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Silly Sailing

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The water was rough and the old man stupidly refused to board our larger vessel, his sentimental attachments – the captain goes down with the ship attitude – were frankly ridiculous in a situation such as this. He actually thought we were bragging about how we had such a large, brilliantly white, state of the art, yacht compared to his 40 year old dinghy. Maybe we were slightly tipsy seeing as we were a bunch of lads out without the female halves, stocked up for the week's voyage, but we were by no means being inhumane as he was trying to suggest. Besides, we spotted him and asked him aboard. If we were too far gone we most likely would have missed him or just hurled empties at him.

We were shouting down to him and he at us from down there, "Let us help you! You can come aboard with us."

"No! Stop harassing me, you young rude imbeciles. You think I haven't managed in worse conditions than this?" Under his breath he muttered, "you young people think you know everything, with your shiny big ships, you haven't lived."

We threw him a rope instead of continuing the argument but the stubborn old man obviously didn't take it.

Then all of a sudden we got broadsided by a wave, soaking everyone and washing our plastic table and chairs overboard close to the old man, suggesting that the size and power of the waves were increasing. We were shielding the old man so he didn't get washed away. However we soon noticed that the wave had caused us to collide with the small dinghy down below, knocking us off balance and if the old man hadn't been strapped in, he would have been out of reach from us. We, in our ship *My Lady*, had barely a scratch but the wooden dinghy's structure was crunched to pieces. The old man was cursing everyone and everything but was also now sinking.

We weren't going to feel responsible if anything happened to the poor sod. I'm sure if we'd met down the local boozier and offered him a pint of his tippie – which if we got talking we probably would have – he would be certain to accept and we'd become friends for the night if not longer.

So now that we had guaranteed his life to the bottom of the deep blue sea, he finally relented, grabbed the rope, tied it best he could to his dinghy, unattached himself from it and surprisingly and athletically scaled the rope up to our deck. We kept his boat tied to us so that in the morning we could help him raise it out for the extensive repair it would need. This we agreed to as it was the least we could do.

As I said about the pint of tippie, which we handed him one as soon as he was happy his ship (no such thing as boats) was safely tied up. The old man became 72 year old George from

Suffolk. A farmer by trade, he'd loved to sail ever since his daddy had taken him as a little boy. George sailed round the whole of England, Wales and Scotland every year just to keep himself active. Sometimes he'd stop off at Le Harve in France to get some nice wine. He was retired and widowed but even then he said he needed the respite from everyday life.

Quite an interesting story he had, and good insight into the life of an OAP. I have nothing to worry about now when I think about ageing. Apparently you can get attractive nurses to help with dreary tasks such as cooking and shopping and washing. George said he only has to read, watch TV or go and meet his old chums at the village hall.

In the morning we awoke, well really it was 2 in the afternoon, but hey, we'd had a long night of it. We went out onto the deck and stretched in the crispy day. We pulled the rope to George's ship and found that it was definitely still part of our company. Again making sure George was happy, we headed for the closest harbour which ended up being Southampton roughly 5 miles away. Not too bad.

We made it to Southampton and managed to hoist *Maybellene* up from the depths. George insisted on attaching the crane's hooks to *Maybellene* himself, to get her ashore, which was quite nerve racking as he scaled back down the rope onto his ship. He gave the thumbs up to say that he was ready for the lift. This was a really delicate process as *Maybellene* could have been split into two and George's possessions could have sunk to the bottom. He was teary eyed. He'd said that he'd built it himself many years ago and this was the first time it had been back ashore since he had first splashed it into the sea. He was cursing about global warming and other such things while the crane was lifting him and *Maybellene* up.

George had forgone the wearing of a life vest as he thought the event could not become any worse than it already was. Well he was deeply wrong. When the ship was at the height of our heads a rail that one of the crane's hooks was attached to broke clean off and unbalanced the whole object. This caused too much weight on the other two hooks and they too broke off. The *Maybellene* fell with a splash and bang. On the way down I saw George get a whack with a hook leaving him completely incapacitated. Down, down, down.

I had got to like this old gentleman. I dived into the water without thinking and therefore not knowing what I was going to do. Mid-dive was the first I realised that I hadn't been pushed. I could have smiled if the situation was any different.

I dived and swam over to the dinghy and started screaming at George to wake up while I was trying to stay afloat. I gave him another whack which brought him to but as he tried to swim away with me he got caught by netting. He looked at me and I at him and I knew he wasn't gonna try and get free this time. Old and knackered he looked and didn't have enough energy to try and

get loose and stay above water. The boat was sinking and drifting further ashore. George made one last effort to get to the hull of *Maybellene*. I saw he was rummaging round in a cubby hole during the sinking, his head just above the sea line. I was surprised no one else had jumped in to help. Maybe they could also tell he didn't want to be rescued or they thought he was fine and jhad just gone back to get something, a picture of his wife or dog maybe. That was not the case as it happens; from this cubby hole he pulled a royal navy flag. At this moment, as if some sort of vacuum had been broken or air bubble had burst, the *Maybellene* dived finally and quickly took George to the depths. A crowd had gathered along the harbour side and there were plenty of gasps and cries of disbelief. Even I was being shouted at for not helping more.

The truly sad thing was that the story of George and *Maybellene* sinking to the depths patriotically did not even warrant a slip into the local newspaper let alone the national news. Trying to feel less guilty about not doing more I did however place an article in the obituaries.