

On the Most Beautiful Monday Morning I Can Remember

By Matthew E. Craig

It takes a lot to make a man do the things I did. I loved this girl once. Let's call her Leanne for the purposes of this story. One day she up and disappeared on me. Or, she thought she did. For two years I kept open channels on the street and occasionally, I would come upon a credible piece of information regarding her whereabouts. I never followed these leads. Not because I didn't want to either. More because her life was her own and she must have left me for something I couldn't give her. It took a lot of will power to accept that.

By the third year I was done looking for her and back to just plain looking. Time of course moves along with all of us on board, we just don't all sit together. And in that time she had met a bad man and had a beautiful baby girl. Let's call her Jillian for the purposes of this story. Of course, he went to jail for 20 years or something (I never gave a damn enough to remember) and she was stuck in a well. This is America.

Five or so years of separate lives ended when she used My Space to find a mutual friend. Calling me was next. I knew when she was going to call and I got drunk in a precipitous manner much as a soldier who fears his first battle might. It prepared me to do or say whatever I had to in order to get by. It didn't help but it didn't hurt either. To tell you the truth I really don't recall anything I said. But I am sure I mentioned love.

I tried to write her a letter but her family intercepted it. Talking to her on the phone was not something she was really supposed to be doing. She had married that bad man and was living with his family. Where does morality make you hit the brakes? I understand that here I should have moved along. This was trouble no doubt. But something in me failed to care enough about the sanctity of marriage (or any other social convention) and in this I must better explain...

At 26 I had been in some sort of school system for more than 88.5% of my life rounding up, I did the math. If there was a system I wasn't familiar with you can bet someone was going to tell me I needed to attend a course on it just to graduate. While jumping through hoops, people were always asking me what I was going to do with a history degree. Apparently, *everyone not getting a history degree already knows*: you simply can't get good work anywhere (and by good I mean \$40,000+/a year). I hated bureaucracy and I was being groomed for it. I hated adults and the decisions they made; and I was becoming one more and more every day. I was learning how to sit in someone else's office and wait for them to double check my figures with someone in another office far, far away.

Sometimes when people asked me what I was going to do I said I was going to steal a large boat from a rich person and sail the world with it until I found a place where I could live. I never said "...happily ever after", but you get the idea. I had it all figured out. Rich people can't be bothered with maps. Every large sea worthy vessel has a Global Positioning System. That tidy piece of gear could take me anywhere. If I could collect enough money to buy enough supplies to get me across the ocean, I'd be able to make a home somewhere and maybe go back for anything else. Maybe.

People always gave me two very predictable responses:

1. "Sounds nice. I hope it works out."
2. "Good luck Gilligan."

I ignored those second category jerks as best I could. Girlfriends always fell into saying the first category but you could tell that deep inside, they were second category all the way. Leanne was the exception to the rule. Way back when - I had told her about this pipe dream and she said, "When you're ready to go, call me because I'm going too." I loved her just for that. But when she said that she was 17 and I was 21 and we still had some life to live before we bailed on everybody and everything.

By the time of my 26th birthday I had collected more than \$9,000 in an online bank account that I hadn't told anybody about. Birthday and Christmas money, drug money, odd-job money, and a little college loan money that should have been spent on books and other things; it was all there and in my mind it would be enough. I started reading books on sailing, riggings, weather patterns, marine life, anything. Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky at morning, sailor's warning. I also had gone to several harbor and marine storage sites to look things over. It started as a general curiosity I had to entertain, but when I found a particular marina that had only two guys on night security (a white guy and a black guy I had affectionately named Nose-picker and Snoozer) and a not so secure front gate, that became the place I would sail from. Several times I skirted in and wandered the grounds after hours while they watched a little television they had in the guard house.

Just a few weeks before Leanne reappeared I had picked out a beautiful 200ft schooner-type yacht. She was called the *Swingin' Judge* and she was perfect. I spent a little time aboard her. I even eventually started talking to her quietly to myself. There were sleeping quarters, a food prep area, generators, a satellite phone, and even scuba gear for four people.

The boat was owned by a real old-fashioned Hater of Men named Judge Franklin Crandall Stempson. Friends and enemies alike called him "Swingin' Stempson" because of his proclivity for recommending the death penalty in almost any case that would allow it. His father had been a judge in Chicago in the 60's and 70's when hippies and civil rights agitators needed to be "put in their place and made to be nothing but a foot note in history", and *his* father had been a judge in Washington D.C. in the 50's and 40's when suspected communist agents and left-wing Hollywood types needed to be "rooted out and snuffed out with a patriotic fervor that would make the founding fathers seem like fair weather Americans." I of course knew nothing about all this. I just wanted his boat. Stempson had a GPS system, and a nice one at that. Insurance would pay the man right?

When the time came I would buy hotdogs and kerosene. Crackers and canned food too. Maybe some bait for the deep sea fishing poles that were on the Judge. The Judge had a deep freeze. I needed to buy lumber and a few tools from a store. I would also need piping for irrigation and farming. It all had to be paid for in cash and I couldn't afford a storage site. Everything would have to be purchased inside a single day and put on board that night (I would sail early that next morning).

It would be a surprise attack. By the time I was deemed missing and the boat was reported too, I planned to be well off the coast of the continental U.S. and there would be nothing anyone could do about it. I even had a special plan for the two security guards since I was sure they weren't going to help me load up for the trip or wave goodbye.

I had never really planned to take anybody with me. I was going to have to become almost instantly self-sufficient. I had to build a shelter and fish until I could farm. I don't even like fish, but I would learn. It took me a while to build up the personal courage to want to go it alone. People aren't supposed to sail alone for safety reasons. It was fate I believe, that gave me a chance to ask Leanne if she and Jillian wanted to go with me. I understand that asking the wife of another man to run away with you is wrong, but he wasn't going to be around to love her and her baby for a long time. Besides, I was going with or without her.

We e-mailed back and forth a while until I felt comfortable enough to spring the idea on her. She decided to pack up Jillian and go with me. Much later, some people would still say I kidnapped them but there were no signs of forced entry at the house. I still laugh at the ogre-ish depiction of me by the boys at FOX and MSNBC. I can't or won't examine the real reasons that she had for deciding to come with me.

On the most beautiful Monday morning I can remember, I went to where she and Jillian were staying and picked the two of them up in a white Ford dually-modified pickup that I had "borrowed" from my friend's father. By 2:00 pm I had three helpers in orange vests loading my goods at Home Depot. I even bought a can of marine based oil paint to rename our boat.

Something about those vests made me shiver and Leanne saw it. She took my hand and said, "We need to get going." By 6:00 pm we had purchased 28 bags of groceries and 15 gallons of water. On the way to the marina Leanne had to hold Jillian in her lap and we could barely see each other over the bags and piping. We caught a radio report about us. I was a thief and a maniac and she was my victim. Leanne giggled a little. A tiny person inside me was trying to get me to stop the truck and that giggle killed him dead.

The marina entrance was off the main road a way and Leanne sat behind the wheel of the truck while I went down to the gate to slip in and deal with the boys at the guard house. There was a fuse box on the outside of the booth and I crept up to it and cut the power. I had rehearsed this in my mind a thousand times but my fingers were cold and numb from anxiety as I pulled the switch. Blackness upset those trolls and out they came. Snoozer was immediately maced and Nose-picker hesitated, guaranteeing the same for him. While they coughed and cried, I flexi-cuffed them together.

I opened the gate and went up to bring the truck through. The sight of the guards upset Leanne a little but I reassured her they would be alright. All night they jabbered on and on about how we were in so much trouble and about how they knew us from the T.V. By 9:00 am the Swingin' Judge was ready to sail. Before taking up the mooring lines, I maced the guards one more time and then cut them free. They could call whoever the hell they wanted to now.

We went down the coast of Virginia and out into the Atlantic. Two days out to sea I was in love with her again and I was in love with little Jillian too. How they became my fictive wife and daughter so fast, I'll never understand. We rechristened the Judge the *Escape Pod* and decided we were from Australia (we took down the American flag and gave it a proper burial at sea and I produced an Aussie flag out of my backpack). I thought we were home free but four days at sea and just east of Savannah GA, Jillian developed an ear infection and a fever. This was the first time Leanne was really worried,

and it was also the first time we slept in the same cabin at night. That was also the first night I really wanted to go home and give up on my dreams.

I sailed without sleep for a day and a half to the Gulf of Mexico and came into Okaloosa, Florida for help. I had a grandmother there and other family as well. We came in at night and gave her a nasty shock. We were all over the national news now. The truck had been found intact and undamaged. Plus the two families concerned were now being deluged with reporters and police. We spent three days there waiting for Jillian to get better and finally we were ready to leave. In that time however, people had found us and were closing in quickly. My grandmother, trying to do the right thing, had called my mother on day three. My mother had contacted my father, and my father had notified the police. Soon Leanne's family knew too, and they were on their way. In the back of this mad procession down to Florida was the man they called Swingin' Stempson.

As we were eating breakfast, the distinct sound of justice came roaring into the driveway. I grabbed a chair and cinched up the door but it was a stall. Leanne picked up Jillian and we bolted out the sliding glass door and into the back yard, down the steps and racing toward the dock, trying desperately to get to the boat and get it moving. I stopped to untie the mooring lines as she jumped aboard and took Jillian. My fingers were fumbling, "why now?" There was a loud ringing in my ears and I heard Jillian crying. I heard Leanne say she loved me and was screaming at me not to go. "Where would I go", I said, "Where would I go without you?"

