He's tryin' so hard to make me eat life, and he can't even eat a ham and cheese sandwich and keep it down.

Lot of things he hasn't been able to eat lately, like that meal at the restaurant last night. I think that's when it really hit McCormick that I'm dying. I could see the horror in his eyes first, then it started creeping all over him like some kind of damned fungus stiffening his body. I could almost see that hole he was talking about. And me, what'd I do? I sat there trying to tell him he's gonna be rich when I'm gone. Damn! If anyone ever gave an award for being a jackass, I could win the thing hands down. McCormick doesn't care if he's worth one dollar or a million; and like a damned fool, I'm tryin' to buy him all these toys and hoo-hahs, like that's gonna make him feel better.

Turns out McCormick, the ex-con, the kid who claims he doesn't have anything, is the one to give the greatest gift of all--the gift of life. You don't do that with money; you do it with love. At that restaurant, he gave me a fury, a passion for living. I fed off McCormick's strength, and finally realized it's the quality, not the quantity, of life that's important. The period at the end of your sentence doesn't mean a damned thing if you don't make that sentence say something.

I keep looking at McCormick sleeping peacefully on the bunk opposite me. The blanket's all crumpled up, and he's clutching at it like a little boy would a teddy bear. Poor kid. He tried so hard today. I had the time of my life, but he kept turning green and running for the railing. Then he went and got bammed by the boom. I'm afraid McCormick's not a sailor at heart. He should have told me that when I bought the boat. Poor kid. There's no kind of sick like seasick.

From where I'm sitting on my bunk I can see the sky out the window, and it's funny, because I've never noticed how bright the stars are when you're out on the ocean. Looks like I could just reach up and grab a handful of 'em.

Everything's so peaceful right now. No McCormick running his mouth a mile a minute, trying to forget, or at least ignore, the inevitable. It's gonna be rough on him being alone again. I understood more than most people, I guess, what McCormick meant about having a hole inside of him. I had it when Tommy was killed; and when Nancy passed away, it was like my whole insides were gone, and there was nothing left but this big, empty place. Maybe that's why McCormick and I understand each other so well--we've both lost the two most important people in our lives. And not the kid's gonna suffer another loss. That's a helluva lot for anyone to go through let alone someone as young as he is.

God, I'm not gonna argue with You over why You want to take me so soon; You know more about these things than I do, but You also know that kid lyin' over there clutchin' that blanket like it's a life preserver. He still needs someone - not so much to keep him in line, because he does a pretty good job of that himself now but he does need somebody just to be there for him. You know his dad ran out on him and for reasons known only to You, You took his mom. I'm just about all the boy's got left. I know I've made a lotta mistakes in my life, but I think the best thing ever did was take that kid into my home. Yeah, I know it wasn't a completely unselfish act, but what I'm tryin' to say is... Look, You know me - I'm not very good at asking for things. But I know that kid's gonna make something of himself someday and I'd just kinda like to be around to see it happen.

Well, the sky's getting pink in the east, so that means a new day is on the

horizon. I wonder how many more of these I'll get to see. Would you look at that color! Reds, and oranges, and golds, and... There it is! The sun! God, it looks like the coals are on fire! I don't think I've ever seen anything so beautiful in my life. And McCormick's sleepin' through it all. Poor kid. I don't think a sunrise would thrill him too much right now.

Mark, if you read this essay like you've read all the others - and you will - I plan to tell you something before the end comes. But just in case I can't find the right words, I'm gonna put them down here. You know me, I'm not a speechmaker; and I don't go for that cappy stuff, so I'm gonna come right to the point. You've become pretty special to me, kid, as a son and as a damned good friend. Don't hate me for leaving, because I don't have a choice. You made the last coupla years good ones, though, and I wanna thank you for that. And as far as the future is concerned, I'm not sure exactly when the end will come, but with you beside me, there's not going to be a period at the end of Ol' Hardcase's sentence. By God, it's gonna be an exclamation point!!

