

The Right-handed Man

Von Erzsebet

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When I first visited that place - searching for my old friend Ole - I was strongly reminded of a story I once read, 'The Undead Cafe'.

The man behind the bar was seemingly startled by me entering his établissement late on that autumn evening. Several pale men and women sat at the sparsely scattered tables, some exchanging muttered sounds, perhaps speaking to each other, but nobody seemed to consume anything. So pale they were, that I had to think of creatures of the eternal night, which crawl in caverns and clefts. It was an uncomfortable feeling, being a stranger in this cafe, late in the night, in a nearly deceased part of the city - and I would have returned to my hotel, were it not for visiting Ole.

Some years ago Ole had sent me a postcard, shortly describing the circumstances of his last disappearance and inviting me to his newly opened cafe. I was unemployed at that time, so I only wrote back that I would visit him as soon as I could afford to travel. And now I stood in his all-night-cafe - at least that was what I thought - looking for his striking appearance. But the man behind the bar - scarcely more healthy than his guests - was not an ash-blond, seven feet high 'Viking', but a rather small, black-haired man of obvious Italian descent. So I asked him to call the owner of the cafe, since I was an old friend from Europe.

The man scrutinized me for a while. "Are you looking for Kyle Montana?"

I opened my mouth, but shut it again. Ole had written me nearly five years ago, so it was not really surprising that he was no longer here. Perhaps he did not live in this city any more. I sat down at the bar, ordered a drink, and thought about staying for a while, to study the picturesque customers of this place.

When the man behind the bar gave me the drink he looked at me, shaking his head nearly imperceptibly, clearly hesitating to give pieces of information - or perhaps to try to get some from me. "I'm the only owner of this place", he began after some seconds, in a low voice. "I got it from the city council some years ago, because the former owner abandoned it. His name was Nielson or something like that. Six months after his disappearance this house was put up for auction and I was the lucky one to buy it."

"So you don't know, where Ole Nielsen is now", I said matter-of-factly. Once again I failed to catch him, but now I was late for years. And that was more true than I thought at that moment.

The owner scanned his cafe, his eyes resting for a wink longer on the table in the dim far corner. "Well, now he's in a graveyard somewhere I think, that Ole Nielsen you are searching for."

I could not help looking at that man in the far corner, too. He had a very dark skin - that moment I thought it must be the shadowy corner, which made him look so dark -, holding a glass of beer in his right hand. He was nearly bald and seemed fat to me while sitting - but was rather athletic as I could see when he left his place some seconds later. The man ignored my staring at him, sipping his beer.

"What's that man to do with Ole Nielsen?"

"Oh, well ... nothing ... he's a bit strange, the Right-handed, you know. He's the only one here who knew the former owner, I think. But he gets upset very easily - especially when someone speaks about ... Nielsen." Another look - nearly frightened - at the far corner.

I could understand that.

The 'Right-handed' left the rest of his beer, going to the lavatory.

"Hullo, my name is Rose. Who are you?"

I turned to the soft voice behind me. One of the pale women had taken a seat at the bar, next to me. "Hallo, I'm Justus. Nice to meet you. Would you like a drink?"

Pale lips smiled at me, great dark eyes gave me a hungry look. "Not now, thank you", she said.

"Bad luck again", said I, smiling at Rose.

"Oh, no! That's nothing I would call bad luck. You know, Isaak over there", and she pointed out one of the pale men with her skinny finger, "he could tell you something about bad luck. Nearly two years ago he found a withered left hand in this very cafe, cut at the wrist, and some hours later he lost a finger of his very own left hand. That was bad luck, for he is a left-hander - and an artist."

I was uninterested in Rose's silly story at that time and looked at the dim corner.

The Right-handed beat a short tattoo with eight fingers - four dark-skinned and four light-skinned -, stood up, put some coins on the table, and left the cafe.

All the time I was fascinated by his left hand, which looked so very strange. First I thought it was only because of this obvious pigmentation error, now I know it was because the thumb was on the wrong side.

When I turned back to Rose, she had gone to the table, where Isaak and another man sat. So I drank my drink, paid and left.

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The next morning I went to the newspaper's archive. Just because I had some hours to stay, as my flight was delayed, I thought of looking up the story of Ole's failure as publican of an all-night-cafe. I was sure to find something, because Ole's failures have always been noisy or dirty - or both.

I did find something, indeed. Ole's body was mutilated when they found it - about eight months after his disappearance. His left hand was severely damaged and his right hand was never found.

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