

Mariner vs. Mijoy

The Curse of the Mijoy 747

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PART TWO

curse (kûrs), *n.*, *v.* 1. an evil that has been invoked upon a person or thing. 2. a profane oath.

Both of these descriptions have been quite discernable each time *Orion* has met up with the *Mijoy*.

I don't wish ill on the *Mijoy*. That 85-foot fishing vessel gives great pleasure to many people, and she is now handicapped-accessible so an even wider body of individuals may experience the joy and excitement of fishing. I just wish she wasn't around when I'm around, as things always seem to go wrong when she is nearby. Before I go on, let me be very clear: I am quite aware of my own fallibilities. I believe that the curse that hangs over *Orion* simply amplifies them.

Such was the situation on a lovely summer day of sailing last year. Having put the previous encounter with the *Mijoy* behind me, I was fully prepared to enjoy a fresh, stiff breeze one afternoon on Niantic Bay. My wife, Liz, was with me, and we made all the usual preparations to depart while at the mooring. We uncovered the mainsail, attached the halyard, brought out the nice, comfortable cushions from the cabin, and, after double-checking that the internal tank was full, I started the outboard motor. Casting off the mooring line, we motored the short distance down the Niantic River Channel until we were close to our old friend, the Niantic River Railroad Bridge, which we had to hail to open in order for us to pass. As we neared, I turned on the handheld VHF and switched to channel 13.

"Nan Rail, Nan Rail, Nan Rail, this is the sailing vessel *Orion*. Come in, over."

"Nan Rail."

"Yes, we are outbound about four minutes away; just looking for your next opening please, over."

"I'll open her right now, Cap'n."

"Thanks very much! *Orion*, standing by."

At this point, a familiar – and somewhat unsettling – voice came over the airwaves.

"Nan Rail, this is the *Mijoy*. We'll be leaving right behind the sailing vessel."

Great, I thought. *Let's hope we keep out of each other's way.*



“Roger that, *Mijoy*. I’ll keep the bridge open until you’re through.”

“*Orion*, copy that.” I chimed in so they knew I heard them. No matter – all I had to do was pass through the bridges and I would be home free.

I snuck under the highway bridge and motored past the small facilities between the bridges. *Blackhawk*, another charter fishing boat, was moored at the pier to starboard. I glanced warily over at the *Mijoy* to port. Those who had paid to fish were standing by the railing, lazily looking around while the crew of the boat was busy coiling lines and preparing to cast off. I gave my outboard a little more throttle and slipped out underneath the railroad bridge into the Bay.

It was apparent even before I passed underneath the iron gantry of the bridge that the wind was stiff enough to require a reef in the mainsail. Whitecaps dotted the tops of the choppy waves, and the *Mariner* began to pitch and roll as soon as we cleared the bridge’s stone foundation. Liz and I buckled our life-jackets as we sought deeper water another hundred yards away.

I gave the tiller to Liz as I cautiously went forward to the cabin top to attend to reefing. I took out the pin in the mast that prevented the sail slugs from falling out, and I let two drop before replacing it (all pre-calculated). Next, I hooked the reef tack of the sail around the reefing hook on the gooseneck of the boom, and I hauled in the small line running along the boom that tightened the reef clew. Everything was looking good as I cleated that line off and started to tightly roll the extra sail all along the boom, tying it in place with the various reef points. I had done this many times before, and it went smoothly.

In the middle of all of this I had glanced aft and noticed the *Mijoy* headed my way. The high winds made the water dance up her bow as she plowed through each wave. I made sure I was out of the channel so she had plenty of room to go around me. By the time I had finished putting the reef in the main, she had already passed by and was headed out to Long Island Sound for another fishing expedition. I held onto the mast as her wake finally caught up with *Orion*, rocking her back and forth even more than what I was presently experiencing.

It was time to raise the main, and I instructed Liz to take the helm, slow down the throttle of the engine and steer into the wind. As she did so, the sail started fluttering on the boom, anxious to be free, and I started pulling the halyard. At the same time, I was holding onto whatever I could in the cockpit, as we were now facing the oncoming waves, and *Orion* really started to buck like a bronco. No matter – I kept my cool and kept hoisting the shortened sail.

Now, I don’t know whom it was who came up with the phrase, “Hindsight is 20/20”. But whoever it was is maddeningly correct, of course, and it just frustrates me to know that all other times I had reefed the main, I had kept the boom downhaul on so the gooseneck would not jump out of its mast slot when raising the shortened sail. This one time I neglected to perform such an action only happened when the *Mijoy* was around; this serves to prove my theory that *Orion* is without a doubt negatively affected by the presence of the *Mijoy*.

With one great pull, I hoisted the main hard in order to stiffen the luff as much as I could. Not only was I dismayed to see that it did *not* stiffen the luff; I was even more dismayed to see the gooseneck slide up, pop out of the mast slot and swing wildly as the boom crashed down on the cabin hatch roof. As I took a moment to figure out exactly what had gone wrong, the boom continued to slam up and down like a courtroom gavel signaling “order in the court”. Liz asked, “What happened?” and my reply was a mixed conglomeration of mumbles and curses (mostly the latter) as I realized which step I had neglected to follow. It got very exciting as I quickly

made my way onto the cabin top, grabbing the boom with one hand and hanging onto the mast for dear life with the other.

Orion and her occupants were really having quite a ride as the mainsail continued to flap wildly while she pitched and heeled with the waves. At some point in my struggle to replace the gooseneck, I happened to look up at the flapping sail just in time to see one of the sail battens fly out of its pocket with a “zing”, gracefully soaring about 20 yards before piercing the water like a javelin. As if I didn’t have enough to think about. At least the motor was going and Liz was steering *Orion* into the wind just fine.

I had one heck of a time trying to fit the gooseneck back in its slot. Finally, I simply lowered the sail completely (something I should have done at the start) which gave me enough slack to fit it in properly. That being done, I tightened the downhaul line, carefully stepped back into the cockpit and tried again. This time the sail went up to where it was supposed to be, the downhaul kept the boom from sliding up too far, and we were in business. I took over the helm from Liz, falling off just enough to fill most of the sail. *Orion* heeled slightly, and the sound of the flapping main stopped. I put the motor in neutral, turned it off and lifted it out. Another moment later the jib was raised and we set our course. Now we were getting somewhere.



The rest of that afternoon proved to be a great day for a sail, and we had a memorable time after my heart rate returned to normal. On our way back home, I was very pleased to see that the *Mijoy* was nowhere around us, and we slipped through the bridges and picked up our mooring just as easy as eating a peanut-butter sandwich.

We had survived another encounter, although this would not be the last time our paths would cross.

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#1922, *Orion*