

FELLOW TRAVELERS

by

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FELLOW TRAVELERS

Characters

MADELINE, 60s-70S, a woman travelling alone.

ALFRED, 60s-70S, a single man.

Time

Now.

Setting

The promenade deck of a cruise ship, with a row of several deck chairs.

FELLOW TRAVELERS

MADLINE sits SR reading a book in the first of several cruise ship deck chairs arranged in a straight line across the stage. She is dressed casually but her posture and precise movements imbue her simple outfit with an elegance that suggests a lifetime in the public eye.

After a moment, ALFRED enters from the opposite side. He carries a pair of binoculars and a light jacket. His slacks and shirt are clean but shapeless from decades of wear. ALFRED cocks his head, appraising MADLINE before approaching her.

ALFRED

Excuse me, is this seat taken?

ALFRED indicates the second chair SR, the one next to MADLINE, who looks up at him with mild annoyance.

MADLINE

There are many other chairs to choose from. You're welcome to one of them.

ALFRED

But the view is so much better here.

MADLINE

Are you serious?

ALFRED

(Guilelessly.)

I think so.

MADLINE

And you really believe a woman of my age will succumb to your charms with an introductory line like that?

ALFRED

But I was referring to the Exocoetidae.

MADLINE

The what?

ALFRED

Exocoetidae. Flying fish. They seem to be unusually active in these waters, and I'm looking for a seat as far aft as possible from which to view them.

ALFRED points to the second chair SR.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

This seat here. Hence my question: Is it free?

MADELINE

Technically, but as a courtesy someone with manners might respect a stranger's privacy and fish from a spot further away.

ALFRED

But the view--

MADELINE

Damn the view!

MADELINE shuts her book on one finger, swings her legs from the chair, stands up, and marches to the last chair SL, the one at the far end of the row. She sits dramatically and resumes reading. ALFRED watches the whole display with surprise. When she is seated, he sits in the second chair and begins to scan the horizon. MADELINE notes this.

MADELINE (CONT'D)

I thought you said you wanted the chair as far aft as possible.

ALFRED, interrupted, looks perplexed. MADELINE makes a shooing motion with the fingers of one hand. ALFRED moves to sit in the first chair SR. MADELINE resumes reading. ALFRED resumes scanning. Suddenly, from behind the binoculars...

ALFRED

Good Lord!

ALFRED jumps to his feet and rushes to the rail, all without removing the binoculars from his face. He hoots with glee.

MADELINE

What is it now!

ALFRED

Delphinidae! Four of them. No six. Seven. Eight. Lucky day!

ALFRED turns to MADELINE. Her look of exasperation causes his joy to chug to a stop.

ALFRED (CONT'D)
Eight of them...Dolphins...I mean...

MADELINE
(Sarcastically.)
Lucky you.

ALFRED
Yes, yes. Sailors the world over and throughout history have considered the appearance of dolphins to be a good omen.

MADELINE
I'd prefer a certain disappearance.

ALFRED
Stories abound of dolphins rescuing men who've fallen overboard.

MADELINE
Let's give it a try, shall we?

ALFRED holds out the binoculars.

ALFRED
Come. Have a look. It's not a sight you see every day. And you're on a ship, for goodness sake.

MADELINE's initial reaction is one of refusal. She hesitates, however...

ALFRED (CONT'D)
It would be a shame not to take advantage of a rare opportunity.

MADELINE carefully removes a bookmark from her pocket and marks her page. Setting the book aside she goes to ALFRED and accepts the binoculars from him. Before she raises them, however, she looks out to sea...

MADELINE
Oh! Oh my! I see them already. They're so close.

MADELINE quickly raises the binoculars.

MADELINE (CONT'D)
My God, how sleek...how graceful...I can even see their eyes...so...so...

Intelligent?
ALFRED

MADELINE lowers the binoculars and turns to ALFRED.

MADELINE
Yes. As if there was a recognizable mind in there.

ALFRED
Scientists think that many species of Cetaceans are capable of some degree of rational thought.

While MADELINE turns back and looks through the binoculars again...

ALFRED (CONT'D)
They've already concluded that dolphins have a language of sorts.

MADELINE
What, like words?

ALFRED
Not exactly. More like--

ALFRED mimics the squeaks and clicks of dolphin speak. This makes MADELINE lower the binoculars and giggle. When she regains control of herself. She pushes the binoculars into ALFRED's chest so that he's forced to juggle them briefly.

MADELINE
Your pickup lines are getting more absurd.

ALFRED
You're still suspicious of me, a humble observer of nature.

MADELINE
Yes. I'm sure.

MADELINE returns to her chair and her book. ALFRED calculates, then approaches MADELINE.

ALFRED
Tell you what. To spare us both embarrassment, I'll leave now. And in fifteen minutes I'll return with two Bloody Marys. If you're still here, we'll have a nice chat. If not, I'll get drunk watching the world pass me by. Your choice.

ALFRED exits. MADELINE mulls over his proposal. Then, with her jaw set, she apparently makes a decision. She marks her place in her book and stands. She gazes out to sea for a few moments, then walks purposefully SR down the row of chairs as if to exit. But when she reaches the first chair SR, she sits, sets her book on the deck, and settles in comfortably to wait.

Fade to black.

THE END