**GAVEL GAMUT**

By Jim Redwine

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(Week of 26 December 2022)

**A CHRISTMAS GIFT FROM PEG**

 Everyone we meet in the country of Georgia likes Peg. When we walk along the cobblestone streets or eat at one of the small and numerous restaurants Peg is frequently approached by complete strangers speaking a foreign language who manage to convey their goodwill toward her as they ignore me. I am used to it. I get it. I accept it. But the world does not know that Peg has a dark side that often involves misadventure for me.

 I first noticed it years ago when we would go skiing and Peg would sweetly say something like, “Jim, that ski run really looks interesting. Why don’t you ski down first, then I can follow you?” I fell for this ploy several times and paid the price. She, of course, never followed after she would see me wipe out as she feigned concern while secretly chortling at my naïveté.

 My misogynistic side wonders if Peg’s enjoyment of my misfortunes is unique to her or if it is a more general wifely trait. Those of you who are involved in the connubial bliss of marriage can reflect for yourselves if the sweet-wife-turned-devious-Delilah is universal or just my lot in life.

 Anyway, yesterday was the latest example of Peg lulling me into trying something foolish while she remained the amused spectator. It all began when we were discussing what we would give one another for Christmas.

 I confess I am not an easy person to shop for. When I want a shirt or something to eat, I go buy it. I really like Christmas but I am not into the buying and getting part of it. The country of Georgia is good for the Christmas Season as many Georgians celebrate the Julian calendar Christmas Day of December 25th and many recognize the Gregorian calendar of January 7th. I like that approach. Peg and I have stayed with America’s December 25th so she gave me my “gift” yesterday as the weather was good. Weather good you say? Here’s why that mattered.

 For the four months we have spent in Georgia we have watched boats dash around hauling fools attached by a long cable and held up by parachutes. These gaily decorated parachutes lull observers into ignoring the perils of falling a hundred feet into the chilly waters of the salty Black Sea. It looked like harmless fun from the safety of our apartment’s balcony. And that’s how Peg sold me on it as she would make comments like, “Jim, look at that guy under the parachute with the smiley face. Doesn’t that look like fun? You would really enjoy that.”

 So after I had firmly resisted her repeated efforts to have me succumb to such nonsense for several months, Peg said, “You’re so hard to buy for. How about a parasail ride for your Christmas gift. It will be fun!” I had an initial thought that “one husband’s fun” was likely to be “one wife’s insurance benefit collection”, but I held my silence. And, as often happens with us, I forgot the various disasters for me that Peg’s innocent suggestions had wrought. I said, “Okay, thank you for my Christmas present, let’s go do it.” We went down to the dock and met a Fagin selling rides.

 The wizened visage of the toothless boat captain astride his version of a motor boat did not alert me to my fate. That was my fault. I did not see or ask about any safety equipment. That was also my fault. There were no rehearsals or explanations of how this would transpire or what the precautions were for mishaps. Of course, he spoke only Georgian so it would not have mattered anyway.

 The Ancient Mariner took Peg’s 150 lari (about $50.00) and strapped me into an apparatus of cords and buckles. There was no escape button. We got about one hundred yards out on the Black Sea then the captain began to let out the cable attached to the smily-faced parachute and me. I quickly was lifted off the deck into a panoramic view of the shore and the Sea. I admit, it was a thrill.

 We rode around for about fifteen minutes, the advertised length of the ride, then we continued to bounce along the choppy waves for quite a while as I slowly realized something had gone terribly wrong. The captain could not get the cable to crank me back in. I remained in the harness one hundred feet above the Black Sea as the December wind swirled around me.

 After thirty minutes another small boat with two young roustabouts who were disciples of Captain Fagin came along hoisting a long line with a hook attached. They made several attempts to hook my cable and finally did. Then they started hauling me down between the two boats. You, Gentle Reader, understand that the only thing between the boats was the cold, deep Black Sea into which I was thrust face first still attached to the parachute that was rapidly filling with water.

 After noting the water was salty, I began to attempt to escape both my harness and the parachute, but the cords were wrapped tightly around both of my legs so I could not swim. My loyal captain did not jump into the Sea to rescue me and neither did the two faux sailors. I guess they all did not wish to get wet. Anyway, I managed to roll onto my back as the would-be dry, rescuers fished me out with a grappling hook type approach but using mainly their hands.

 When we got back to shore I was soaked and cold but soothingly comforted by Peg who had filmed the whole episode on her iPhone as she sat warm and dry in the boat. She said the only thing that made sense, “Well, Merry Christmas.”

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