

Contentment Revisited

By Michele Dutcher

Captain Fitzroy sat at the rectory table, leaning back in his chair a little. “That was indeed a fine meal, pastor,” he said, giving a nod to the preacher’s wife.

“It sounds as if meals onboard ship are a little less extravagant,” mused Josiah Wedgewood II.

“The meals on the open water may be less ample, but certainly more varied, especially those after rounding the tip of The Americas,” the Captain told the others at table.

“Now if you men are going to be talking about all that ship stuff, perhaps you should take your tea in the parlor” said the pastor’s wife, as though shooing the men from the table. “We women need to clear the table.” She stood up, and began picking up plates and saucers, the other wives following suit.

“An excellent idea, Miranda,” the pastor answered, giving his young bride a peck on the top of her head.

“I’ll have Mary bring it in directly, Charles” she told him, smiling, as the men left the room.

The coals in the parlor’s fireplace were a luminous red, and blazed up as the Man of the Cloth stoked the hearth.

“Are you enjoying married life then, Charles?” asked Mr. Wedgewood.

“I am very content,” he answered, taking a seat in a wing chair beside his brother-in-law and the Captain. “Since I graduated Seminary six years ago, life has been a steady climb for me. Each day I’m here, I grow more and more confused about the wanderlust of my early years.”

“Really Charles? I never would have pictured you as an outdoorsman.”

Josiah looked at the pastor with concern as he picked up a china teacup off the silver platter before them.

“Early on, when I was perhaps 16 or 17, I thought about seeing the world, just out of curiosity, much as you have been able to do Captain.”

Captain FitzRoy rose and crossed the room to lean upon the mantle. He knew his friends were eager to hear more about his travels. “I did enjoy the Americas. One incident comes to mind which was a little humorous.”

“Do go on,” begged the pastor and his relative.

“Well now, it seems the Beagle had just docked in a bay at the southern tip of the Americas, when natives boarded the ship and stole a lifeboat, among other things.” Captain FitzRoy chuckled to himself. “We were beside ourselves, trying to discover what to do to get back our belongings.”

“I’m sure you didn’t want to start a war over a lifeboat,” piped in the pastor.

“Exactly right, my friend. So a plan was raised to take hostage four of the men responsible for the deed and bargain them back to their families, in exchange for the lifeboat and other sundries.”

Josiah Wedgewood thought it over for a moment. “Definitely a good move.”

“So we also thought. But when given the opportunity to choose between the men or the goods, the natives chose to keep the things they had stolen!”

“How absurd, Captain,” laughed Charles. “Imagine choosing the goods over their own flesh and blood.”

“We were surprised as well! After three days with them aboard our ship, we were wondering what to do with them, in the long run and all. I had even proposed we take them back with us to Great Britain, teach them the ways of God, and then bring them back to their families, as missionaries. It would have taken a second voyage, but it seemed we had no other options.”

“I do like that, of course,” echoed Pastor Charles. “They would have been excellent messengers of God to their heathen families. Is that what happened then?”

Captain Fitzroy laughed at the thought. “Of course not! You see me sitting here, don’t you?”

All three friends were now laughing at the question. “Well what did happen?” asked Josiah, finally.

“We just pulled up anchor on the fourth morning and left the men on the beach. Ultimately, we were content to leave the lifeboat as a gift from her Majesty the Queen. We swore to warn other ships heading that direction about the thieving tactics of the natives however.”

“I dare say, Captain. I dare say!”

The three men were silent a moment, gazing into the fading light of the fireplace. The pastor was the first to break the silence. “Will you be heading back to sea then – making a return to the Americas as it were?”

“I cannot picture that, Pastor Darwin. I fear I’m just as pleased to sit here fireside and drink tea from a china cup, as to be out there somewhere, thrown about upon the high seas.”

“And I’m content to putter about my gardens as well,” answered Charles Darwin, picking up a tea biscuit and dunking it into his cup.

The End