

Yellow Fever

I woke to the sound of my dog, Risk, steadily lapping my hand, timing perfectly with my cat, Silver's purring. I pushed both of them away and opened my eyes, unsurprised by the darkness that stole my sight. I yawned and stretched lazily. I got out of bed, slipping a clean shift and reluctantly worming into a dress. I kept my feet bare so I had a better view of my surroundings.

Using my senses, I walked toward the window and sighed irritably; the window was already open, letting in no cool air. I could feel the sun's merciless rays beat down on me, and I realized that I had already broken a sweat. I heard a dog barking in the distance but nothing else, adding to the grim feeling of the once busy city.

I knew that as every moment passed, some unlucky victim will have died of yellow fever. Yellow fever was a big epidemic here in Philadelphia, and a number of people had already died from it. The stench of death was so overwhelming, I wasn't even sure they buried the people any more. My mother had also been taken by the wretched fever, and it almost left us in despair. My mother had been an early death, and because of my family's reputation of being amazing artists, almost the whole city came to her funeral.

But when I came along, my mother and father settled for owning a restaurant, and became famous for their delicious pastries and meals. I also had a big reputation since I was blind, but I didn't get the unwanted sympathy that everyone first offered me.

I wandered out of my room and heard Mathew drag himself wearily out of his room, unaware of my presence. Mathew has been living with us ever since his father died of the fever. He couldn't stay with his mother because she was having the hardest time getting over the fact that her husband was dead.

Every time she looked at Mathew, she would break into tears, so we took him to live us. And somehow, we managed to fit him in a room even too small for a mouse.

I made my way down the stairs and breathed in the smell of my father baking more pastries for our invisible customers. I coughed. How long would it be until the first would come? I didn't know how long I could endure this. I had recently been a victim of the fever, but unlike my mother, I had survived. The doctor had told me to be careful in the heat and he told me that I would be weakened for awhile even after I had recovered from the fever. He had also told me that after you catch yellow fever and survive, you won't be able to catch it again.

I curtsied to my father and I could feel his smile brighten up the dim room. Father had also been lucky enough to survive yellow fever and some people had been filling in more and more at our restaurant- probably because the frost was coming closer and closer to seal its icy grip and drive Death away.

I heard footsteps coming down the stairs and assumed it was Mathew. But suddenly he doubled over; vomiting the same smell I had vomited when I was sick with the fever. I winced at the sounds of pain he made while he retched, and felt the vibrations of my father running over to Mathew and holding him up in an attempt to help the boy. I heard him take Mathew up the stairs and ran after them, flinching as my bare feet came in contact with the vomit. I pounded up the stairs and almost tripped over a barking Risk and hissing Silver, but I didn't slow down. I followed my father into his room as Mathew's retching ended. He fell into father's bed and very shakily buried his head in the pillow. I blinked my blank eyes up at father, fear wrapped around me like a snake coiled around its prey. Father went downstairs and got a knife and a sickening realization hit me- I knew Mathew was going to have to be bled.

When my father came back, I put my hand over my mouth to hold myself from vomiting when the sound of ripping flesh hit my ears. Father repeated this method throughout the day and fed Mathew broth. By the time night hit, we were both exhausted and sleep came to me willingly.

When morning came I heard my father's panicked cries and dashed into his room. He told me that Mathew was so white and cold, and when I felt his forehead, I knew my father was right. Tears slipped down my face as I realized that Mathew was dead. We couldn't do anything to help him anymore.

As the death cart came around we brought Mathew out and I felt frost nip my toes and I realized that the first frost had come. Another tear slipped from my unseeing eyes, the frost wasn't quick enough to save Mathew. But a flower of happiness bloomed inside of me because this was going to be the last death cart for victims of yellow fever. My flower was quickly washed away by my grief for Mathew. But it was done. Yellow fever had been defeated! And I was a survivor. Triumph overtook me as I realized that I had survived the great epidemic. It was all over.

People have been filling our restaurant now with the fever gone. President Washington himself had even come. Things were looking up for my father and me. But I still feel chills from the memories of yellow fever. It is something that will forever haunt my mind.

Bibliography

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