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## **Ten Dates of Christmas? Ten Lords A Leaping: The Gallant Mariner**

*I posted this piece on 12/19/07. It is the first of a series of essays about ten Match.com dates which I wrote about around the holidays. It is posted on my blog: 17-2-70; as above. <http://17-2-70.blogspot.com/>*

The business of actually having a date during the holidays is now heating up, and those of us who have worked the dating sites must now view the results of our labor.

And so it goes in Gotham.

Those who have spent last year in singleton status, have perhaps pursued this goal more diligently.

However, since I have long been a subscriber to Blaise Pascal's expression "All men's miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone," I am not as starry eyed about the euphoria that will descend upon me through the act of becoming one half of a couple.

Just think about it, not only do you have your own family, office Christmas party, etc. to deal with, but his...

The best time to get on Match.com is about six months before the holidays. It's a good idea to stay on through Valentine's Day too. But well before Memorial Day, many people might have just had it with all the sour dating experiences they have had and they are willing to take their chances going solo or meeting someone during the warm weather.

And speaking of experiences and the summer, let me tell you about this Lord A Leaping. As previously mentioned, I am tough minded about the holidays and tough minded about being alone, you might say I am "intrepid."

And into my life then comes, "The Gallant Mariner," well "intrepid" is how he in fact describes himself too!

Yes, as previously mentioned, somehow I did manage to post on a dating site that day when I discovered secrets of squirrels' mating habits (11/24/07).

Gallant says he's 49 years old (and I already knocked a few years off my age), but that is not the worst of it. He describes himself as a "Renaissance Man"—a builder, a sailor, an investment banker, a musician, a world traveler, a golfer and general athlete—however his heart is in investment management, and he is looking for an equal companion.

I'm pretty, I'm shapely, I'm sweet, I'm funny, I'm even industrious—but I'm an idiot. Ballet or Opera tickets are about the worst thing you could offer me, I'm a neurotic traveler, and I regard finance as what people do to make more money than the average Joe; and yet I have some sympathy for those of us who live in New York who must do work such as this to survive. But like it? I just don't get it. I am not saying all these people are Ebenezer Scrooges, however, well, I just don't get it, I repeat. That doesn't mean these people should be ostracized from the planet, no, I guess there must be room in the garden for many different flowers, but why these stinkweeds always want to cross-pollinate with me, I don't know.

OK, I am jumping to conclusions and let's face it, working class heroes can be a big pain in the ass too. What's that saying, "it's just as easy to fall in love with a rich guy, as a poor guy." And think how happy my family would be if I married a rich guy and they wouldn't worry about me anymore.

And the other saying, it is better to be with a guy who likes you more than you like him. And this guy does like me, he keeps writing me romantic letters. In fact, he admires me!

He "admires my sense of direction and values—we share a fondness for being active including numerous intellectual and physical pursuits." (Does this guy like to climb the old fashioned Stairmaster, while reading The Post and listening to "Gimme Shelter?")

"It seems we share a strong feeling for things adventuresome... and wanderlust—I'm looking for a special traveling companion to share a fine dinner with after an exciting day of exploration whether in Manhattan or across the Globe..."

I'm looking for someone who is not a weenie, has a car, and isn't frightened to drive to the neighborhood where I grew up in Crown Heights. I want to see what my old apartment building looks like.

And hey look, Fish, Mermaid, Peter Luger, every once in awhile, but otherwise, we can buy some great steaks at Ottomanelli's or buy the fish right at Fish across the street...

I just did not think I was right for him after reading his profile. He seemed waspy, self involved and rich.

"I thought your well thought-out self description which reflects both an understanding of yourself and those things that prompt relationship potential—clearly an amalgam of both intellectual and physical qualities ..."

You talking to me?

It's not that I am stupid. People who know me think I am smart and intuitive. College professors thought I was smart, at least they said they did. I did well in national type tests, except the science and math part of the MCATS, and I didn't do that bad, considering I stopped studying.

But I am much more working class. Although I may look waspy.

I warned Gallant that I wasn't familiar with sailing, did not work in finance, had only an undergraduate degree from a local college and was a nervous traveler. Actually, every time I get on an airplane, I want to bang my head against the wall while I am taking my sneakers off, waiting to go through the X-ray machine, for voting for Jimmy Carter. Didn't he deregulate the airlines plus start taking taxes from Unemployment Benefits?

But Gallant insisted. He was game.

Well, ok, maybe this guy knows something about me I don't know. I haven't made the greatest choices in guys. He is choosing me and isn't that the way it is supposed to be.

OK. I'll meet him, but this will be intimidating. This will be a stretch...

"I also like your upbeat sense of optimism—Cheers, Skip, the Gallant Mariner."

He likes my optimism. Now, I have to act optimistic?

My sister says I am a downer. Maybe for just a few hours I can ...

It's hard for guys too, being the initiator. I am wondering if I am the victim of one of those boiler plate letters from guys. I see them sometimes ... it's like a cover letter for a job that they have not investigated.

One date will not kill you, I tell myself.

Well I better look the best I can 'cause he is younger than I am!

"Meet me at the Plaza Athenee Hotel, you know it."

He has a nice voice. He says he must pull up canvas because of a squall.

I ask him if he has a convertible—but he explains he is on his boat when I reach him on his cell.

As I said, it's not as if Gallant has not been forewarned. Or should I say, Skip.

I don't "know it" and I look up the hotel on the Internet, 37 E. 64<sup>th</sup> St.

Gallant calls me though and wants to change the date to The Boathouse in Central Park. "Too much traffic in town."

Both meeting places seem like sophisticated pretentious New York locations, however, The Boathouse may be American pretentious instead of European pretentious and that will be easier for me.

It is so hot, almost 5PM and I am walking around said Boathouse in the heat. It is set against a green pond, and it is really pretty except it is about 90 degrees out.

I forget that he has said to meet him at the bar; I think he wants to meet me outside. I am so nervous when I have to go through these events, I forget things.

I am waiting there and I am wondering if some guy near a park bench is he, although the guy on the park bench doesn't particularly look like Skip's picture. No one does. I don't have quarters or a cell phone and use my calling card on the telephone.

Next thing, I am responding "Skip, is that you." "Yes." "I mean are you on the bench there." The guy on the bench is talking on the cell phone and I feel he is gesturing to me or perhaps it is just too hot.

"I'm at the bar," he says. "The bar?" (cell phones so suck) "Oh that's right, you said you would be at the bar."

The heat has made me stupid!

I go in and there are many people that could be him. And I am hoping they are not him. Finally I notice an aging Wasp and I realize that MUST be him.

First thing I am thinking is that thank God it is him. He is not great, but the others at the bar are far worse. Also, I am thinking if he is younger than I am, that I am in great shape and my younger brother, by Gallant Mariner's math, (two years older than Gallant-51), is a Greek God or possessor of the secret of the Fountain of Youth.

Gallant speaks in a clipped slightly bored manner, much eye squinting and gesturing, Bill Buckley style.

I notice that Gallant's hair is that weird ass grey hit with a red tint—not quite blond, more orange.

OK.

Then I notice Gallant's teeth which are unusually yellow and loaded with gold in the back.

He says he has made his career in finance and is reading the Wall Street Journal, it's an article about money being available thanks to President Bush. Gallant is very pleased.

"Do you believe it is true?" I ask.

"Oh yes and if there is more money available..."

I finish the sentence, "people buy stuff."

Yes he smiles in a slightly condescending fashion, "Stuff."

I look out at the green water and it somehow seems to have a very European decadent feel; I don't know why. Perhaps it is the gondolier.

Everyone in the restaurant seems to be in the "happy hour" mode, however, most of the people do not look particularly American. They are talking about mergers, acquisitions, bonuses. It is obviously an expensive restaurant. Who goes here after work, I think.

It is the grasping New Yorker set here. Some foreign, some yuppie go getter types, introducing themselves to other potentially influential people, no one particularly attractive but everyone doing the New York thing.

Naturally, I did not volunteer that much about what I had been doing, since thanks to the FD, I have been doing nothing in terms of income producing activities but I merely mention that I worked in the medical field on occasion and now I was doing medical editing.

Gallant perks up.

"Yes, the field to be in now in medicine is dentistry. Dentists are the ones doing well now, my college roommate has been doing cosmetic dentistry and has a home in St. Lucia."

I think to myself that all people that went into medicine are affected by the difficulty with third party compensation.

"He doesn't find it competitive then?"

"Not for him."

I looked again at Gallant Skip's teeth. OK. Well maybe he is not vain. That speaks well of him. Maybe I should lighten up.

I confide to Mariner that I was so hot today (we are in some bizarre July doldrums closing in over 90 with plenty of humidity) I just wanted to jump in water, any water.

He gestures to the pond.

"Not that water," I say. "It's so green, why?"

Gallant explains it is loaded with algae, and there is a reflection from the trees. Then he adds "plus there are gaters, babe and piranhas." Gallant interjects some humor and I smirk, even *I* know that is not true.

I have been blabbing mindlessly because I have begun to realize that Gallant has somewhat misrepresented himself. I realize that Gallant has probably lived most of his adult life in a rent stabilized apartment ("Don't shoot Santa Claus") on the Upper

Westside. He has a little pot belly and I would not consider an over-developed chest. Toned and athletic? I think he is married because he has the tan line on his hand. ("Just briefly, as a young man.") He's got at least ten skin cancers working on his kisser. If he is really his age, well then, I can attribute it to too much sun. In addition, Gallant has answered me, a little snippily, when I asked him if he liked to swim ("I was a lifeguard."). Too much sun at a young age and sailing and all.

I think I have hyperthermia and can hardly remember my name far less the profile and I am somewhat struck by all the new variants of the original information and I am trying to reconcile the inconsistencies.

This restaurant is beautiful but feels decadent and hot, it is reminding me of something, something that I can scarcely remember, a movie I saw when I was younger, "The Garden of the Finzi-Continis." The bar is open and not air conditioned.

He brings up 9/11; he lost a friend at WTC. I say "I am sorry." He mentions how FDNY is handling the pressure to integrate. He believes that the jobs are handed down in families.

I say, "Perhaps, but I think that many city workers, police and firemen, want better for their children."

I'm thinking of all the kids I grew up with whose parents wanted their kids to have less risk, more money. "I think more people who would have previously gone into FDNY and NYPD are encouraged by their families to work in more lucrative areas, like Wall Street."

I just couldn't help it then, I said, "and it's too bad."

I think how awful some of those guys I graduated with who got involved in Wall Street became.

I am still trying to process that Gallant is not who he represents himself to be, his best friend is a dentist yet Skip is badly in need of dental work. And yet, so am I, I tongue the successful implant I have undergone in the back of my mouth, still waiting for a crown. Cleverly I have asked his dentist friend's name, as he has been bragging and bragging about the Ivy League school they went to, both in person and in his profile, and at this time, although I cannot recall Skip's last name, I think it is inappropriate to ask it.

Gallant refers to his last Christmas here, at The Boathouse, which he organized "as a gathering of other orphans." I am thinking that is too pitiful a word when you think what an orphan really is.

I only say, "You have no children then?"

After all an orphan is a child without parents, totally innocent.

"No, I always hoped it would be natural, an out flowing of a good relationship ..." etc., etc. etc.

A variation of my standard bullshit, which is true, but even I know there is more to it, you've got to be more game and less selfish than I was ...

"And how was the gathering?"

"Surprisingly lovely, we orphans ..."

Orphans again, I am thinking, we are self indulgent, neurotic New Yorkers that wouldn't step up to the plate ...

To live fully, you have to be more willing to take the blows of an unknown situation. More willing to give hostages to fortune. I blame myself for childlessness, among other things.

I am still trying to make Gallant but I am growing more at ease with Skip, and his little pot belly and narrow chest, thinking, well how can I be angry at a person who suffers really from the same issues I do? Had a rent stabilized apartment all his adult life and all he has been able to accrete is a boat, if that, basic medical attention for facial skin cancer lesions ignored. He reminds me of the captain on Gilligan's Island. Suddenly I relax, yeah, ah so what. It reminds me of a family tale that made my mother really laugh. My younger sister went on her first date with a goofy kid in the neighborhood. They went to the Prospect Park Ice Skating Rink, both of them posturing with adolescent airs, but when they went to rent the skates, they both were mortified because they both had huge holes in their socks.

I smile at Gallant and suddenly he says, "Well I have to be getting back now."

He's dumping me unceremoniously I realize.

The penurious tip of two dollars is flying off the bar with a light, sudden and unexpected breeze, and I tell Gallant "your money is..." he plants my Amstel light beer bottle down on it.

Then I quickly calculated the turning point in conversation from when he was trying to woo and impress me and when it turned, mostly when I had become relaxed, forgot he said he was a lifeguard, expressed absolutely no interest in money ... which shouldn't have bothered him as it was clear he had none.

He had dated another woman he said who didn't want to go away much and during a trip to North Fork ("do I know it?") I am not that big of an idiot, I only lived in the city all my life, she became nervous because her mother was alone and her father just died, just didn't want to travel. Man, I thought I was neurotic, but I don't consider traveling to Long Island traveling although I do know what it is like to be nervous over an aging parent.

When did this rejection stage begin I think. But I have barely time to think as we are at the door of The Boathouse and he is saying to me, his pot belly and narrow shoulders squared resolutely towards me and clearly enjoying this minor display of power, "It was a

pleasure to meet you, I'm going this way. You are going that way?" "Yes, I am, of course, going east." He repeats, "It was a pleasure to meet you," in a manner that is both courtly and militaristic. "Yes, thank you," I say.

It is still stultifyingly hot in NY as I trudge up the hills of the park in the Tower of Babel this town is, a city in which the population revels in this square of green that the developers have allowed them. The atmosphere is sitting on me as if I am underwater with no oxygen. I trudge up and down the landscaped hills in my Match.com date uniform, which matches my pictures. No matter how hot I am, I still wear stockings.

My heels are a little higher than are comfortable to accommodate the possibility, the hope, the dream, well maybe, you never can tell ... and first impressions count...

So I tread up and down this landscaped square for both the poor and the wealthy, like a hamster running on a wheel in a cage.

But the detective in me is kicking in.

I am home on the net Googling his dentist friend's name along with the Ivy League School.

Ah hah, those damn reunions that these preppy problems and other anal retentives insist on. Both he and his dentist show up, about nine years before I graduated, but I was skipped in Catholic school.

That makes Skip about 61.

I see my brother the next day, looks like Ed Harris with more hair. He looks in fact like Gallant's son. When he hears the story, he begins to laugh. Then he says, "well, for sure he was anticipating a smack down, a situation which he probably is all too familiar with." My brother is the worst accomplice, but I force him. He dials Gallant's cell and luckily gets the message system.

"This is the Match.com police, and we have some reason to believe you are misrepresenting yourself on our service. And so we are keeping you on the service but we are changing your net name to "The Ancient Mariner."