



Here comes the judge

by AMOS ARTHUR HOLMES

Last year, at the St. Mary's County Fair, I looked at the display of driftwood and I made up my mind that I would compete in 1977. The Fair needed some class, some originality, and a fresh creativity. And I KNEW That I could do something with driftwood that would easily win me a blue ribbon.

I abhor bragging but why hide the fact that I am one artistic son of-a-seabiscuit? My remarkable talents go all the way back to my childhood. I remember the colossal colors, the exquisite shadings, as I crayoned my mother's dining room wall. In the first grade I wrote my first poem. I wrote it for my first grade teacher and it went like this:

I like the way you do your hair

I like your ruby lips

I like the way you pucker up

And the way you swing your hips.

This poem got me expelled for six days but I think you can readily see the talent.

There has always been an awareness that sensual things were a part of me. I can remember, even as a young boy, the rich warmth I experienced while watching a sunset. I could carve from soap the most life-like parts of the female anatomy, and although my mother destroyed these sculptures as fast as I made them. . .still. . .the talent was there.

When I entered the driftwood competition this year there was no sense of excitement or exhilaration. Hell! I KNEW I would win the blue ribbon. No doubt about it. I even felt a degree of shame because I was so much more competent than the other contributors. It would be rather like competing in an oratorical contest with a three year old, or running a foot race against a six year old girl.

I guess I entered the competition for the sake of my ego. When I won the blue ribbon people would say, "Amos Holmes is not only a great writer. . .not only a joy to the housewives of St. Mary's county. . .but a creative genius with driftwood."

I found a piece of driftwood floating beside the shore that was absolutely enchanting. It had been caressed, fondled, and beaten to death by the wind and tide, and its appearance was uniquely beautiful.

To add a final touch to that driftwood. . .to create an exotic artistry. . .I added a single crab. I took a crab that had washed up upon my beach and I let it dry in the sun for about a week. I then took this hollow shell and glued it so that it wouldn't fall apart. I gave it a coat of varnish and I was tremendously pleased with the result. The varnish had highlighted the crab's tiny specks of red and white and blue and it had the

glory of an absolute masterpiece. I glued the crab to the driftwood and stood back immeasurably pleased with life.

My wife, who shouldn't be allowed within twenty yards of an oven, was entering a pound cake. Her pound cakes always weighed at least sixty pounds and this one was no different. It was heavy and soggy and completely inedible. I kind of chuckled to myself because once again I would prove my superiority over her. While she got nothing for her culinary disaster I would have, hanging from my driftwood, a bright blue ribbon. I made up my mind that I would not rub it in. I would soothe her, console her and not patronize her by being overly sympathetic. After all, how could she possibly compete against Amos Arthur?

Thursday evening, when the Fair opened, my wife and I went over to see the results. I have never seen my wife so excited. She kept saying, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if I won a blue ribbon?" I snickered to myself because there was no way that damn cake would win anything. In fact, as soon as the fair was over, I was going to take her cake home and use it as an anchor for my boat.

We entered the building that contained the baked goods. My wife was

ahead of me because she was practically running. And then I saw her stop. She looked, in amazement, at her cake. . .and then turned to me with tears in her eyes. For, lying beside her cake, was a magnificent blue ribbon.

That one act renewed my faith in religion. Miracles DO happen. I patted her on the back, told her the judges must have lost their taste buds, and we went down to the Arts and Crafts to view MY blue ribbon.

When we got to the driftwood we saw the blue ribbon, the red ribbon, and the white ribbon. The only trouble was that the ribbons were not placed on MY driftwood. My wife patted me on the arm. and in sickening sympathetic tone, purred, "Amos, I am so terribly sorry." I hissed, "Take your damn hand off my damn arm." But then, thank goodness, I got a hold on myself.

Why should I feel depressed? Why should I act like a spoiled child? Certainly I realized that others had artistic qualities. I would take my defeat like a man and not whine just because I hadn't measured up. I just hate a man who is so egotistical that he can't take a small set-back.

And honestly. . .I think it was so kind of the Fair officials to let a blind man judge the driftwood this year.

I really do.