

DIVE! DIVE! DIVE!

You're the only landlubber on board and Captain Bill is as mean a bastard as any cur to have ever walked a plank. You learn the ropes at your station but you spend the summer painting the hull, woodwork and masts on the Witch's Brew. In a trial run about Santa Catalina Island, Captain Bill orders you up the ratlines to the crow's nest, a 2x4 foot plank, thirty feet above deck, only, with the leeward to starboard sway of the masts. You spend two-thirds of your time looking down onto the frothy heads of 15 foot swells. Your arms wrapped about

the mast, you watch your friend Jack pull himself up a rope hand over hand from the deck. He stands there, casually holding the rope so you can admire his scene. Your arms wrap tighter so you hug yourself. He says, Great view! You don't remember how you get back down.

You fondly recall, however, the witch's net on the bowsprit, where you'd lie on your stomach and the boat would rise and fall, your face alternately inches and yards from the neatly sliced waves. One night after

a day's drill, you discover a journal in the back seat of your car. They are love poems to some guy from your wife. She has never written a poem to you. You realize that you have been absorbed in sailing and have neglected her once too often. She wants to leave for Oregon where her boyfriend awaits. You comply with her wish but ask her to wait until after the race. The event of the

summer begins: the Ensenada Sailboat Race. The 65 foot Witch's Brew is impressive with her white hull and simulated gunports painted black. The crew works like well-oiled machinery, each to his ropes again and again, Pull! Pull! Pull! like the submarine crew in Run Silent, Run Deep who submerge their boat in seconds when Dive! Dive! Dive! echoes below. Despite your large-boat class advantage, the Witch's Brew comes in dead last. A note

is pinned to the apartment door, the cat is half-starved. You sell your newer car and buy a '62 Ford Fairlane station wagon. You head for the deep, deep redwoods of Sequoia but barely make it through the Grapevine. On Rt. 99 the engine finally blows and your car is towed into Bakersfield.

Somehow, Bakersfield seems appropriate. You lie on the cool sheets of a Motel 6 room that night and listen to the waves beat upon the bow -- the bell clangs, the hydroplanes crank open, a voice echoes: Open ballast tanks. Dive! Dive! Dive!