

JDVoelker
10/30/32

THE MATCHMAKERS

As I gained the upper deck I saw that the sea was calm. It was late at night. The big ship rolled ever so gently. Pulse normal. The moon, full and high, bathed the restrained waves into the silvery aspect of a vast, sandy desert. I imagined myself astride some swift and silent camel.

I had just watched a man die in steerage. A good ship's doctor must report to the captain. I could'nt tell the captain tonight, though. He'd probably be sitting there ~~in his cabin~~, brooding over his bottles, waiting for me to explain 'why in hell' I'd run away and ruined his bridge game.

No, I could'nt bear to watch him pouting — ~~and~~ damning fatly over his brandy; bemoaning the report he'd have to make. 'My record, you know, Doc,' he'd wheeze at me. Then ~~I could hear him saying~~ later during his report in New York: 'First death in seven crossings, you know.'

I would'nt see the captain tonight.

→ Space ↕
Standing there by the railing I could not but think of that silent form lying down there in steerage. The ship was asleep. The old man was dead.

I am still ashamed at the unprofessional annoyance I betrayed when Cooley called me away from the captain's bridge game. 'An old man sick in steerage. Insists on seeing the ship's head physician.'

Cooley, good assistant, guided me through a maze of odors, huddled humanity and luggage to the steel door of a cabin in st/eerage. A cubby hole. I waved Cooley away and entered the cabin without

knocking.

And ~~the~~ old man sat on the ^{bench} ~~berth~~ in his underclothes. His hair was white and his faded blue eyes had a feverish look. He needed a shave. Especially on his throat he needed a shave. A small electric bulb lighted up the white hairs on his neck. Bristles.

The old ^{fellow} ~~chap~~ looked at me and said, slowly:

"I must beg your pardon for my appearance.

I am tired." Then: "You are the first doctor of this ship?"

I nodded. I judged him to be a Scandinavian; of some culture from the way he spoke and held himself.

He looked at me unblinking, in the eyes, for fully a minute. I looked away. The soul is sometimes like the sun. He said in his precise and labored English:

"Yes, Doctor, I would like to talk with you. I will not be for long. You are a gentleman."

"Go on," I said softly. This man's sickness was not for doctors.

"There is not much, Doctor. I am ^{very tired. I...} ~~just an old man about to die.~~" I moved towards him. He lifted a hand in a ^{weary} ~~tired~~ gesture. "No, it is ^{of} ~~no~~ use. The heart - it is gone." His eyes - tired old eyes - were poignant. Then as though to vindicate his summoning me: "Just this, Doctor.... I wanted to talk to you; I wanted, perhaps, to die before a - gentleman."

We sat there quiet for a time. The old man still looked at me intently. He wanted to die all right.

"It is of the master that I speak. You see, I was his man - what you call his 'body servant'." A vague smile of memory lighted his face. "I was born in his father's village."

"Where he went I would go for his comfort and

for that no harm should come. His many business gave him many enemy. There are those who say that is why he died. But they do not know."

Again, the faint suggestion of a smile.

"I was near the night he first saw her - there at the ball in Stockholm. He told me afterwards - ~~he~~ was so fine; so tender. He love her from the first look."

There was nothing I could think to say.

"And what you call - Fates? - Ah yes.

Your fates also made it that it should be me - I - should that same night bring her together with that young faller; that prince of a young faller." The old man rocked on the ^{bunk.} bed. "No, not the master - he was not young."

He sank back onto his bunk ^{so, ~~his~~ ^{chest} garters ^{tattered his underwear.} ~~AA~~} I leaned over him and asked, gently, "Who was the master? Who was she?" There was no curiosity. Merely: The unburdening should be complete.

The old fellow looked at me. Tears came into his eyes. It was a s though I had struck him.

"You - do not know the master?"

He looked at me intently. His breathing was rasping, now, and faster than the dull throb of the engines. *Then there was only the dull throb of the engines,*

That was all.

Then
I thought, 'The first death in seven crossings,'
I wondered if I would die so well.

I searched his clothing - he had no luggage. There was nothing. I searched for a name; relative business. No matter, the purser ^{will} ~~would~~ have it. I lay him straight on his bunk. I puffed out his pillow and under there I found a piece of folded newspaper. The front page of an old Paris newspaper.

There were two photographs. The picture of a young prince who had just married ^{what they called} a commoner. They were on their honeymoon in England. They looked very happy. The other ^{The other} was the picture of a suicide - of *an odd one*; ~~strange character~~ of a man they sometimes called the Match King.

- END -

Written within the week after Krueger's death. Origins

The Matchmakers

Calm is the Night.

open →

I had just watched

A ~~man~~ ^{man} had just died in ~~the~~ ^{the} steerage. ~~the~~
A good ship's doctor ^{couldn't}
Must report to the captain. ^{I can't} tell the captain
tonight, though. ^{probably} Yes, he'd be sitting there in his
cabin, ^{probably} peering ^{probably} over his ^{bottle} brandy, waiting for me to explain
"why in hell" I'd run away and ruined his bridge game.

NO, I ^{couldn't} bear to ^{watch} see him sit there ~~drinking and~~
^{pointing and} damning ^{over his drink} satly ^{brandy} over his brandy, bemoaning the report he'd
have to make. "My record, you know Doc," he'd ^{where at me.} tell me.
^{then} I could hear him ^{I later later} saying ^{the} during his report in New York ~~office~~
after the landing: "First death in seven crossings, you
know." No, I would'nt see the captain tonight.

As I gained the upper deck I ^{saw} observed that
the sea was calm. It was late at night. The big ship
rolled ever so gently. Pulse normal. The moon, full
and high, bathed the ^{restrained} small waves in ^{to} the silvery aspect
of some ^{a and sand, swept} vast ^{and deserted} desert. I imagined myself
astride some swift and silent camel.

Too many adjectives.

Standing there by the railing I could not
but think of that ~~poor~~ silent form lying down there in
steerage. The ship was asleep. The old man was dead.

I am still ashamed at the unprofessional
annoyance I ~~had~~ displayed when ^{my assistant,} ~~Cooky,~~ ^{Pickett,} had called me
away from the Captain's ~~bit~~ bridge game. An old man sick
in steerage. Insisted on seeing the ship's head physician.

^{Cooly, good assistant,} Pickett, ^a guided me through the maze of ~~smells~~ ^{smells} odors,
huddled humanity and luggage to a ^{the door steel door of} little ~~cubby-hole~~ cabin
in steerage. ^{a cubby hole.} I dismissed Pickett and entered the cabin

without knocking.

An old man sat on the ^{berth} ~~bunk~~ in his under-
clothes. His hair was ^{faded} white and his eyes had a feverish
look. He needed a shave, ^{especially on his throat he needed a shave,} A small electric bulb lighted
~~the room~~ ^{up the white hair on his neck.} Bristles.

The old chap looked at me and said, ^{slowly;}
"I must beg your pardon for my appearance. I am tired. ^{Then,}
"You are the first doctor of this ship?"

I nodded. ^{assent.} I judged him to
be a Scandinavian of ^{some} culture from the ^{manner in which} way he spoke and
held himself.

He looked at me ^{unblinkingly,} straight in the eyes -
^{I looked away.} The soul is sometimes like the sun.
for fully a minute. ^{Then} he said in his precise and
labored English, "Yes, Doctor. ^{It is} to you ^{who} ~~are true~~ shall
^{shall} I tell."

"Go on," I said softly. This man's sickness
was not for ^{that} doctors.

"There is not much, Doctor. I am just an
old man about to die." I moved toward him. He ^{lifted a hand in} waved
me away with a tired gesture. "No - it is no use. The
heart - it is gone." ^{his eyes} The tired old eyes were poignant.
Then as though to vindicate his ^{summoning} calling me. "Just this
Doctor... I wanted to talk to ^{you, I wanted, perhaps} ~~to~~ die before ^{to} a gentleman."

We sat there quiet for a time. The old man
continued to look at me intently. He wanted to die ^{all right.}

"I ~~was~~" It is of the master that I speak.
You see, I was his man - what you call ^{his} a body servant."
^{A faint smile of memory lightened his face.}
"I was born in his ^{father's} village."

3.

and for his comfort. For that go so that
"Every ~~where~~ where he went I would ~~follow~~ that
no harm should come. His many business gave him many
enemy. There are those who say that is why he died. But
they do not know."

Again the faint suggestion of a smile.
"I was near the night he ^{first saw} met her; ← there at the ball in
Stockholm
Copenhagen. He told me afterwards. He was so fine - so
tender. He loved her from the first look."

There was nothing that I could think of to say.

"and what you call - Fates? Ah yes. *that same night*
Your Fates also made it that I should bring her
and the other ^{young} ~~faller~~ ~~not~~ together." The old man
rocked on the bed. "No, ^{it} not the master - he was not young."

Paris. That was all.

4.

The old man sank back onto his ~~bunk~~
bunk. I ~~went to him and~~ ^{leaned over him and} asked, gently,
"Who was the master? Who was she?" There was
no curiosity. Merely: The unburdening should
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He looked at me and tears came in his
eyes. It was as though I had struck him.

"You — do not know the master?"

He looked at me intently. His breathing
was rasping and faster than the dull sound
of the engines. 'The first death in seven
crossings'. I wondered if I could die so well.

I searched his clothing — he had no
luggage ^{for radiograms and} ~~Relative~~ business. I lay him
straight on his bunk. I rearranged his
pillow. Under the pillow I found a piece
of folded newspaper. The front page of an
old Paris paper.

There were two photographs. The picture
of a young prince who had just married a
commoner — on a honeymoon in England. The
other was the picture of a suicide — of a strange
character, of a man they sometimes called the
Match King.