

'Good Paper'

by James S. Austin

"The sea, it seems calmer today."

"Huh. The wind still blows and the sails are pulled taut. We are keeping high on the waves."

"No, just seems quiet."

"And you're bothered by this?"

"Not really. I just always feel like the sea is talking to me in some capacity. But today I hear nothing."

"Maybe she has nothing to say."

"There is a reason they liken the waters to a lady, she always has something to say."

"Or could be why a woman is considered bad luck on a ship? Jealousy of the fickle sea will swallow a crew whole for bringing another woman into an already tenuous relationship."

"That would seem an unfair supposition."

"You believe that? That she chatters to you?"

"I do."

"You're not married are you?"

"Never the time."

"If you were, then even in the chatter you should hear nothing."

"That would be a shame."

"Then you could be missing the point."

"Is there ever a point?"

"A girlfriend?"

"Not that she would say. I try but she always leaves me puzzled. Never sure of what she means or intends. She never seems to have a point. Particularly a starting point."

"She doesn't wait for you?"

"Don't know. See what I mean? I can tell she is happy to see me. I don't know of any other in her life."

"What about you? No other port ladies?"

"No. I don't ever feel the inclination. I guess she fulfills something with our nightly liaisons."

"Yeah, you're not married."

"What does that mean?"

"Marriage is a contract. You might get more out of it than some but, at the end of the day, you are obligated."

"Wouldn't that mean she is too?"

"You would think my young man. No, she is like the ink and you the paper. You are bound and only able to be defined as she has allowed you."

"Doesn't it take the paper to record the union?"

"Yeah, not married. The paper is the constant but the ink comes in many forms and is only as strong as the words willing placed on the paper. She can choose what words to scribe at her discretion. You could easily remain blank for eternity."

"That's a dark thought."

"Have faith. Just as you do not hear the sea doesn't mean you are lost to her. Good paper always has a purpose."