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Hitting a House Boat

By CLAUDE PAMARES

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Harold Strong was a New York artist and had painted the portrait of Ruth Bascomb and fallen in love with her. Whether she returned his love or not was the thing he was worrying over. Harry Stevens was a New York sculptor, and he had desired to bring out a marble bust of Miss Bascomb and also had fallen in love with her. As to whether she would consent to be "sculptured" and marry him was a matter that gave him headaches. Both the artist and the sculptor had sisters that were friendly with Ruth Bascomb, and this was the general situation for the playwright to build on.

The present situation was that Ruth Bascomb's mother, who was a fairly wealthy widow, had become possessed of a house boat and had determined to float around Princess bay and up the Shrewsbury river for a month or so. Her guests were to be the artist and his sister and the sculptor and his sister and two or three other persons.

A day was appointed, a tug engaged to tow the house boat down New York bay and leave her at her first anchorage, and all was going merrily when the villain hidden in the thicket showed his hand.

It always has been suspected that he was a villain belonging to the same club as the artist and sculptor. He became aware of the house boat party, and out of pure deviltry and from no desire to see the sculptor get ahead of the game he worked his little trick. The day before the boat was to sail he fixed up a telegram calling Harold Strong to Philadelphia to see about painting the portrait of a millionaire.

The artist's return was indefinite. He knew that he was leaving a rival behind him, and he knew that the Colonial Dame, as the craft was called, would scarcely have come to anchor in the bay and the moon risen above the waters when that cheeky sculptor would be talking soft nonsense to Ruth Bascomb, but the artistic spirit was strong within him.

He arranged with his sister to interrupt if the sculptor tried to take advantage of the occasion. Feeling himself as secure as any man ever can feel where a woman is concerned, he departed on his mission, and the stately Colonial Dame also departed on hers.

Sometimes a millionaire can be found sitting on his front steps and smoking a fairly good cigar and waiting to be interviewed. Again he is as elusive as the midnight mosquito. The one the artist sought was elusive. It took a whole day to run him down, and when he was finally brought to bay his reply was:

"Young man, don't try any of your confidence games on me if you want to keep out of jail. I didn't telegraph you. I want no painting of any sort. I don't like the look of you. If you are honest, then some one has made a fool of you; if you are a confidence man, then try the first corner grocery."

Harold Strong had been bunked. It was only natural that he should believe the game had been played by his rival. He didn't want to devour even a sandwich before catching a train for New York. For three hours he sat in a chair car and murdered the sculptor. He killed him in seven different ways and was planning the eighth when he arrived at a good sized town in Pennsylvania and was asked by the porter if he wished to stop there. He had got into a car that had been switched off at a junction on to another road while he was doing the murdering act.

It was noon when the artist reached New York. It was 2 o'clock before he began his hunt for some craft to take him down to Princess bay and lay him alongside the house boat. The sculptor had had one moonlight night in which to weave his net of romance around the victim, but he should not have another. The artist tried to charter all sorts of crafts, from an Albany day boat to a sand barge, but the afternoon wore away and night was coming on before he landed at the foot of Third-ninth street, Brooklyn, and interviewed Captain Jinks of the Merry Sal.

"Can you charter me to find a house boat in Princess bay tonight?" repeated Captain Jinks as he bent his head to scratch the back of his neck. "Yes, sir, I reckon you can if you've got a twenty dollar bill about you. You've got a schooner right here which is not much to look at compared with some schooners, but if there is anything on land or water that she can't pick up, I'd like to see it. That's her great holt, young man—picking up things. There's going to be a fog tonight as sure's your live, but if I don't hit that house boat plumb center before midnight then I'll never sing gospel hymns off Cape Hatteras again."

Harold Strong closed with the offer. The crew of the Merry Sal consisted



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of the captain and a lunkhead or a young man and a boy of ten who had run away from home and was trying a life on the billows. The captain looked upon the artist as a husband pursuing an eloping wife; the lunkhead looked upon him as an idiot for giving up \$20 when the captain would have taken \$10, and the runaway boy figured it out that he was some sort of grafter escaping from the police.

The opinion of the crew did not affect Mr. Strong, however. He helped to cast off the schooner and cant her head the right way and hoist the mainsail, and presently she was careering down the bay and avoiding as many statues of Liberty, men-of-war and Staten Island docks as she conveniently could. What she couldn't avoid she crawled over until she struck deep water on the other side. She struck the fog at Fort Hamilton, and then the anxious artist asked:

"Captain, isn't this going to make it difficult for us to find the house boat?"

"Not at all, my son—not at all," was the confident reply. "I told you we should have a fog, but that it would make no difference. The Merry Sal is a-sailin' of herself. She's a-follerin' of her own nose. I've told her that I want her to hit a house boat called the Colony Dammed, and she'll do it or never look me in the face again."

"The Colonial Dame is the name of the boat," corrected the artist.

"Well, I got near enough to it for the schooner to understand what is wanted. You just enjoy yourself and don't worry. Lord, but I wish you really knew what a nose this craft has got for smellin' out other boats and things! One night I was comin' around Sandy Hook in such darkness that I couldn't see my hand before my face. I didn't know whether the Hook was five rods or five miles off. I left it all

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to Sal, and what did she do? Why, she smelled her way along and went ashore so high and dry that I got off without wettin' my feet. Show me another craft that can do the trick. No, sir, you needn't worry one least bit. I'll hit that house boat inside of another hour if the wind holds."

Aboard the Colonial Dame all had gone well. She had been towed down to the bay and anchored. The sculptor felt that the game was in his hands and was determined to win. He counted on a moonlight night, rippling waters, wavelets softly tunking against the sides of the boat, poetry, sighs and the soft strain of music floating over the waters from some summer resort where sandwiches sold at 15 cents each. The fog came and blotted out the moonlight. It was too damp to sit on deck, and the artist's sister accompanied them down in the cabin, and his suit did not advance. At 10 o'clock the house boat rocked silently on the waters with all on board retired. At about that hour also the captain of the Merry Sal was saying to Harold Strong as they walked the quarterdeck together:

"Yes, sir, the Sal has got a nose on her, and there is really no use for me to carry a compass. I've told her to smell out that ere boat of yours, and she's a-doin' it. I'm reckonin' she'll hit it within fifteen minutes. Why, I could turn in right now and feel that if that boat of yours is anywhere on Princess bay the Sal would hit her with-in!"

The Sal hit her. Whether she was guided by Providence, the lunkhead of a young man or by her nose may never be known, but as a matter of fact she suddenly crashed into the Colonial Dame and cut her down to the water's edge.

There were shouts and screams and yells of confusion. It seemed for a moment as if all on board the house boat must be drowned, but luck was with them. The tide had gone out and there were only three feet of water under her keel, the crew of the Sal were active on the bows of their craft, and the artist went overboard at the first crash and fished around until he found the right party and then saved her in a sopping, but uninjured state. He also magnanimously extended a saving hand to his rival and to his future mother-in-law, and as he piloted them to the sandy Jersey beach and counted heads to find all present and accounted for he was hailed from the departing schooner with:

"Well, good night, young man. I told you the Sal had a nose on her and would hit this ere house boat in the darkest night, and you see I am a mariner who speaks the truth. Good night all. Take the Merry Sal when you want a schooner with a smeller on her."

The Art of Begging.

The head waiter of a famous New York restaurant said the other day:

"A few nights ago, after having charge of a very large dinner, I started for home. My way led me through West Seventy-second street, where, late as it was, I saw a little girl only a few years old sitting on the lower step of a private stoop, crying and sobbing as if her heart would break. I stopped to ask her what was the matter, and she told me that she had got lost uptown, that she knew where she lived—in Sixteenth street—and that if she only had car fare she could get back there. Being in a hurry, I gave her a quarter and started to pass on.

"The moment the kid got the coin she jumped up and ran away around the corner like lightning. I never before saw any one disappear so quickly. It dawned on me at once that I had been 'dead easy.' Of course she was simply a well trained little actress and had taken the quarter to her father or mother, who was in hiding near by. It's an outrageous shame that a little child should be trained up in that way."—New York Post.

Some Strange Customs.

A very interesting account is given of the strange customs of the Bedouins of the Sinai peninsula in Lord Cromer's report on Egypt and the Sudan. If a man kills another in time of peace the relatives of the murdered man, beginning from the father to the fifth generation, have the right to revenge or pardon against the receipt of "blood money." This latter is fixed at forty-one camels. If the murdered man was of the same tribe as the murderer the latter or his near relatives have to give a girl in marriage to one of the victim's relatives without receiving the usual dowry. When she gives birth to a child she is free to go back if she chooses. In the latter case the marriage must be renewed and the usual dowry paid. Five camels may be substituted for the girl.

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