

Tillicum

a novel by Stephen C R Lovejoy

'WHAT A WEEK' was the recurrent theme of this crewing job. The Pennington's wavered between outright warfare and stony silence over their eight day charter cruise of the Gulf Islands. A desperate Mark Simmons had knocked on the hull of Dave's aging schooner, begging him to ride as cabin-boy/cook for some wealthy clients who had bare-boat chartered *Illusion*, then decided they didn't want to cook or clean. As far as David could tell, they didn't want to perform anchoring chores, sail changes or even be bothered to tie her to the docks they sought each night.

Abundant cursing and staccato accusations from above were soon replaced by demands to know where the fucking Indian had gotten to. That would be his cue. Mark was going to hear about this one. Oh yes. That man had some kind of radar to steer him away from the demanding, weird and awkward clientele. David, with his continual need of money, seemed to be all too convenient whenever Mark Simmons had 'important business elsewhere'.

"Coming!" called Dave as sweetly as he could manage. He winced as the effort caused a fresh sheet of pain.

Henry Pennington was in full flight of furry when he spotted the no-good Indian kid tottering slowly out of the yacht's companion way. Not that David hadn't busted his ass for the American couple, but Henry knew beneath the ever smiling exterior was the lazy black heart of a most contemptible lower caste. Look at him smiling roguishly even now, walking unsteadily along the slightly canted teak deck. Pennington wondered fleetingly if the Wagon Burner had been nipping at his depleted stores of Wild Turkey while preparing the dinner below. He glared what he felt was his most ferocious glare at the swarthy thirty year old, who failed to flinch in the least. Yet another sign of disrespect from the shameless bastard.

Henry wheeled, "Now just look at that!" He pointed indicating the pair of buoys straddling *Illusion's* bows, one hundred feet off to each side.

David was looking; the scenario was quite plain. A green buoy to starboard floated in the current beginning to set with the afternoons tide change. To the left of the Pearson '42 a red spar buoy nodded gently, tugging at its anchor chain. In the waterway they were motoring through they would be considered as returning to Sidney's Tsehum Harbour. From the first rule of navigation, 'red on the right returning': one can also surmise 'green on the left returning'. These buoys had been positioned to force boaters to travel around on either side of the sand bar *Illusion* was firmly wedged onto.

"Humph." David commented noncommittally.

"Sammie!?" Henry Pennington shouted as his petulant, much younger wife - younger, David guessed, than he himself. "You see this?" Samantha was less than four feet away peering into the sand murred waters as if staring might in some way help. "It isn't clear to this - - this experienced sailor fellow we rented, that I was perfectly in centre of channel when I hit this unmarked reef."

If sheer volume of a statement made it true, the lines he was delivering might have been quoted from the Bible. "Now what would you suggest we do?" Henry smiled the leering smile of one who is convinced the party he is addressing has no idea of how to answer his question.

With a smile that did not reach his eyes David replied calmly. "We'll just wait an hour or two 'til the tide lifts us off. If you want to put out a kedging anchor it will help a little when the time comes."

Henry liked this answer as he turned his back on the bare-chested David and said mockingly to his wife, "We'll just wait dearest. Just sit doing FUCK ALL and wait. It's no wonder this guy's people are stuffed onto reservations. They sat and waited while we won the country away from them." Swivelling back on David he spat, "Well I'm not waiting! Get the dinghy off the davits and put an anchor in it. I'll show you how things are done by American's."

"Okay." Returned David with a small, placating smile.

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Several minutes later the fibreglass dinghy was away, Henry rowing by himself as David paid out the half inch line of the second anchor's rode. Samantha watched with dull grey appraising eyes. She was in fact two years younger than David. Bored, restless and accustomed to privileges, Sam Pennington was everything but stupid. Her classic looks and poise had won her the attentions, and then the hand of one of the richest research doctors of her father's acquaintance. Their marriage of two years had been a safe one where each was immersed in their own interests to such a degree that contact with one another was at a bare minimum. Then Henry got it in mind to take this bloody sailing vacation. Together! Why couldn't he have gone off with several of his work colleagues for a booze, broads and cigars type of get away like her father had so often done?

There had been some rather good moments of course. Henry seemed inclined to sleep ashore as much as possible, and the relaxing nights in quaint pubs and occasionally elegant, if rustic accommodations had nurtured discussions making Sam feel there was a chance for happiness in this loveless relationship. The topic had been carefully introduced by Samantha that children might be a pleasant distraction. She was surprised when Henry dropped his usual boisterous front and gave the conversation his rapt attention. She had little hope for the continuity of their relationship, but Henry, though quite fat, was attractive enough, and had straight teeth and good eyes to go with his bags of money. Children from him would have the joint advantages of being intelligent and handsome, as well as raising the potential alimony substantially.

For the first time in many months they had not only shared a bed, but their bodies as well. But Henry had a way of making her good feelings quickly disappear on the morning after. His bonhomie and bad moods reappeared as if never gone. In fact, he

seemed so moody and distracted Sam began to wonder whether something was wrong. Perhaps he suspected some of her numerous activities in their home-life for what they actually were: fronts for her countless affairs. Samantha Pennington felt no accompanying twinges of guilt with this thought; she simply examined it for what it was. It was just as likely Henry had something of his own closet full of skeletons.

Sam watched her husband row in a jerky, convulsive fashion, frequently sending small geysers of water flying as the sweeps fell at incorrect angles. 'Years of sailing experience' huh? Her slate colored eyes refocused to fall on the young man who had taken so much slander and abuse from Hank. She wondered at his ability to not sink his long clasp knife into Henry's breast. David Two Bear. A full blood Cree Indian. Although he stood passively at the taffrail in cut-off jeans and a seemingly never buttoned Hawaiian shirt, Samantha could sense in him a latent readiness. He reminded her of a wild animal whose smooth skin was tight over muscles that could be instantly joined in a movement so quick and unexpected as to easily overpower its prey.

Here was a man not so transparent as her husband, her father, or any of the circle Sam was accustomed to. His dark eyes were quick to pick up any movement - any change around him; although sometimes she would have sworn it had happened out of his line of vision. She had heard of excellent peripheral vision, but perhaps Two Bear's hearing was exceptional as well.

Henry stood in the ten foot dinghy and managed to drop the smallish anchor over. One of the flukes clanked dully against the dinghy's teak gunneling. From her vantage, looking through David at Henry's actions, she saw the heavily muscled shoulders beneath the flowered shirt flinch as the hired hand winced. More damage.

'He really is such an ass,' she thought to herself.

As if she had made the statement aloud, David turned and met her gaze and gave the slightest of nods. Sam felt her eyes fly open in surprise and was immediately disappointed with her lack of control. She was a woman who showed herself to no one. It was safe that way. Lucrative.

She had cast her eyes down for just a second to regain her composure, but when she looked again David was out of sight. Her husband was rowing an even worse line back to Illusion, pulling against an increasing tidal current. Passing the open hatchway she noted David had returned to the dinner-related chores. Still forty feet off, Henry was already yelling for assistance in getting aboard. David lifted his head from chopping vegetables and his eyes met with Sam's as she sat in the cockpit. She felt strange now speaking to him for only the fourth or fifth time in eight days.

"It's okay David, I'll help him." A searing at the base of her ears spread rapid, tingling fire across her face and Samantha realized she was blushing wildly. What the Hell is wrong with me!?, she wondered, averting her face towards the stern. Sure he was good looking enough - well built, athletic would say it better. But a tawny skinned Native American with a pony tail halfway down his back? Come on Samantha - he'd hardly fit in at the tennis club would he?

"Here." grunted Henry, the physical exertion having taken some of the sting out of his sour mood.

Samantha took the dinghy painter and secured it to a deck cleat with the careful moves of one who has just recently been shown the simple knot.

"Where is he?" Henry whispered, his eyes looking beyond his wife for the tall, muscular young man he had piled so much abuse on. Henry didn't see himself as a bigot or racist. He worked with plenty of Blacks and Orientals; all quick, intelligent men and women - credits to their races. It was just Indians. You had only to drive past a reservation to see the squalor and filth the people lived in.

Ironic, he thought. He had read about Eastern cultures and their tens of centuries of advanced study in mathematics and medicine. And just recently he'd become absorbed in a rag-tag copy of ROOTS found laying on a coffee table in the staff lounge. Those blacks had a civilized culture back in Africa. They farmed and husbanded large flocks of domestic animals. Hell, they were even practicing Moslems. But these North American Indians - they're the ones who have only the barest framework of civilization. It perhaps would have been more suitable to have used them as slaves. Heaven knows they showed little enough imagination that once domesticated they might make excellent workers.

Henry knew you couldn't trust one. He knew they were unclean and unmannered. He knew he especially hated this forced proximity to one. If Henry were being totally honest - which Henry almost never was - he would admit he was also inexplicably afraid of the quiet, taciturn fellow. It was more than just the rolls of muscles showing in David's forearms, chest and thighs. It was the way he carried himself - a sort of dignity crossed with a nonchalance that drove Henry to stronger efforts to try and ruffle the young man.

"He's gone back to preparing our dinner." Samantha's voice had a kind of pointedness to it, making it almost appear as if she was protecting the cabin boy.

"Good," said Henry, not addressing his remarks to Sam but beyond her to the unseen David, "I'll just winch us off myself then."

Henry pulled himself aboard with a show of effort comparable to scaling the side of the Titanic rather than a four foot transom with two well placed foot steps.

Sam retired to the port side of the cockpit, watching as her husband untied the bitter end of the anchor line and took several anti-clockwise turns around the sheet winch. As he began pulling at the tail of the line Samantha could see how all of his strength was not even taking the slack out of the line. Now, all Sam knew about sailing could be stowed in a thimble, but wasn't the winch drum supposed to turn and make clicking sounds when it was working?

"Oh what's the bloody use!" exploded Henry, after tugging uselessly at the line for several tense minutes. "God damn!" he shouted at no one in particular, then seizing a magazine that lay on a cockpit seat, Henry stormed forward and slumped onto a pile of bagged headsails.

While Henry was not the finest catch amongst the swanky circle Samantha travelled in, he had never before been an embarrassment. She hugged her knees and sat in the late afternoon sun wondering how much she could get in a divorce settlement right now.

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David Two Bear was trying hard not to become truly angry. He was employing his last-ditch tactic for anger control. Rolling mentally through the entire script of a Faulty Towers show and sharing out his own frustrations along with those of John Cleese's character, Basil. Small smiles played at the corners of his full mouth as he pictured the

hotel owner with a Kipper sticking out of his cardigan neck or making faces behind (his "little piranha fish") Cybil's back.

At least he felt sure he was over the dangerous wave of near violent anger. What a pain these two were. The man pale, haggard, and jumpy as a toad on hot asphalt. The woman cool detached, brooding. Why would such an incredible looker tie herself to a much older, bad mannered goof? Silly question of course. Money. There it was - the one thing in the white man's world he couldn't come to grips with. An S with two vertical strokes through it. In philosophical moments Two Bear thought the symbol might represent S for soul and two jail bars. It would have to be an awful lot of money, he thought wryly.

David placed several handfuls of broad noodles into a vigorously boiling pot of water. Looking at the swirls of bubbles coming up from the pots bottom he was reminded of how lucky he was with the cold water earlier. A lesson not to be forgotten. With the flat edge of a broad knife David swooped the chopped vegetables off the counter and into a frying pan with some meat, making an interesting array of colors with the spices he'd sprinkled on generously. He replaced the fry pan and stirred the noodles a few times to prevent them catching on the bottom. The smell of rotten eggs was apparent in the hot gases above the stove. Propane. What a terrible thing to use on a boat. He'd take diesel or kerosine any day. Still, it was quick and he'd have to adjust the cooking time considerably below what he was accustomed to.

Well, the food would tend itself for a while. Time for a cold beer to ease his throbbing head. While not a big fan of sophisticated, power consuming systems on board, David would be forced to admit the NOVA COOL refrigerator/freezer didn't suck at all. Crossing the galley to the wood panelled fridge he noted the woman sitting in almost fetal repose, staring blankly at Sidney Island.

On an impulse, he brought out a second can of Moosehead Lager.

"Miss?" he said very gently. It took several moments for the question to sink through layers of consciousness, then the woman unfolded her long legs from bronze-tanned arms with a grace David found alluring. There were white bands at knee level where her arms had contracted tightly. The slate grey eyes were serene with the subdued light of early evening: her pupils dark and large, showing a prick of reflected light in the upper right of each.

David proffered the can of beer. For a moment he felt foolish, that she would refuse. Obviously a woman of class and breeding, her preference would run to dainty pastel cocktails in exotic, frosted glasses. But a trace of a smile showed in those eyes, then her head jerked away and she was diving across the cockpit.

Startled, David set the beer on a sideboard and took two steps up the companionway ladder. Samantha was sprawled to her full five foot eight inch length, one hand holding the absolute bitter end of the kedging anchor rode. Her peach hued silken beach cover-up rode up high to reveal a skimpy bikini bottom where her lean, muscular legs terminated. Sam held up the rope triumphantly.

"TADA!" She said, smiling the first real smile David had seen.

"Alright!" commended David, "thanks for saving me a swim."

Samantha's eyes met his and seemed to almost sparkle; then as if realizing her status and his, she averted her gaze and bent studiously to the task of securing the line her

husband had failed to. David turned back to his cooking.

He had only stirred the noodles and pushed at the meat sauce when a shadow filled the hatchway. After a second the light was stronger again and Sam stood below with him in the galley.

"Where's that beer?"

Slightly bemused, Two Bear pointed behind the figure of Samantha to the two sweating cans sitting by the stair case. He turned back to the pasta which wanted a more vigorous stirring if it were to be more than a single, solid lump. The familiar rip-hiss sound of one can then the other being opened filled the air.

Sam took up a position at the end of the counter so she would be clear of the cooking procedure but close enough to talk. It was about time she said more to this strange man than "yes, no, please or thank-you." The cruise had only two days yet to go. Besides, with Henry being such an asshole, she wanted the guy to know she thought he was doing a good job. She had observed the subtle changes unobtrusively made by the paid crewman. Changes which placed them in deeper water, better winds and kept them occupied more often. Think what a job he could do if you let him at it in earnest.

"So how bad are we stuck?" she asked after an uncomfortable silence.

"Oh, just a little. Another hour or so I guess." David took a long pull from the lager.

"And it's no use to pull on the anchor?"

"No. Not the way we hit. This is a full keel boat. If it had a fin keel I'd say sure. No, we'll just have dinner, wash up, then before you know it you'll feel the hull start to wriggle a bit. A gentle pull on the kedge anchor and we're in reverse. Then we'll go around the buoys."

"I thought you always went between the buoys?"

"Well, some people do..." David smiled. It was a smile, Sam thought, which didn't show any malice towards Henry's poor seamanship - rather just a sense of humour at their predicament.

All the same, she switched topics. "Will the weather hold? It's been such a glorious week."

"Radio says there's a little front coming across the island tonight. I doubt it'll rain but it might mean a bit more wind. They're calling for a gale warning, but I wager it won't amount to much."

"So long as we get to the place Henry wants to be tomorrow night. He's been so grumpy this trip I'd hate to see him if we don't make the appointment he seems to have there."

"Bedwell Harbour," David confirmed. "It's an easy jaunt from Sidney. Illusion is a good boat. She'll get you there safely in any blow we might see this time of year."

Sam's eyes were wider and darker now, "Would it mean we'd have to keel over?"

David's single joined eyebrow shot up in surprise. "Well..." he began haltingly, "The boat will *heel* when there's a stiffer breeze. You can ease it by letting the sheets a little looser. 'Course if you let too much air spill you loose speed..."

"Fine by me. In fact I'd just as soon motor."

"Now there you're mistaken," offered Two Bear, "a sailboat without her sails up in a blow bobs around like a cork. Now you keep a gentle push on her and she tucks into the job. Quite comfortable - really."

"Uh-huh. Well, we'll see..."

"Hey you making time with ma sweetie Geronimo?" Hank called down just before he entered the companionway. His voice seemed more relaxed and the taunt was as much good natured as obnoxious.

"I'm so hungry I could eat a horse," he rejoined, opening the fridge and fishing out three beers.

"Sorry, we ate the last of the horse last night." Said David accepting the can of beer with a modicum of surprise. Was Henry Pennington about to display a good mood?

Henry's arm encircled the petite waist beneath his bride's flimsy sun jacket. He held up his beer can until she got the clue that he wanted to clink them together. Samantha did, tentatively, and Henry chuckled. "I see what happened up top. The green buoy must of bust loose from where it was marking the proper channel. Now it's gotten re-hooked on the wrong side of the red one. I'll report it to the Coast Guard when we reach Sidney."

"Good plan." David read in Samantha's eyes that his smile looked more like a wince, but Henry didn't catch on. "Let's eat! I'm hungry too."