



Looking for Garbo

Jon James Miller

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In Jon James Miller's heartwarming noir *Looking for Garbo*, James is dying for a unique story to build a documentary around. Seth, who's dying of emphysema, lures James in with a tale centered around legendary actress Greta Garbo and her connection to Adolf Hitler. Seth's story seems too good to be true, but after a freak accident leaves both men in the same hospital ward, James manages to pull the truth out of Seth. What follows is a strangely compelling adventure rife with violence, sex, and genre tropes.

The foreword indicates that Miller drew upon historical facts and a personal connection for his text; he spoke with the real-life Seth. Expanding on the premise of Garbo's connection to the dictator with a lively cast of characters, the story alternates between Seth's romantic narration of his adventures aboard the *SS Athenia* and James's present-day drive to complete his movie and find an emotional resolution.

Seth and James shine in their roles. Seth begins as a charming scoundrel, but his realness and flaws are revealed. James is fleshed out more slowly—most of all when he begins a relationship with his nurse. Over the course of the story, James and Seth—initially tied together by their adoration of Greta Garbo—connect in surprising ways, discovering similarities from mother issues to their longing for connection; these lead to a shocking, satisfying ending.

Seth's tale could almost be considered its own novel. As he recounts his journey with Garbo, the story moves quickly—with more speed, even, than his present day narrative with James. Its elements, including multiple double agents on board the ship and repeated blows to Seth's head, are larger than life. Blending hard-boiled noir and romance into a compelling historical tale, *Looking for Garbo* is filled with heart and action.

JOHN M. MURRAY (March/April 2019)

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