

MY ANCHOR IN PRISON

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In this piece, Ahmed demonstrates the importance he places on his anchor in prison - hope.

Another five meter wave tossed me around and I took a sharp breath before the water swept over me. After a long few moments, I frantically pushed my arms and legs upwards. Finally, I broke the water and opened my eyes only to see the fifteen meter wave approaching me. I quickly gulped some air and braced myself for the impact. Once under water, I struggled to hold my breath and kept kicking, pulling myself upward, but a strong current pushed me further down. Releasing some air through my nostrils, I swung my legs and whipped my arms, aiming towards the sunlight above me. Then my left hand touched something strong and thin. I quickly grabbed it, yet within a short beat a massive current snatched me away. For a split second I thought my life was over. I flung my right arm just in time and clasped the thin cord again, wrapping my left hand over it. After a few moments, the wave receded and my face resurfaced, witnessing the vast ocean in front of me. Spent, I slowly turned around and, realized I was tightly holding a cord connected to a buoy. Using my open palm, I wiped away the base of the buoy and read: hope.

You know how the American saying goes: the rest is history.

As I brushed off the stains from the buoy's base, I woke up from my afternoon nap and found a letter on the bars of my cell. I was finally being accepted in college on my third try. Since then, hope - buoy, my anchor - has held me together in a whirlpool of the Prison Ocean.

Just like a massive ocean wave pushes you down in the same way you end up in a prison world going further up north (upstate) in a box (solitary confinement) for years: There, mail, a visit, and even the thrill of taking a nice warm shower becomes a distant memory. This begins the initiation phase of your animal instincts and slowly you begin to behave like an animal, perhaps that is why prisoners are called animals. This leads back to the starting point of your prison time. How are you going to do your time?

As for me, while I'm lost in prison ocean, I want to hold tight to the buoy which I have discovered and has kept me floating until the rescue ship arrives (my release date). Just like a thrill to swim against the current beats in our chest, this place tempts prisoners to demonstrate violence against each other simply to prove their strength.

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Without constant and positive emotional and mental reinforcement, one can easily slip in the false legend of Prisonville like the smell of blood lures sharks under water. A person lost in ocean, clinging to a buoy, prays that everyday the weather will be nice and sunny, keeping the ocean calm until the rescue team arrives. I greedily pray every day for a positive environment around me in prison and hope no one will start another violent act, especially in front of me because my human nature is stronger than animal instincts in that I cannot witness blood dripping away and draining human life. But we know - don't we - that there is no sunny and clear weather throughout a year.

The most difficult thing to understand and embrace in Prisonville is to know how challenging the circumstances are around you. It is hard to predict the situation and one can easily fall victim to it. The way a distant shark, fin erected above water, comes in your direction giving you a hope that a rescue ship is coming, is the same as how pitfalls baffle you in prison; covered in a nice wrapping yet incessantly gripping you in an instant, making you believe you are doing the honorable thing.

Some of you are thinking that I believe I'm surviving temporarily because I'm holding on to the buoy. You are wrong. The life inside the Prisonville is intricately unpredictable. In any moment violence can break out and the ripple effect can engulf you - whether or not you are involved - on the pretext that since you are prisoner you must be a criminal and part of violence all the time.

While holding onto this buoy, hope, I pray too that everyday will be sunny and warm, but I also factor in the hurricanes, dark clouds, heavy rain, and of course thunder and lightning until I am rescued.