

## *The Anecdotal*

### **XIII    *THE ANECDOTAL.***

#### ***The Captain of Atavist Defends his Ship.***

A first anecdotal occurrence might serve to depict my own inveterate meanness, and at the same time provide some generalized equation for guaranteeing my own meager self-satisfaction, such as one is allowed in this life, given the limitations of His dispensations and those of my personality.

To further augment this beginning I should add, you have heard it said, "It all comes out in the wash." You have all heard it said, "He'll get his!" You have heard it said, "Revenge tastes sweeter than honey." You have heard it said, "Every dog has his day." Some have even dared suggest, "There is justice in this world."

As I have perhaps sufficiently conveyed throughout this narrative, it was our desire to become exposed to and feast ourselves upon the secluded and preferably untainted wilderness. We traveled alone, preferring to anchor alone as well. As you have most likely deduced I persist in a selfish humour, attempting to maintain possessory rights wherein I have located myself, conspicuously unsharing, resisting intrusions, and omitting any tendering of the social graces.

Do not, by this self-assessment, infer my meanness should encompass refusal to render assistance to anyone in distress. I might be the first to do so if proximity dictated my presence would be of avail. But by this same token, do not assume, though I might respond in one way, that I would in another.

Now that I have set a dimly illuminated stage for conducting my confused debut, let us proceed to this one-act, two-scene farcical interplay.

Throughout this entire beautiful day, we had been alone. It was sunny, cool, with a good wind astern; we sailed from Mouat Cove, through Milbanke Sound, up Finlayson Channel, through Heikish Narrows into Princess Royal Reach (Graham Reach), passing by several inviting anchorages along the way, to finally come to anchor in an unlikely sounding Horsefly Cove, at the entrance to Green Inlet, not seeing as much as a single sign of its namesake. But rather to bask in a stillness and privacy, frolicking on deck desquamated, exposed to the blushing solar presence, as others might have done in Paradise long long ago.

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Indeed, this very day, this very circumstance verified our assumptions regarding ourselves; that we, simple folk, of humble beginnings and dubious extraction, were as equipped to partake of joy and contentment as were the Deities, Royalties, and the whole gamut of 'distinguished' and other ostentatious 'world-class' personages to whom this kind of adventure 'seemed' rightfully accorded; and we, no less, had accorded the same to ourselves.

I had taken to the dinghy, with our canines, disembarking upon a small islet that formed part of our 'lagoon' to lolligag in all manner of breathings and sighings while the four-legged ones chased about. Only a few feet above, perched upon a limb of a small tree, a casually nonchalant crow engaged in conversation with me, ogling his head this way and that, examining me first with one eye, then the other, assessing this oddity beneath him. I might have delighted more in encountering a wood nymph as attestation to a truer Arcadia, but the bird constituted a surprise in itself; perhaps one ought be more appreciative, not demanding too much all at once.

If I might have been discontented at the absence of the sight of nymphs, I was certainly struck 'dumb' at the appearance of the 'ship' that suddenly hove into sight, coming into the Inlet from Graham Reach. Proceeding slowly, it seemed either to be searching for a place to anchor or was slowly cruising along, taking in the sights. If it had been in search of a place to anchor, it would certainly be in my interest to wave it away, for it would most assuredly dominate 'our' little cove, a most distressing prospect for this one Paradise-infested soul, and it would surely frighten away the nymphs.

Suspecting the 'ship' had evil intentions, I rose to the



occasion attempting to wave them on - suggesting they would be better served to proceed up the Inlet - to prettier scenery. Since I could not speak directly, they perhaps misinterpreted my dumb semaphore, seemingly slowing their headway, aiming more in our general

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direction. This apparent noncompliance on their part, and my inability to influence the course of history, provoked in me a rather different persuasion, employing a more blunt approach - still however relying on a primitive universal semaphore, by raising my twenty-seventh letter of the alphabet to the highest heaven, damned near spearing the crow above, rendering my vilest opinion of the proceedings of this ship named Malibu.

Undeterred, this bruiser of a vessel entered Horsefly Cove amidst my soliloquizing and acid recriminations, all acted out-of-earshot lest the ears of the first mate of Atavist rate as auditor thereof; we were both 'pissed-off'. We would now be obliged to listen to their 'Quacking generator' and be dominated by whatever it was they were.

Not too long after they had anchored, two men launched their motorized Boston Whaler, heading in our direction. One fellow was rather nautical in appearance, all attired in blue, with sailing cap, as one might expect upon a well-appointed yacht; the other appeared less nautical and more officious (..er..vicious). Oh, Mah Gud, they're gonna read us the riot act.

They motored alongside Atavist. I had been sitting rigidly and sternly in the cockpit, presenting my most formidable countenance. The one in blue hailed, "We're sailors too, we know how you feel" (Hooray for universal language). I remained sternly entrenched. However this half-assed apology had made severe inroads into my one-liners which were abandoning me, as if in a rout. The other officious looking one mentioned something about having to run their generator in order to maintain their refrigeration. To this, one half-loyal, malingering one-liner was itching to see some action readying itself for utterance, when the second fellow revealed his 'piece de resistance', a bottle of wine, which he placed firmly, as if in command, upon the deck between the toe-rail and cockpit coaming saying, in an equally resolute voice, "Enjoy!, Enjoy!", without as much as waiting for 'thanks' (saints preserve us) or participating any longer in this one-sided exchange, leaving us staring at a bottle of Chateau de Beaucastel.

I'll leave you to imagine what we did with the wine. Well!, what would you have done? After all is said and done, we are rather tender hearted. We survived the event as we have all - good or bad. The 'ship' went on its way the next morning, as did we, and still one other, in this case, a fishing boat, that had come to anchor, staying the night also. This latter occupant of the cove might have delivered the twenty-eighth letter of the alphabet had I presented unto him the twenty-seventh; surely not a bottle, lest

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it was directed at my skull.

The setting of a second scene, rounding out this play, took place in Sitka National Historical Park, as we were walking along the wide wood-chip covered trails, lined with the tall Sitka Spruce and the occasionally strategically placed Tlingit totems; on a balmy, sunny, shirt-sleevy afternoon. A tall fellow, hatless, in short sleeves and slacks walked leisurely ahead of us. After a bit, we drew alongside of this fellow, and upon glancing at him - lo! - I thought something in that face seemed familiar. A mid-thirties to forty sort of person, with a slightly balding, receding hairline, and clean shaven. Yes!, Yes!, then, as a flash of recognition surged through those memory circuits, three lemons appeared, followed by a deluge of coins! "Don't I know you - Horsefly Cove?", I probed. Ah so, 'twas truly he, the one in Blue, answering to the name of Putnam.

He had relinquished his position as First Mate of the good ship Malibu, he and his Captain having had a falling out. Putnam would soon be on his way home to seek another berth, or other adventures in Seattle or faraway places.

He informed us the other fellow in the Whaler had been the Security Chief, and was still aboard the Malibu; and that the Malibu herself was under hire for the summer by some corporation to the tune of a quarter million dollars. The corporation provided weeklong holidays in Southeast Alaska for small groups of its executives with their families.

A seeming gentle and considerate fellow, Putnam; he knew what he wanted of a Captain, and of the accommodations aboard ship. And perhaps he truly meant what he had said when he first spoke us, "We're sailors too, we know how you feel". In no way did he seek to square accounts which he might have easily handled, with the gesticulating Captain of Atavist; perhaps it was out of respect for the First Mate of Atavist he refrained from comment.

We parted cordially. One is sometimes rewarded for his brashness, although the reward depended upon the magnanimity of the other fellow. On the other hand, if I had done nothing, or said nothing, all would have passed without notice as 'ships passing in the night'. One might muse at length regarding such juxtapositions.

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### ***A Tinkering We Will Go.***

While in Sitka we encountered a couple of sailors (man and wife) whom we had seen in Glacier Bay. They were dock-bound in their Mariner 32 ketch. She had lost her mainmast in the trip up the coast from San Francisco. The owners were getting about with a jury rig and the old reliable 'iron sail'; they were not to be deterred in their adventuring, expecting to refit with a new mast in Port Townsend on their way home, to San Francisco, in September. They had been tied to the dock for a whole week before we had encountered them. Their travelling companions in another larger gingerbread Taiwanese ketch, had departed earlier, unwilling to wait out the eventualities occurring within this other craft.

Alas, theirs was an odd tale, but not uncommon, and certainly a human one. The loss of a mast might give cause to suspect its master of some negligence, inattention or indiscretion. It was learned, however, the loss of the mast stemmed from the failure of the rigging, a failure one may or may not have been able to prevent. One might marvel at this couple's determination to continue, perhaps encouraged by their now departed travelling companions presence.

While idling about in Sitka the master of the vessel, a person who seemed unable to avail himself of reposefulness, engaged in his penchant for a nervous tinkering, in 'not leaving well-enough alone', and for some unspecified reason, had chosen the anti-stall device on his diesel engine's fuel injection pump to indulge his pastime. Be aware this was only an exercise in fine tuning of a device that had performed consistently without fail. I know the feeling he must have experienced when the threads on the device suddenly stripped. Perhaps if he had read the signs aright he would have realized that it was not his day, thus leaving things as they were for the time without attempting remedy, and perhaps had afforded himself opportunity to seek counsel. But to hear it told, he decided to 'repair' the damage he had inflicted, only to fully disable the injector pump, rendering it useless for any further service without subjecting it to a major rebuilding by a professional.

Sitka is not the center of the Universe. While it might accommodate and cater to the fishing fleet and the other commercial vessels, it is unlikely one would find the servicing of recreational sailing vessels as a lucrative prospect in that remoteness; therefore it would be most likely one would find very small investment in parts inventories for the scant customer,

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and for the tinkering sailor. Such being the case, the master was obliged to telephone Seattle for assistance, the exact nature of the business requiring a replacement fuel injection pump, costing well over three hundred dollars (1980), plus the air freight shipping costs. Oh Yes! Seattle's manufacturer's representative gave assurances the part was in stock and that it would ship AIR immediately.

Shipping AIR immediately from Seattle to Chicago or New York is one thing; shipping AIR from Seattle to Sitka, Alaska is quite another. Rush shipments of any kind require a good deal of coordination, usually worked out through trial and error in advance, as well as everyone's sincere interest and effort in doing his job as though he himself was to be the recipient of said shipment. And do not disregard the all-too-agreeable effect produced over the telephone.

Fate sometimes tries a man beyond his ordinary store of endurance. Still it is truly remarkable how we do survive such trials in tact, without revealing any outward signs of the lunacy that is raging within.

Of course, in this set piece, the part did not arrive, and it did not arrive; two, three, four, five days. To the agreeable telephone again and again; one's exasperating link to the Universe was full of reassurance that it had been shipped as promised. "Why has it not arrived then?" "We do not know; we'll put a trace on it." Finally it was located in Juneau. It would be shipped AIR immediately from Juneau some eighty air miles away. Only, some shots had been fired at Sitka's airfield's runway lights, destroying some of them, adding further conspiratorial delays in this mad and luckless calamity. And innocent Mother Nature, not to be denied, added the final blow: Sitka's airfield was fogged in for two days.

Yes, and finally, after some seven days the part arrived, almost as an anticlimax, one's reserves exhausted and beyond the point of no return; finally the last laborious row in the Sportyak across the harbor to Japonski Island, the last long empty-handed walk to and from the airport. And finally to penitently install the pump, purge and purge the lines of air, with just enough juice remaining in the batteries, after the purging, to fire the engine, and, finally, to obtain a restful sleep, and to get under way again on the following morning.

MAH GUD!!, can you imagine the relief?

We never saw nor heard from them again.

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### ***Red Meat before Calvary, or Fishes and Loaves.***

In hopes of seeing a pair of resident brown bear, we had anchored in a place called Chapin Bay, and as it eventuated we also weathered some of mother nature's inclemencies in this rather protected bay. We never did see the bear. But while so snugly anchored, without regular weather forecasts, we availed ourselves of the cross talk of the fishermen as a source of weather information which we hoped to glean from listening to their banter on their customarily used VHF channels.

While so engaged in listening during a period of heavy rain, we happened upon a rather talkative, amiable, enterprising, marooned, and desperate fisherman located somewhere near, yet afar in the vicinity of Kake, across the Sound from our anchorage. The engine in his fishing boat had broken down requiring parts; an auxiliary outboard was also non-functional. It seemed he was able to dinghy to the docks at Kake for information regarding the delivery of parts, his arrangements for the same not emerging over the airways with any clarity. What did become clear however, was his assessed need and desire for a tow to a more likely and hospitable place in order to expedite his repairs, and as it turned out, to vary his cuisine. Kake did not appear to be his favorite place.

After much persistence he had located a friend who had agreed to tow him to Baranof where he might obtain more effective assistance while enjoying familiar companionship and the pleasure of the Hot Springs. Not too long after making these arrangements, he received a further message from his prospective tower, located at Baranof, that he would not be able to assist him since he needed to transport or accompany his eight-month pregnant wife, who was showing signs of another kind of labor, to the hospital in Sitka. The stranded fisherman was thus further abandoned with the promise that when the prospective tower's wife's troubles were attended to and reasonably resolved, he would gladly assist him, if indeed he still remained stranded and needful of assistance.

Undeterred, the lonely fisherman accessed the airways once again offering all comers to pay fuel costs for towing. He managed to elicit a response from another acquaintance anchored in Windham Bay, located off Stephen's passage. This conversation became rather protracted in and convoluted in negotiations, since it involved concerns regarding the weather, the time of day, tides, as well as a developing feeling of general reluctance and inconvenience to the tower; at least that was the

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impression created in the minds of we two disinterested bystanders (listeners). This new prospective tower said he would ask around, just in case he couldn't make it.

We did not pursue this saga to its end; we had heard a few more conversations, even one with a concerned lady fisher person who was also waiting out the weather in her fishing boat in some other unspecified remoteness. Perhaps, in the end these two came together to the greater good of the world.

The intrepid fisherman attempted to become more persuasive without avail. God only knows what were his private thoughts regarding the fickle altruism of his fellow man. However he was conspicuously a man of good spirit, good manners and one with a sense of humor, as the following will illustrate.

Whatever his dinghy trips to Kake yielded, besides frustration, they certainly did not yield an enhanced cuisine, or if yielding such, at too high a cost to fit his purse. In any event, it seemed necessary for the fisherman, in his appeals, to sound the clarion of his innards, that his plight also included his diet which he phrased and expressed rather poignantly: "I sure could use a piece of Red meat; I've been eating fish ever since Christ was a corporal."





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### ***Discovery In The Wilderness.***

Burroughs Inlet, Behm Canal, Mystic Fjords AK

Suddenly, one morning, while idling in our leisurely passage, a noisy noise approached, hovering into sight; the appearance of a large bee, which broadened into a helicopter, heading for our solitude, as though it was looking for us.

We speculated that something happened to a family member (but how would they know where to search). But No!

While they were indeed headed in our direction, and apparently seeking us out, in fact landing on a nearby rock outcropping. They were lost!

We learned they had become lost in their search for a lumber camp, situated somewhere in the wild.

We dinghied to the rock with our charts; at least they discovered where they were not.

