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An Island Bride

How I Made a Match on Halloween

By Mrs. SARAH B. ROBERTS Copyright by American Press Association, 1911.

On the coast of Maine is an island (Bailey's island) where I have a summer cottage. My place is on the east side of the island, and on that side the Atlantic waves are unbroken by any land or shoals, so that they come singing in upon the rocks. Surrounding the house, except on the sea side, are fir trees, whose odor hangs pleasantly upon the air, especially pure in that region. The people who live on Bailey's and on Orr's island, being next north of Bailey's, are mostly fisher folk, though some of them do a little farming in vegetables and milk.

The several summers during my occupancy of my cottage a girl about seventeen years old—Myra Crofts was her name—brought me milk. She drove about among her customers in a little buckboard wagon drawn by a small horse, so used to his mistress' stops that he would stand quietly wherever he was placed. Myra was a study for an artist. Her clothes were of the poorest, but her face was comely and her figure fit for a model for a statue. I did my own housework and used to receive the girl at the kitchen door, and since I liked her would always speak a pleasant word. One day I said to her: "Myra, it seems to me that it is nearly time you were getting a husband."

"Oh, dear, no," she replied, showing by a toss of her head that the subject deeply interested her. "There's no one on the island who wants me, and I never go off it. And, as for the summer visitors, the young men are all too much taken up with the visiting girls to notice one who peddles milk."

I noticed one on a young fisherman, to whom I had taken as much fancy as I had for Myra. During the months of July and August he gave his attention to the summer visitors, taking them out in his motorboat, but after they had gone he would return to his fishing. I went out with him frequently and had every confidence in his ability as a skipper. There are numerous ledges in Casco Bay, and Ned Ballard could sail among them almost with his eyes shut. I was once with him in a fog some seven or eight miles out to the eastward, numerous islands and reefs intervening between us and home. Ballard brought me into port safely, never lying to for a moment, and when we landed I said to him: "How in the world did you do it?" "Oh, to me," he replied, "it's like your walking about in your own house in the dark. I notice the flow of the tide by the direction of the buoys. I occasionally get a glimpse of a rock, a bit of shore, a point, which confirms me in my opinion as to where I am."

This was all unintelligible to me, for I had during the whole period seen nothing but that driving fog so common on that coast. It occurred to me that Ned Ballard and Myra Crofts would make a good match. Ned brave and strong, Myra, also the specimen of a country girl. So interested was I in bringing the two together by a plan I conceived that when the season ended and the other summer residents and visitors departed I stayed on. For a few days after the begonia from country to city I felt lonely at the changed appearance the region took on, but as soon as I became accustomed to the new regime I felt more pleasure in my surroundings than ever. There was above me the great blue dome of the heavens, about me the waters of the bay, and I breathed in as pure air as it is possible to find on the globe.

To carry out my scheme for bringing my two favorites together I was obliged to stay till after Halloween, for on that day it was to be put in practice. My sailing days were not so frequent now since Ned Ballard was engaged with his fishing. His work was in the night, and he slept by day. He fished principally for mackerel, spreading his nets at set of sun and taking them up at its rising, and when lucky would find them well filled with fish, which he sold at a handsome price. He told me that in one haul he once took in 1,200 pounds. Moonlight nights were his favorite time to fish. There was sufficient light by which to work, but not enough for the fish down in the water to see the nets in which their fins were caught. I have myself seen him out between my cottage and Ragged Island—so called from its ragged shore—and when his boat would lie in the moon's shimmer I could almost recognize the silhouette of his figure.

That year Halloween came at the full of the moon. I had thought of inviting Ned and Myra to my cottage unknown to each other and contriving to have them see each other's reflection in mirrors, but Ned was having such luck with his fishing and the light of the moon was so valuable to him that I could not prevail upon him to give me even one night. So I was obliged to invent another plan. Ned knew very little about Halloween. He had heard of it, but did not know that on that evening girls were liable to get a vision of the man they would marry. There was no superstition about him, and I knew it

would be impossible for me to induce him to ask Myra to be his wife through a childlike faith in an apparition. But we women are made of different stuff from men, and I could rely on Myra to believe in anything that had the appearance of being supernatural, especially if it pointed to a mate. A few days before Halloween, when she came to deliver milk to me, I said to her: "Myra, are you going to try to get a glimpse of your future husband on Halloween?" "I haven't thought of doing so," she replied consciously. "You don't believe in that, do you?" "Why not? There are lots of queer things in the world. Is it any more wonderful that a girl should see the man she will marry than that messages may be sent through the air without even a wire to conduct them?" "I never thought of that."

"If I were you, coming as you are to a marriageable age, I would try to get a glimpse of him."

"How?" "Oh, at 11 o'clock on Halloween night start somewhere. The first unmarried man you meet you will marry."

"Where shall I go?" "I have it. Go out on the water. I have a small motorboat, which I will lend you. You can run it, can't you?" "Yes, ma'am."

"Well, come here just before 11 o'clock. The moon will be nearly full. I will start you out on the water. You will pass but one person—a man in a boat. He will be your husband."

The innocent creature's face beamed with pleasure. She regarded what I told her as probable, as I had myself many years before considered it possible that with a bit of wedding cake under my pillow I would see my own future mate. "He will be working at something," I continued, "but I can't just tell you what. You shall see for yourself."

"Oh, dear!" she gasped, putting her hand to her heart. "Do you really mean it?" "Come at half past 10."

The next afternoon I saw Ned, who had just awakened from his day's slumber, and stopped to ask him how many mackerel he had taken the night before. He told me, and I led the conversation about through various themes till I finally broke away from what I was speaking of, saying: "By the bye, Ned, do you know that tomorrow night is Halloween?" "I didn't know it," he said. "You don't believe in such things, do you?" "I'm not a child."

"Well, child or no child, on Halloween the girl you are to marry will appear to you while you are working with your nets."

He smiled with the look of one who took but little interest in the matter of Halloween, but would not be averse to seeing a sweetheart. "Remember," I added, moving on, "I tell you your future wife will sail past you tomorrow night."

"Mermaid or a sea-witch?" he called after me. I gave him no reply. All was working well for my plan. I only hoped that the weather would be propitious, for should it storm or the sea be boisterous all would be spoiled. As I expected, when Myra came to me on Halloween she was as comely as I had dreamed of. She wore a flower during the day, which I put in her hair, and replaced her tawdry wrap with a white sweater. The nights are chill on Casco bay, even in summer, and in October they are cold. But Myra had the warm blood of youth in her veins, and I knew a sweater would keep her perfectly comfortable. Fortunately there was no wind, and the sky was covered only by broken clouds that rendered the heavens more beautiful, lighted, as they were, by the moon. I took my charge down to a stony beach, where, there being only a long, low ocean swell, I had moored it. She got in, and as I pressed her hand at starting I noticed that she was thrilled with emotion. I pushed off the boat, telling her to steer for the north point of Ragged Island. I could myself see Ned's boat between me and the point, but Myra was so excited that she was oblivious to it. As I saw her sail out into the moonlight I sent a prayer after her that she would find a husband and happiness. Of her appearance to the fisherman I learned afterward from himself. "I confess," he said, "that until I got to work setting my nets I thought of what you had told me, though I did not dream of its coming to pass, but as soon as I was busy I forgot all about it. Then I heard the explosions of a motorboat. Boats are rare out there except in summer, and I wondered who was coming. When the boat came near me I looked up, and there, her face lighted by the moon, standing with one hand on the tiller, was Myra Crofts. I was taken flat aback."

"Why, Myra," I exclaimed, "what brings you out here in the night all alone?" "She answered never a word, just looking at me strangely out of her eyes, as though moved by some deep feeling. Her boat passed mine and turning, moved in the moon's shimmer toward the narrow waterway between Orr's and Bailey's islands. I could see it go through and turn northward, doubtless to the anchorage cove a little farther up."



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A. C. STATEN ON THE HEIGHTS

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