

Sheri lay face down on a large beach towel, half asleep from the sound of the gentle surf washing against the beach. Franklin was sitting next to her in one of those half-chairs with the short legs.

“Hand me a beer, please, Franklin.”

Franklin smiled at Rick, who was sitting in the sand on the other side of Sheri. He took the lid off the Styrofoam cooler and handed a bottle across Sheri’s back, to Rick.

“Hey, watch it,” Sheri snapped as droplets of ice cold water dribbled onto her back.

Sheri rolled over and sat up, reaching for the bottle of sun tan lotion at her feet. She looked out across the ocean and it was hard for her to believe that it was true. The beach was nearly deserted during the off season and the three of them spent a lot of their time outside.

“Are you working tomorrow, Franklin?” Sheri asked, rubbing lotion up the outside of her leg.

“No, me and Karen are going into town.”

“Oooh,” Rick didn’t look up from the paper he was reading, “you and Karen are getting to be quite an item, uh?”

“She’s a nice girl. She’s not like that Rick.”

“Uh, uh.” Rick’s sarcasm hung heavily on each syllable.

Franklin grabbed a handful of ice from the cooler and flung it at Rick. Rick, calmly, blocked nearly all of it, by raising the paper in front of his face.

It had been three months since the freighter had dropped them at the unidentified port.

The goodbyes had been brief and the captain cordial when he had wished them the best.

They had gotten jobs, working for a small beach side resort. Not a nice, fancy, plush one, but a run down, kind of working man's resort. Staff was allowed to live in some of the old guest rooms on the in-land side of the hotel. The three of them were allowed to share one such molding room.

An old torn sheet on a piece of twine, separated Sheri's and Rick's bedroom from Franklin's. The cramped quarters might have given rise to tension among any other individuals. But these three shared a special bond. Something they'd lived through together. Their connection was strong and their love for each other had grown and made them into a kind of family.

"Any beer left?" Sheri stopped rubbing her legs to squint through the sunlight at Franklin.

"Sorry, Rick got the last one."

"Shit."

Rick grinned as he took an overly dramatic drink from the bottle.

"Franklin, will you go buy another six pack?" Sheri begged.

"Can't. Broke." Franklin looked up the beach at a flock of gulls streaming through a cloud in perfect formation. Sheri turned to Rick and put on her best pouty face. "Will you by me a beer honey?" Sheri batted her eyes heavily.

"Can't. Broke."

"Shit!" Sheri's put-on face quickly faded as she smacked Rick's paper with the back

of her hand.

Rick put the paper down and looked lovingly at Sheri. She hated when he did that. It made her heart hurt. Rick smiled and talked softly.

“Look...we’re broke as hell. We live in an utter shit hole. It stinks. The water’s a funky color and the toilet backs up every time Franklin eats oysters. The cock roaches are bigger than a small cat and the cats are actually afraid of the rats.”

Sheri was looking down at her towel feeling guilty. Franklin was still watching the sea gulls. They had swooped down in front of an old man with a metal detector. He wore tattered shorts, no shirt and was carrying a big shopping bag. Probably full of beer pull tabs, small change and lost car keys.

“We work ten hours a day, six days a week, trying to eak out a feeble existence here. The pay stinks and that ass-hole we work for has brain damage. He’s a dick with ears and sometimes I just want to wrap my hands around his skinny little neck and squeeze every last bit of shit right out of him.”

Sheri was playing with the cap on the lotion bottle, trying desperately to avoid eye contact while Rick was in one of his speech giving moods. Franklin continued to watch the man sweep the metal detector back and forth as he made his way up the beach toward them. Occasionally, he would stop, stoop down and dust off something. After examining it carefully, he would either chuck it or add it to the collection in the bag.

“Yet, for all the grief and aggravation...I have never been happier in my life.”

Rick took a deep breath from the moist salty air and looked around at the picture in

front of him. Sand and water. Sun and surf. Blue sky and white billowy clouds. The gulls and the man with the metal detector coming toward them. Rick reached out and held Sheri's head up and looked straight into her eyes.

"Life is great...and I don't want to hear anymore of your whining."

"Oh, Rick," Sheri leaned forward and put her arms around him, "piss on you. It's real easy to talk like that when you're the one who got the last beer" she giggled and chewed on his ear. Rick handed her the nearly empty bottle and Sheri smiled coyly.

"Thank you, honey."

"Howdy," Franklin was addressing the man with the metal detector.

Sheri turned around in surprise. He was standing just a few feet in front of her and wearing a large straw hat that obscured his face from view.

"I believe I've got something that belongs to you," the man said while extending the open shopping bag toward Sheri.

The sun lay high in the sky behind him and it glistened through the tips of the straw in his hat. Sheri squinted and brought her hand up over her eyes.

"Belongs to me?" Sheri was waiting for the guy to ask them for a hand out. Wouldn't that be a laugh. The blind leading the blind.

As the man moved the bag slowly toward her, Sheri raised her hand to block the sun's glare. Then, the contents at the bottom of the bag came into focus.

The man dropped the bag at Sheri's feet and stood for a moment, before lifting his head, exposing his face from behind the brim of the large straw hat.

“Kirk?” Sheri heard the name stick in her throat.

“Shhhh,” he mouthed with his lips, but no sound came out. “I’m putting you in great danger by even coming here,” he said as he switched on the metal detector, turned and began to wave it back and forth across the sand.

“But...Kirk,” Sheri said to his back.

Kirk stopped and turned back to face her, “This isn’t the time. I can’t stay. They’re still tracking me. I’m still hot as shit. Trust me, you’ll be fine here.”

He winked at Sheri and looked down at the bag. Then he turned and walked off down the beach.

Sheri grabbed the bag, in a daze, and dumped it out on the towel in front of her. To Franklin’s surprise, it actually did contain some small coins, beer tops and a few keys. But there was also three large bundles of the currency and three black passbooks.

Rick and Franklin stared at Sheri as she slowly paged through the little black books.

“Well?” Franklin was the first to ask.

“What is it?” Rick leaned closer to get a better look.

Sheri’s head raised slowly to meet Rick’s eyes. “it’s the dummy accounts. Three of ‘em.”

Sheri looked back down at the open book in her hand and then back at Rick. “Looks like about a million dollars a piece.”

Holding the newspaper off to one side, Rick’s mouth opened and closed like a fish in a bowl. Sheri sat with disbelief plastered across her face and Franklin rubbed his chin and

frowned.

Sheri looked down the beach just in time to see Kirk disappear behind a large rock formation. He was an amazing man. Misunderstood and somehow haunted. Sheri wished that she had had more time to get to know him. She had misjudged him and now she regretted it.

“I wonder if we’ll ever see him again?” Sheri pondered out loud, wishing for just one more glimpse of him.

Rick’s lips were still moving in a desperate attempt to say something, but no sound was coming out.

Franklin nodded, “I wonder if he’ll ever see *anyone* again.”

Sheri put the passbooks back in the shopping bag and flung one of the banded rolls of bills at Rick. Sheri rolled over and laid face down on the beach towel.

“I’ll have that beer now, honey.”

The End