

The following is the last chapter of the 1956 edition of "Princess-New York" published by The Bobbs-Merrill Company.

When David McCay decided to publish the book in 1973 he and the author made the call to eliminate this chapter from the new edition. Their reasoning was that this chapter was intended to be a wrap-up of the story and by adding Book 2, "Key Biscayne", they felt it would be redundant to end the story twice. They also changed the name to simply "Princess".

As many of you have read Jon Wilson's review of "Princess" in WoodenBoat's July 2008 edition we thought it a good idea to include a PDF of the chapter on the website so Joe's readers can make their own call.

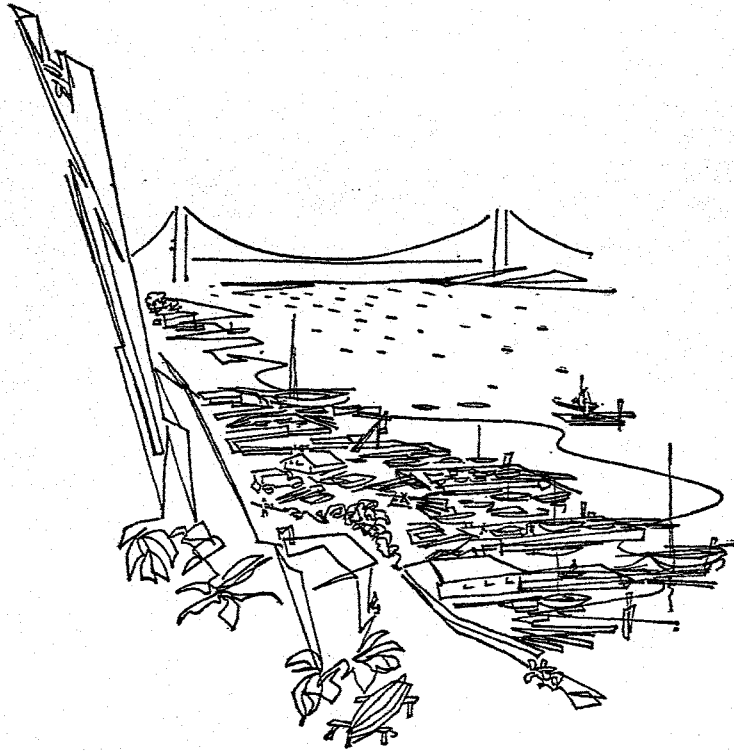
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Every once in a while somebody will come up to me and say, "Whatever happened to *Princess*?"

It isn't so bad if I happen to be alone. I can usually handle an inquisitive customer, take him aside and explain. "Remember that babe?" Then when the eyes go up—"Well, I'm married now. Wonderful wife. Two kids. Very happy."

It gets complicated when the wife is around. It's not that Betty and *Princess* don't get along—they do, fine. It's just that I feel she resents it when I talk about the old girl. I can tell. It's the tone I get in my voice, the moonlight and roses one.

There were moonlight and roses. We went steady from the start. So did my boat. She was dead steady, hauled out in Edgewater, New Jersey, propped on a grounded barge on that crowded shelf of mud below the Palisades.



I had returned to my island, the one where I was born. I slipped back unobserved under cover of victory. *Princess* waited all that summer alongside Floyd's barge for round two of my quest for the enchanted tropical island. She waited in vain. I had my island. It was just what I wanted.

Come fall and a scuffing from a stiff northeaster *Princess* was hauled, protesting gently and still hankering. Betty and I were married during the blizzard of '47. It was quite a flurry. We put off our honeymoon until spring so that we could share it with *Princess*, which is proof to end all proof that love is blind.

The spring of '48 came all of a sudden, like the back draft of a west wind off the Palisades. There was a scrap of snow blanket and a dripping fringe of icicles on the roof of the shed. Men leaned over locust stakes with drawing knives and shaved the bark that snags the shad nets. The butcher's wife on River Road claimed that two could live as cheap as one and backed it up with hero sandwiches. We didn't have a worry in the world. There was nothing to do but fix up *Princess* and sail away. As usual, the fixing part produced the bottleneck.

*Princess* needed a new deck. The unprotected plywood had separated with the years. The sides of the cabin had rotted away. There were some bad planks below, and any number of other things like a new tiller and a couple of frames cracked at the chine. Contented with the crimp she put in our plans, *Princess* lay away and waited for bigger and better ways of getting even. On a hunch I had one eye peeled for repercussions. You never know about a boat.

Outside of the usual quota of cuts, skinned knuckles, barked shins and assorted bruises associated with the spring toughening-up process, nothing of a lethal nature happened during the work of removing the old cabin and fitting her with a new one. I accepted her docility as a kind of truce pending the inevitable outbreak of hostilities when *Princess* got back into her element. Then it would be every man for himself, and every woman too. I hesitated to communicate my fears to my wife. It just isn't done—especially on a honeymoon.

The old-fashioned cabin, whose sides were bent from one great sixteen-inch oak plank, was pried loose from the deck beams and slid down onto the barge in much the same way a boat is launched. The two timbers that were used to pry it loose served as tracks. With a screech of crumbling wood *Princess* became an open boat. We left her for the night.

In the morning the sun rose over the city and poured into her hull. Her planks shrank. Calking cotton hung from her open seams like puffed spaghetti. Spring rounded into summer, and all the hopeful launching dates came and went. That beached barge in Edgewater began to look like just the place for our wooden anniversary.

We used to come over on the ferry with a list compiled the night before. That list grew longer all the time. It became a standing joke in Edgewater, but somehow, like a wind tide, the crest passed and the list grew smaller. A new cabin, fashioned from a gift of African mahogany, followed the sheer of the deck. We recanvassed the deck all over, and I replaced two sad-looking planks next to the garboard. After the bottom was calked Betty buttered it with seam compound.

*Princess* was not the only boat on the barge being primped for summer passage. There were sailboats, motorboats, inboard and outboard, boats converted from work boats to pleasure craft, from pleasure to business and back again in their dotage to pleasure. There were war boats and boats of peace. There was a subchaser without engines and a beat-up old landing barge owned by a soulful sea buff who operated a steam shovel weekdays. His week ends were devoted to the landing barge upon which he lavished a preposterous pilothouse and a small fortune in time figured at the union scale.

Under the pretense of an enthusiasm for Friendship

sloops, he liked to sit cross-legged on that hilarious pilot-house and leer at my wife. I had no objection. I've put in my time leering. If *Princess* resented this duplicity she showed no signs except a barely discernable disdain for that potbellied landing barge with its big mouth. What got me was the way Betty acted when the landing barge was launched.

"Ever ride a boat down into the water?"

Betty said, "No."

The steam-shovel guy put on the heat. "Come on. It's just like a roller coaster." He waved up at the amusement park atop the Palisades, and off went Betty. There was a tooth-paste smile on her sun-tanned face as the barge splashed into the drink and she gave the silliest giggle you ever heard when the little round steam-shovel guy helped her ashore on the dock.

I went about my business. We didn't talk about it, but for some reason that makes sense in retrospect, I was alone aboard *Princess* when she rolled down the long incline of the barge and floated free. Betty watched from the dock. I felt almost sick about it, but these things are beyond the ken of men. The ladies understand. The war was on.

In the practice of celestial navigation a good deal is made of three points in the sky which help to determine the position of the ship. It is called the heavenly triangle. No such pin-pointing has been developed to help a guy figure the eternal one. Now I was at sea and no kidding. June was gone, and a thin fog that burned the distant edge of things hung in the quiet sky. *Princess*, her topsides glowing with semigloss, waited in a pocket scooped in the mud by her own deep keel. When the tide was in, she took a little more of it aboard than a lady should. We under-

stood. One morning in the very middle of July we heaped her with our summer clothes and a hamper of cold cuts, and shoved.

It was broad daylight this time when *Princess* passed down through the choke of river traffic and headed for Sandy Hook. It was a pleasant passage across the lower bay with the west wind filling in for the failing tide and the sun gilding the landmarks of New York, small as souvenirs astern.

We groped in the darkness for a decent anchorage with the usual insufficiency of charts. A man on an ammunition dock chased us away. We found a safe place under the brow of Atlantic Highlands and pounced on the cold cuts. It was idyllic. It was great. We couldn't leave the boat for a minute. She leaked.

It wasn't one of those little leaks that nag and annoy. It was a big, bountiful leak with the soul of Fiddler's Green. Betty was wonderful about it. We talked it over. "By the way," I said, not trying to pin-point blame or anything, "do you remember seeing any old nail holes that hadn't been plugged when you were smearing compound on the bottom?"

Betty looked up into my eyes. "Why, darling," she said, "I didn't even think to look."

I got the drift. It was not in my favor. "Oh," I said, with a balloon over my head and an electric light in it. "Don't worry about it." She didn't. Neither did I.

There was no time to worry. We shoved off for Long Island and a place to haul. Atlantic Highlands was too far from home in case the infirmity of *Princess* became as severe as it was chronic. The run up toward Manhattan at dawn with the leak in dead heat had at least the magic of morning. The wind was strong from the southwest. We flew under the wing of Manhattan and pumped

like crazy passing through Hell Gate. It was midday when *Princess* came up dripping, appropriately enough, on the ways at College Point. It was an education.

They say you never learn. They're right, you don't. The ways of the mind are more obscure than the origin of man. Maybe it was wishful thinking, but so sure was I that it could be nothing trivial that I went to work on *Princess* with a vengeance.

I unstepped her mast. It was a hell of a job. I ripped out her mast step, a huge oak member, looking for signs of the leak. It was just as well. The mast step was spongy and could have made trouble. I worked like crazy. Betty went back to the apartment for a decent night's sleep and a look-see on how the sane half lives. I was too busy to share her curiosity. When at last I did go home, we passed each other in the subway, she going out and me coming home, like ships in the night or submarines.

*Princess* had been hauled at high water. When the ebb came at College Point, I stared unbelievably at the ways. The tracks over which the car had passed bearing the old girl were lying loose on the ancient ties. As the water receded it revealed new lengths of rusty rail curled up at the ends and pointing to the merciful sky. It was bad enough having to unstep and step the heavy mast, fashion a new base for it and join it to the keel, without having to rebuild the marine ways at College Point. I had no choice. The yardman didn't give a damn. He leased the place, hung around the adjacent bar and covered himself with a sign which said, in letters slightly askew:

#### AT YOUR OWN RISK

I had grown to accept the injunction in all theaters. With a maul and a handful of railroad spikes I went about waist-deep in water for the best part of a tide to make sure

*Princess* would be spared a spill. Although she had never gone over, out of water the old girl had a very high center of gravity. She was no low-down landing barge. This time for better or for worse Betty went along when we rolled down into the rising waters and the bumpy rails yielded to the cushion of brine. We stepped the mast, lowering it away from a flagpole on the dock. It was good to be back in the water. There was only one drawback—*Princess* still leaked. We took comfort in the fact that the leak was a lesser thing. The agony at College Point had not been without virtue. We shoved off, still dribbling, for Oyster Bay.

We found the leak. We found it in the shadow of Cooper Bluff where Teddy Roosevelt rehearsed on horseback for his part in history, *Arsenic and Old Lace*. It was silly, the way we found it.

We had just culled a tidy lunch of clams from the flats of Oyster Bay. I was sprawled on my bunk staring, dozing, then staring. I was fascinated by a damp spot in the forepeak of *Princess*. Betty was doing her nails with a tiny file after the muddy manicure of a clam bed. We were talking about a place to haul again for another go at the bottom.

I said, "Let me see that file a minute."

Betty looked at me. "Want me to do your nails?"

"Not now. Give me a ten-year rain check. Then I'll know you still care."

"Do your own," she said handing me the nail file.

"Not mine," I said, and reached forward to pass the file between an exposed rib of *Princess* and a plank.

A little stream of water, saltier but not too unlike the one Moses drew from a rock, ran out along the lower edge of the file and poured into my cupped hand. We grounded the boat in the clam bed and found the guilty



old nail hole. It had been buttered by Betty. We plugged it with a twig no bigger around than her pinkie. The tide rose—the one on the outside this time. *Princess* righted herself and was dry.

The honeymoon began. There was a full moon and the capillary click of brine along the boot-topping. If you have an ear for it, there was the music of little night noises in the shell of a cove. There was everything a man could want, except Betty. Where was she?

I had ducked below for a can of beer. While I was rummaging in the ice chest there was a splash. She came up dripping. I fished her on board.

“Oh,” she gasped, “it was an accident.”

“What did you do?”

“I stepped back along the deck, and I came to the end of the boat.”

“The end of the boat.” I drummed the deck. She might think it was an accident. I didn’t. If it was anything, it was the end of moonlight and roses for me. I had swapped freedom for honeymoon. The price of honeymoon like the price of freedom was no less than eternal vigilance—leastways aboard *Princess*.

She was tricky at anchor, irritable alongside and worse under way. On the long leg to Fishers Island I caught the boom in my hand as she jibed. I lifted it over just as it was about to connect with Betty’s blond bean. *Princess* got back at me. She gave me a nasty bang on my left shin with the club of her staysail. It was a nice run anyway with the wind aft out of the southwest and a blue bow wave that fell away before us and a long hill of swell from the open sea to get up on and look around. It was early in the afternoon when I came back to Block Island with my bride.

We came into the old harbor under sail, and I set

her along the inner wharf as if the dock were a carton of eggs. Harold Dunn came down. He knew. No deep-draft sailing vessel comes into the old harbor under full canvas but *Princess*. He presented us with the key to the village and the key to the fish well of his trawler. Then we climbed the hills.

We looked out from the top of everything. I did. So did my bride. We saw the pattern. We felt the air move. We realized the heights, and we looked down with strangely calloused eyes at a tiny little boat, seabound and dockside, fretting in the pungent bosom of the old harbor.

THE END