

Aboard the *Sun Princess*

David A. Myers

None of the group had ever seen a cruise ship, much less shipped out on one. She was magnificent! Eddie ‘Chief’ Parfait and his brother Ernie were anxious to board. The sisters seemed to be taking things in stride.

“Damn, bro, what’s with these girls? Look at ‘em. They look incredible. I feel like my gonads are about to bust,” Eddie said as they waited to board the ship.

“Yeah man. I haven’t wanted my wife this bad in a long time.” Ernie put an arm on his brother’s shoulder. “Hang in there, Chief. They’re having fun, and that’s a good thing. You’ll live, just go with it. Take another cold shower. The girls reward us for our patience. I guarantee you that.”

“When did they dye their hair? The black drives me insane.”

“Musta been last night after we passed out.”

The *Sun Princess* stood out magnificently among the “working” ships docked along the Mississippi near Canal Street. The *Princess* had proceeded up the Mississippi as far as she could go. While the tankers and freighters that navigated the Port of New Orleans and beyond could adjust their ballast, allowing passage under the Greater New Orleans Bridge, the *Princess* didn’t have that capability. She was capable, however, of affording an unequaled level of opulence to her passengers. The luxuries included highly acclaimed restaurants, a casino, theaters offering Las Vegas-quality shows, luxury accommodations, and a week or longer of pampered bliss. The word is that once you board the *Princess*, even time itself becomes a meaningless dimension of human reality. No one grows older while aboard the *Princess*. No one is ever late for dinner, nor does anyone ever oversleep. Hence, there is no wakeup service.

Does anyone aboard the *Princess* ever wonder what they'll do for entertainment on a given day or evening? No, they don't. They'll blow in the wind, allowing the sea breeze to send them in the general direction of the liveliest show, or the most interesting conversation, or the slot machine that is ready to hit. Upon return to port the following week, everything will seem right with the world. It will be as if God has snapped His fingers and, in the blink of an eye, the returning passenger has become tanner, more relaxed and confident, certainly more sophisticated, and has shed the need to worry about trivial things. They tend to tip better, and to converse more easily. They gladly let other motorists go first and never get angry if someone cuts them off.

"Go right ahead, my mon. There's nowhere I have to be any time soon."

Of course, the demands of civilization will eventually catch up with them. The lower temperatures will cool down the tropical passion of just a few weeks ago. Schedules will once again impose the will of superiors upon the psyche of the former traveler. Budgetary concerns will dictate not only full work days, but a desire for overtime as well. The hurricane winds inevitably blow in, necessitating immediate responses to life's uncertainties. This in turn often sets into motion the plans and preparation for the next opportunity to take to the high seas. It becomes an addiction, a calling and an essential element to the rebuilding of life, limb and spirit.

That's then and this is now. The *Princess's* home port is Miami, Florida. The excursion out of New Orleans is a special test run, "testing the waters", so to speak. It seems to be a good move for the cruise company, for in many ways New Orleans offers a seamless transition from the Caribbean ports of call. Consequently, she's often perceived as much as a Caribbean city, or even a Mediterranean one, as an American city. That designation is often more intuitive than glaring, and more sensed than consciously perceived. This is what brings people back to the Crescent City, or in some

cases, keeps them away. The “feel” of the city is different than anywhere else on the U.S. mainland. It’s not surprising that the birth of various bohemian scenes speckle the city’s historical timeline, be they of a literary, artsy, musical nature, or otherwise.

The Parfaits, and one soon to be Parfait, waited in line to process onto the ship, chatting casually. The girls were discussing the wedding and were overheard by one of the clerks. When they reached the counter for processing, the clerk showed a surprising amount of interest in the wedding arrangements.

“Are you the ones being married tomorrow?” she asked.

“Yes, we are,” Debbie answered.

“Oh, it’s an unusual choice of days.” She kept taking glances of the girls’ hair.

“We have four weddings scheduled for this trip and the other three decided to wait until the return leg across international water,” she continued. “I can understand. Tomorrow is a Friday and it’s the thirteenth day. Forgive me, but I’m Haitian and in our culture that day has special significance.”

“It’s significant for us, too,” Debbie said.

“Oh?” the clerk replied. She couldn’t seem to take her eyes off of Chief. He winked and the girl became somewhat disturbed.

She handed the travelers their paperwork and said nothing more. There were several other staffers behind the counter that heard parts of the conversation and were curious about the Friday wedding too. They also had the look of islanders.

“She said the thirteenth was significant to her,” the Haitian girl passed on to the others.

“Is it a voodoo wedding?” one asked, wide eyed.

“I presume so. Did you see the groom? His appearance and demeanor would seem to be precisely what the she-spirit

would choose. He winked at me! I hope Elzuli didn't notice," she replied in a whisper.

The news spread through the ship's crew, which was made up largely of personnel from the islands. A voodoo wedding was considered to be the worst of seafaring omens. In such a wedding, the groom not only marries his woman, but also marries an evil spirit. Subsequently, certain nights of the week will be reserved for this spirit to spend with the groom. Under this circumstance, the presence of evil spirits on this voyage was to be expected, bringing about the likelihood of disaster on the open waters. This unnerved much of the crew.

The foursome settled into their cabins and immediately assumed the demeanor and pace of Caribbean travelers. Kathy and Debbie found their way to the hair salon where they both had their black hair braided in the Jamaican style. While this made them even more lovely to behold, it also served to verify that the wedding rumors were correct. News began circulating that they were priestesses of the female spirit. This quickly evolved into the belief that at least one of the sisters was actually a spirit herself.

"Didn't you notice the complexion? I suspect one is a spirit image of the other."

"No, I have not actually seen them, just heard about them. Could you tell which of them was spirit?"

"No. There is no way for a human to distinguish. But it certainly would not be the one who is listed on the manifest as the bride."

"It was as if one could see right through both of them. And the one who is to wed – did you notice how her man acts toward her? He cannot keep from touching her, from rubbing against her. He always seems, what's the word, erogenous? He's always rubbing on her. She has him under a spell!"

"I am afraid."

The word “spell” quickly spread, as did the opinion that one of the girls was indeed a “spirit.” Eventually the rumor spread to the passengers. As unnerving as the situation was to the crew, it was intriguing to the passengers.

“What? A voodoo wedding? How cool is that?”

Of course, most of the passengers knew nothing of voodoo or evil spirits. Some thought it was part of the shipboard entertainment.

“Which theater is that gonna be in?”

Unfortunately, the situation became more serious. Several members of the crew threatened to leave the ship, including some with critical maritime certifications. The ship’s departure itself came under threat. The captain was notified.

He tracked down the foursome on the Promenade Deck where they were enjoying frozen margaritas.

“Excuse me, Mr. and Mrs. Parfait, Mr. Parfait and Miss Campo. I am Captain Salvador Piazza. I am captain of the Princess. May I have a word?”

“Certainly, Captain,” Ernie replied. “Here, sit and join us for a cocktail.”

“I’m sorry, senior. I will sit but I’m on duty. We set sail in an hour.”

“I understand. Well, thank you for joining us, Captain Piazza,” Ernie said.

“Captain, is this about the wedding? Debbie and I can’t wait,” Chief said, looking at Debbie. “Especially me.”

“I am happy for you two. It is the wedding that I would like to talk about. You see, there seems to have been some misunderstanding about the ceremony,” Captain Piazza said.

“How so, captain?” Debbie asked.

“This may sound silly to you, but my crew is suffering a bit of, uh, anxiety, over the perceived venue of your ceremony. You see, much of my staff and crew are made up of people from the various Caribbean islands. They are

excellent workers and superior seamen. However, they are also very superstitious.” He paused.

“What are you trying to say, Captain Piazza?” Ernie chimed in. The captain sighed.

“Somehow a rumor was started that your wedding ceremony will be a voodoo ceremony. To those who believe in such nonsense, it will involve the presence of evil spirits, in particular one female spirit that will share the marriage bed with the groom on an ongoing basis.”

“Like hell!” Debbie exclaimed.

“Now, that part of it is none of my business, I assure you. However, the crew considers it a bad omen to set sail with evil spirits on board.”

“Wait a minute, Captain,” Chief said. “I don’t know where this rumor started but it couldn’t be further from the truth. Debbie and I intend to have a traditional ceremony in international waters conducted by you. Now we made that clear with the travel agent who supposedly made all the arrangements.”

“Ah, I see. Yes, the arrangements are made, *senor Parfait*. We are happy to accommodate you on this wonderful occasion. I suspect this all started because of the day you chose.”

“We chose our first day at sea so we wouldn’t have to wait until the return trip to hit international waters. You see, Captain, my fiancé is a traditional woman who is withholding herself until we’re wed.”

“Eddie!”

“I understand, *senor*. No more needs to be said in that regard. However, I wonder if you would gratify me with one small favor. Will you and Miss Campo accompany me to the Lido Deck and allow me to make a ship-wide announcement as to your intentions?”

“You gotta be kiddin’,” Chief replied.

“*Senor*, my problem is that several critical members of my crew will not sail otherwise.”

“I don’t know about y’all, but I’m gettin’ hungry,” Ernie blurted. “I say we get this done, set sail, and go to dinner.”

Captain Piazza chose the Lido Deck for a reason. There was already a concentration of passengers sunning and enjoying the reggae music. Naturally, a large contingent of the ship’s crew was concentrated there as well. Captain Piazza took the microphone. His English was Italian accented, but otherwise excellent.

“Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention. Ladies and gentlemen.”

It took a few minutes, but the captain soon managed to get the crowd’s attention. He continued.

“I am captain of the Sun Princess, Salvador Piazza. Many have expressed an interest in tomorrow’s wedding ceremony between Mr. Edward Parfait and Miss Debbie Campo. Please allow me to update you on the developments.”

The crowd became very quiet, particularly the crew members.

“I am pleased to announce that the ceremony will be at noon on this deck and that all are invited. I myself will perform the ceremony. Mr. Parfait has rejected any interest in joining with the female spirit Elzuli Dantor and proclaims himself to be a loyal servant and follower of Jesus Christ!”

Cheers broke out among many in the crowd, mostly from the crew. Chief and Debbie gave a puzzled look to each other, then shrugged and went with the flow. Captain Piazza held up his hands for quiet.

“I’ve just received an updated weather wire. The tropical disturbance that has been threatening the gulf has turned. Our weather forecast is for calm seas, moderate temperatures, and good times!”

Once again he was well received and once again, he held up his hand for quiet.

“Listen,” he said and paused, waiting for complete silence. He was a master at playing the crowd.

“Listen,” he said again. “We sail in thirty minutes! Anchors away!”

The first shipboard meal was splendid. They conversed freely amongst themselves and with fellow cruisers at their table.

Chief and Debbie went back to the Riviera deck and each had another margarita. They sat inside the rail and watched south Louisiana roll by as they travelled down the river. By midnight they exited the delta and reached the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

“There’s no turning back now, honey,” Chief said. “In a few hours we’ll be waking up in international waters with a trip to the wedding chapel on our schedule. Sure you don’t want to change your mind about waiting to consummate?”

“Positive.”

Copyright © David A. Myers
All rights reserved



www.pagethirteenbooks.com