… Torment in Teak

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***Part Two- The “Disappearing” Past …***

As Mrs. Steen poured the tea, She began talking. At first it was polite and idle. But then she fell silent a moment. That thin soft voice quavered as she began her story of the cutter “EVIG”.

It had been the Summer of 1939 when the keel was laid. She was going to be a One of a Kind.

Commissioned by a member of the Danish royal family. She was conceived by one of the top Danish yacht designers of the time, Knud Reimers. Building started in a yard in Copenhagen a year before the Nazi’s invaded Denmark. She was launched on the first of May 1940. A few days after the Germans had taken the city.

Because of restrictions by the military, she’d never sailed. Put up in dry storage, she sat in a warehouse for the remaining years of occupation. The Danish count who’d ordered the boat, had been a collaborator for the NAZI'S. His name was well known. He had been responsible for the deaths of scores of Danes. At the war's end, he'd been tried and sent to prison. But like so many of the war criminals then, he was released soon afterwards. Retreating from public view, he returned to his home in STEGE. A little city set between the waters of the Stege Nor and the Stege Bugt. 50 miles South of Copenhagen on the island of MØN. He hadn’t thought about the boat for more than 5 years. But, It wasn’t long before he had the boat trucked from Copenhagen to the little marina at Stege.

That’s where the legend begins.

The boat that became his obsession. It was said that he spent all of his time on the boat. Like a youth who had just fallen in love, he never left her side. He devoted hours and days cleaning her up. Getting her ready to sail for the first time. The towns people began to think he must have lost his mind. He wandered the city like a drunk. And worse, he began to neglect his family. He stopped going to church and the council of city leaders. No one was concerned or missed his being there. They hated him anyway. He began sleeping on the boat. Hardly eating, he worked on her day and night. He no longer seemed to care about anything ..But .. the boat.

Then the day came to launch her. He let it be known that, other than the crane operator, he wouldn’t allow anyone to witness the event. It happened, but no one knew what he had done or said during that time. He stopped talking to everyone after that. He only sailed and spent the days caring for the boat. A few curious folks had gotten close enough to see the name, but they could never get him to talk about it. That Danish royal family member had simply stopped being. His only friend was the boat.

It was several days before someone noticed that the boat stopped sailing. Or for that matter, had anyone seen the Count on EVIG (the name everyone knew by then). He wasn’t seen around town or at the marina. What family he had left, was called in. The police arrived and thoroughly investigated the boat. They found nothing. It was as if he had just walked away. Away from everything and everybody. Cleaning tools were setting in the cockpit, food had been left uneaten in the galley. But, he had left No notes. No clues, No trace. He was simply GONE.

Mrs. Steen stopped for a moment. She heaved a sigh and then continued. I was fascinated and frozen to my chair.

After a period of time, the Danish authority declared the nobleman to be officially dead.

All processions and property were to be turned over to the surviving relatives. The oldest son made it known that the sailboat **“EVIG”** was to be either Sold away or it was to be destroyed. No family member wanted to have anything to do with what had corrupted their relative.

It was sold.

Mrs. Steen poured herself another cup of tea and went on……

The second owner of **“EVIG”** was a wealthy Englishman. Mr. Bixby had been on holiday in the islands of Denmark. Upon hearing that a **Knud Reimers** boat was for sale, he’d rushed to see her. His first look convinced him to buy her on the spot! He contacted the nobleman’s family agents and had a bank draft in their hands before the day was out. Mr. Robert Bixby arranged to have his new boat decommission and packed aboard a cargo vessel out of Copenhagen, on it’s way to Plymouth. It would take about three weeks to make the trip. Mr. Bixby was very excited.

“EVIG” was delivered on schedule.

Some time later, Mr. Bixby’s friends and employees became concerned. He was seldom seen at his company or at the Pubs he frequented. One afternoon, his closest friends gathered to discuss the missing Mr. Bixby. A number of them decided to call at his flat to inquire as to why he’d gone missing. Nailed to the door of his apartment was an old note. It looked to have been there for days. Scrawled words said that he could be found at the city quay on his new boat. What they found there STILL is being whispered about the pubs and clubs of Plymouth.

They found Mr. Bixby unwashed, unshaven and incoherent setting in the cockpit of his boat.

All efforts to get him up and out failed. His friends left him vowing to return with medical and police personnel. They hoped to remove Mr. Bixby to a hospital and have treatment for his “ailment”. Their returning with the necessary officials was met by an empty cockpit. The cabin was empty as well. They did notice that the boat was immaculate. Every part had been cleaned and sanded until it shone. It had been maintained with what had to be the most Loving care.

Mr. Bixby was never found.

Bixby was declared deceased. Since he had no living relatives, his properties were sold by the bank. All monies returned to his business. The boat was on the market only a few days. The credentials of the designer was enough to sell it quickly. The buyer was a wealthy American from Long Island New York. George Fisker, middle aged, overweight and balding. Fisker wanted the boat as a show piece. A classic to display in the club’s annual boat show. He of course had a larger boat. This old classic would be simply a trophy of his.

George, a definite “A” type, wouldn’t stoop to haggle over prices. He listen to the yacht dealer’s quote, then wrote a check for the price that HE decided to pay. It was a lot less than had been listed, but the dealer was so intimidated, he agreed to the price. Fisker hired an American delivery captain and ordered him to sail the boat across the Atlantic. “Evig” was to be moved ASAP to the states. Captain Williams hired three friends to fill out his delivery crew. They sailed away a few days later. Captain Williams set the “Northern Route” course used by the old OSTAR (now TRANSAT) racers. A good choice, avoiding most of the headwinds of the North Atlantic crossing. Williams and crew lucked out. There hadn’t seen a bit of fog or ice along the way. The crossing was made in a very short time.

That was good. Good for everyone.

On arriving at the Long Island Yacht club, Williams and his crew packed up and quickly left the boat. Later he told friends that the “Boat was just went crazy”. He and the crew had nothing but troubles with her. Not danger, he could handle most boat problems, but he said that “We were never comfortable. It was like the boat fought us. Strange responses to normal controls, crazy movements, noises, food and water tasting funny. "It was the worst delivery we’d ever experienced”. He said. Even the friendships of the crew had been destroyed.. Captain Williams was glad to get off of THAT boat.

It wasn’t long after the delivery that George Fisker began to act oddly. His Yacht Club friends all notice the change. His wife called the club to ask them what was going on. He had been so morose lately and she was worried. No one knew why he was acting that way. What they DID know was, George had been setting in the cockpit of his little boat, Crying!

It was reported by club members that he had been seen Sobbing, like a child, while he scrubbed, sanded and cleaned that boat of his. A few days after that, He and the boat were gone.

Then “EVIG” was found drifting in Long Island sound. Abandoned. There was no sign of Mr. George Fisker. Speculation was that he’d fallen overboard. But his body was never found.

A few club members quietly gosiped that it was more likely, a Suicide. He HAD been acting so strange lately. What ever had happened to him, He was quickly forgotten by the members of the LIYC. They DID have the annual Comodore's Summer Dance to think about, now.

George’s wife would have nothing to do with the boat. She hated it when he’d bought it and now it had “killed” him. She wanted it sold as soon as possible. It was put on the market. Of course it HAD to be moved from the Club docks. No one wanted a "For Sale" sign hanging on a boat moored at THEIR club !

Mrs. Steen paused long enough to fill her tea cup again. The tea was quite cold by now. It ddin’t seem to matter to her. She didn’t say a word but sat there with that cold tea cup in her hand. She began to quietly weep. A group of long sighs. Then I noticed tears had begun to run down her cheeks.

“And now, I must tell you the last story of the **EVIG,** young Mr. Morten.”.

"And of my husband, James"

What had been a face with soft wrinkles, being wetted by tears, now turned hard and angry. “My husband James was the next owner of that boat” Her words were cold. “He found it in New York and had it shipped out here. I begged him not to buy her, but he just laughed at me. I KNEW that thing was evil. We both knew the stories. We knew of three men who had been lost because of the boat. God knows how many more. That boat had to be dangerous. He tried to comfort me, saying, it was just coincidence and that a boat couldn’t cause the disappearances. I couldn’t convince him. James bought the boat. Even though he knew I feared and hated it.”

I listened to Mrs. Steen's words. But I felt I knew James Steen.

Mrs. Steen continued. Her tone was icy and her hands were clinched tight.

James Steen, loved all kinds of boats. While in New York on a business trip, he’d taken some time off to walk around some of the marinas. He had seen a “For Sale” sign on a beautiful wooden boat. In love immediately, he bought her the very next day. In spite of his wife’s protests, he’d shipped the little cutter to Seattle. While he loved to sail, he also planned to enter her in one of the many classic boat shows. In James’ mind, it was a prize winner. As soon as the boat arrived he started to get her in shape for the first show of the season. The Victoria Classic Boat Show was a wonderful venue to show her. He’d have the whole winter to get “EVIG” in Show condition. As the weeks passed by James Steen became a different man. He worked without rest on the boat. Places he’d cleaned once, he would clean again and again. The Teak was bleached and treated, the bleached and treated again.

He wouldn’t stop. He wasn’t a young man to begin with, and now he had aged terribly in just a few weeks. No one could stop his obsession with “EVIG”.

Then, one cold January day, the boat was found floating, empty, off Elliot Bay in Puget Sound.

Not a living thing was aboard. Everything was as if James had just stepped out for a moment. A half filled cup of coffee sat on the settee and a partially eaten sandwich was balanced on the pedestal. He was just Gone!

Mrs. Steen had wanted to sink the boat after that. She claimed it carried a curse. Her son had stopped her plan to destroy EVIG. He had said that such a classic boat with such a well known design should be in the hands of someone who can appreciate her. Mrs. Steen had argued but her family and friends convinced her to keep and sell the boat

Mrs. Steen paused in her story and began to cry again. I reached out to take hold her hand. She looked at me, smiled and said “You’re such a nice young man. I couldn’t sell the monster to you”.

I felt a sharp pain run through me. She just HAD to sell the boat to me. I wanted that boat badly. At this stage I would pay any price.

I held her hand and tried to calm her fears. “Mrs. Steen, I’m not rich. I AM strong and young. I know that if I had the boat I could erase all the pain she carries. I’m willing to take on any task to make her a happy ship. Please allow me to own her. She means a great deal to me”. I held my breath waiting for her answer.

She looked at me with those sad eyes of hers and said “I’m afraid for you. But if you wish it so sincerely, “EVIG” is yours. I will not make profit from you, my dear boy. I will sell her to you”

My heart raced when she said those words. “May I ask what price you are asking?”

“Dear man, You are doing me a service by taking the boat away. I’ve let the moorage fee go unpaid for a few months. Pay the amount they have on their books and the boat is yours. I’ll sign the papers today and I’ll have them delivered to you by tomorrow”.

My breath left me. Moorage fees? They couldn’t be more than a few hundred dollars. I wasn’t sure I’d heard her correctly. I asked to repeat what she’s said. “I mean what I say Peter. May I call you Peter? The moorage rent must be about a thousand dollars by now. Is that too much?”

“Mrs. Steen, I’d be honored to have you call me Peter. I don’t know what to say. The price is too low. The boat is worth thousands. I’m in shock.”

“Peter, I hope to god that you don’t find the price TOO HIGH. Now if you’ll excuse me, I’ve grown quite tired. Please, would you find your way out?”

I took her hand and pressing it firmly I told her that I couldn’t possibly forget her. In such a short time I found her to be a brave and generous lady. She would be on my mind for a very long time. She smiled and walked away.

I left the house with the huge stained glass door and the sad eyed lady.

If I’d known what was going to happen in the next few days… I would have run away to some inland desert city, away from any water. Where I wouldn’t have to see or think about boats… ever again! But, it's too late now!

(continued)

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