

Steady As She Goes

by

Steven Clark

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Phone: 631-456-2752

Email: SAClark69@verizon.net

FADE IN:

An old iron steamer CUTS through the open ocean. A silver anchor hangs from its port bow side. Two large stacks emit black smoke from the ship's center.

INT. BRIDGE - DAY

A grizzled old CAPTAIN, white beard, long overcoat and captains hat, puffs on a pipe. He holds his hands out to an old coal stove in the corner.

A young HELMSMAN walks in, fresh-faced. He holds a pair of binoculars.

The Captain does not look up.

CAPTAIN
(raspy voice)
Who's steering the goddamn boat?

The helmsman hands the binoculars over.

HELMSMAN
Captain, you better take a look.
Iceberg off the port bow side.

The Captain SNATCHES the binoculars. Sighs impatiently, stands and looks out the window for a beat. He GRUNTS, turns to the helmsman, and SHOVES the binoculars into his chest.

CAPTAIN
That 'berg's at least three miles off,
jackass. Maybe four.

The Captain blows a large puff of smoke. The helmsman coughs, waves the smoke away.

HELMSMAN
But, Captain, you told me to --

CAPTAIN

I told you to come get me when you have something important to say! Now, get outta her before I put you on baboon watch!

The helmsman salutes.

HELMSMAN

Captain, may I request that you please don't put me on --

CAPTAIN

Go steer my boat!

The helmsman races off.

The Captain sits down, strikes a match off the side of his chair, puts it to his pipe. Outside a window the sky is gray. Rolling dark clouds loom in the distance. A lone --

ALBATROSS

-- circles overhead, then perches itself on the forward railing. It spreads its dark wings and pecks at its feathers before settling in. The bird faces the sea.

CAPTAIN

Watches the bird, the hint of a smile crosses his lips. He looks away. A faded black and white picture that hangs on the wall catches his attention.

INSERT: PICTURE

A comely WOMAN, (30's), light hair, dark eyes, flowing white gown. She sits on a bench, hands folded across her lap.

The Captain takes the pipe from his mouth. White smoke hangs in the air.

CAPTAIN

Steady as she goes, me lady. Steady as she goes.

He holds his hands out to the coal stove.

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Clean dishes sit on a mat next to a sink. The dishwasher HUMS. A ceiling fan WHIRS, its hanging chain CLINKS intermittently.

RAY FIELDS (38), neat black hair, slacks, shirt and tie, brushes dirt off the linoleum floor into a dust pan. His lips pressed tightly together.

He stands, then empties the dirt into a waste basket. Under the sink is a --

STORAGE CABINET

He opens it and throws the dust pan in. SLAMS it shut.

Frustration on his face, he lowers his head and rests a hand on the counter.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

HOPE FIELDS, (34), very pregnant, bare feet. Her pink pajamas hug her figure as she washes the dishes, her back to --

RAY

Stands behind her, next to the stove.

RAY

So, the lines of communication are closed?

She does not turn around.

HOPE

It's just gonna be the same thing.

She shuts off the faucet, places a glass on the counter, then opens the --

REFRIGERATOR

On the door is a cluster of multi-colored, magnetic letters.

Hope pulls out a water pitcher, fills the glass, puts the pitcher back, closes the door.

She looks up, her pale blue eyes stare blankly out from behind her stylish glasses.

HOPE (CONT'D)

It's just gonna be the same thing,
right? So, why bother?

RAY

Stands silent. He glares back at her, then shakes his head.

HOPE

Turns and heads for the --

LIVING ROOM

Its warm light illumines a bookcase with numerous CD's, a coffee table with scattered Lego's. A love seat sits below a large picture window, its curtains pushed back.

Hope sits on the love seat, opens her laptop.

Ray appears in the --

DOORWAY

Next to him, on the wall, hangs a sign.

INSERT: SIGN

Family Rules: Always say thank you. Love one another. Say your prayers. Be grateful. Etc., etc.

RAY

Plops down on a nearby couch. He watches as Hope types away.

RAY
What are you doing?

A long, uncomfortable beat.

HOPE
(coldly)
Downloading pictures.

RAY
Pictures from what?

Another beat.

HOPE
Our vacation.

Ray nods. He exhales deeply, puts his head back and closes his eyes.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is dimly lit by the flickering of a small candle that sits on the dresser. A mirror behind the candle shows two figures in bed.

BED

Ray is on top of Hope. Their hands intertwined, the sheets cover them from the waist down.

He kisses below her ear, down the side of her neck. Hope's eyes are closed, her mouth parted slightly as small moans escape her lips.

Their arms stretch out together. Ray pins her down as he suckles upon her full breast.

WINDOW

A gentle breeze blows in. The curtains ruffle. Ray and Hope's --

SHADOWS

-- are illuminated on the wall, then disappear as the candle flickers out.

END FLASHBACK

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ray, on the sofa, rubs his face. He looks at --

HOPE

Still on the love seat. Still tapping away on her key pad.

He reaches over and grabs the --

REMOTE

-- from off the table. He turns on the TV, flips through the channels. Lays the remote down next to him, then stares blankly at the screen.

END FLASHBACK

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ray's head is lowered. His hand rests on the counter top. He raises his head, eyes watery, and gazes at the --

REFRIGERATOR DOOR

-- with its numerous, multi-colored letters.

The letter D is highlighted. Then an I, a V...

RAY'S

head tilts as he watches, transfixed.

REFRIGERATOR DOOR

The highlighting continues. An R, then a C, and finally an E.

RAY

Rubs his moist eyes. He turns on the faucet, splashes water on his face. Grabs a towel from off the stove and dries his face.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Ray walks in. Opens a closet. Takes out a jacket and slips it on. He grabs a briefcase from off the floor, then walks out into the --

HALLWAY

He passes a door, then stops. Backs up a few paces, and steps into a --

CHILD'S BEDROOM

A Transformer's blanket covers a bed with several stuffed animals. A baseball bat hangs on the wall. A fish tank rests on a dresser.

Ray opens the lid of the tank, takes a pinch of fish food between his fingers and drops it in the water.

FISH TANK

A small fish pokes its head out of a castle. It swims up through fake plants, then nibbles on a piece of food.

RAY

Sighs, then closes the lid on the tank. He holds a beat. Scans the room one last time, then walks out.

KITCHEN

Ray puts his briefcase down. He kneels and reaches out to the refrigerator. A CLICK-CLACK is heard as he rearranges the magnetic letters.

He stands, grabs his briefcase, takes out his keys. Out the door he goes.

REFRIGERATOR DOOR

Among the scattered letters, an incomplete word is spelled out.

INSERT: INCOMPLETE WORD

L-V-E

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - DAY

On the bed with the Transformer's blanket sits a brown teddy bear. Next to it, near the bear's hand, is the missing letter O.

FADE OUT