

*A fanfiction inspired by the TV show *The Adventures of Sinbad*, created by Ed Naha and developed by James L. Novack. I do not claim ownership of the characters or world I am borrowing. All names found within are original for my own adaptation.

The Past Catches Up...

By Sophia Marie Sears

“No wait, Leander!” Jovian called out. Leander spun back around to see Jovian pointing at the small hand beckoning them all inside the small shuttered gate.

“This way! Hurry! Please!” the voice whispered urgently. Three tiny fingers trembled in the first rays of moonlight, the ring finger and pinky both missing. “Hurry if you don’t want her to get caught!”

The crew hesitated a second longer, then hurried inside the gateway.

A secondary door opened into a sparsely furnished room, bare of any real comforts save for a rough wooden table surrounded by three chairs. The floor was cold stone except for a threadbare rug placed in the center of the area. Two narrow archways led to other rooms, presumably the kitchen and sleeping quarters.

It was apparent from the single table setting and the pitifully meager meal that their kindly savior was alone, and had been for at least a year or more. Their heroine was in fact an old, withered woman, and one who resembled more of a desert prune than a living being.

Her small, woeful eyes were held in sockets too large for her face, the wrinkles around them adding to their size. Her once full lips had thinned bitterly with her pain and sorrow and her diminutive frame seemed dwarfed by the black, floor-length robes and matching headpiece. Grimness hardened every feature.

The crew shuffled into the woman’s house, each of them growing silent as they sensed the present mourning there. The captain and the sorcerer’s apprentice were the last to enter.

Leander touched Elora’s arm as she passed him, stopping her.

“Are you all right?” he asked gently. He wanted to extend his hand further up, maybe to cup her cheek, but they were in the presence of others.

“They didn’t hurt me,” she murmured. She shivered, stroking Ozias’ feathers on her shoulder where he perched, and Leander wondered how it would feel to have her turn to him instead.

Then he banished the thought, and all of its idiocy.

“You all shouldn’t have come here,” the crone said. “Especially you, my pretty one.”

Leander’s eyes narrowed as the crone studied Elora. “What do you mean by that? What did those men want with a member of my crew?”

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“Not just any member,” she said. The crone’s eyes intensified as they traversed up and down Elora— from her toes to her face, her gaze lingering on Elora’s red curling hair— before her shoulders sadly drooped. “A part of your crew, eh?” she repeated. “I’d wondered why any innocent woman would surround herself with such rough sailors.”

“Innocent?” Gower guffawed, and the Sicilian pirate’s wide face grinned with mirth. “Why if she’s innocent, then I’m a—”

Gower coughed as Jovian suddenly elbowed him, and Casimir also shook his head in reproof. Though the freed Moor never seemed to have much to say, he always made his opinion known alongside Leander’s navigator.

“I ask that you explain yourself, good woman.” Leander took a few steps forward and opened his hands imploringly. “I am Captain Leander, and these are my crew.” Each of them nodded to the old woman, and Jovian took a seat with the crone at the table. “As a man of my honour, and word, and as a Captain to them, I find it distressing to learn that one of my crew has been targeted for unknown reasons. You have already provided us sanctuary, and for that I am eternally in your debt and grateful, but for the safety of my comrade I must insist that you tell us everything you know.”

Leander’s legendary silver tongue took welcome effect and the old woman unbended slightly.

“I *believe* I said that I’d be asking that question,” Elora muttered under her breath.

Secretly she was glad. The last man who’d thrown the bag over her head had shaken her more than she’d realized, and she craved a moment to compose herself. She stroked Ozias’ falcon feathers instead.

“Then I will tell you this, Captain Leander,” the woman said. “It is not your red-headed crew member the monster seeks, but every red-haired girl in Galahba, and the kingdom of Essyria.”

Stunned silence followed that pronouncement.

“A monster?” Gower repeated. “Like a real monster - trapped - in - a - maze - devouring - maidens, sort of deal?”

“Nay, he’s human enough. Although his heart be black as pitch,” the crone spat disgustedly. “Nay, he only wishes to replace the supposed love of his life, the Princess of DeLancey.” Elora blanched at the name but everyone else continued listening to the crone, oblivious. “She perished in her own kingdom when she was seventeen.”

Jovian frowned. “Perished?”

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At the same time, Gower exclaimed, “A princess? That’s just perfect.”

“She is dead?” Leander asked, and his eyes never left Elora’s face as the blood drained from it.

“Aye,” the woman assured them. “That witch, Carmira,” she spat again, “and her father, Mirak, invaded the princess’ kingdom, killing the entire royal family— the fair king, his queen, and the red-haired princess along with her younger brother.”

More stunned silence.

“Carmira again,” Gower finally growled. The crew all murmured angrily and Casimir fingered the knives in his belt longingly.

The crone took this all in. “You know the devilish witch, then? I’d heard she’d tricked the princess into literally giving her the keys to her kingdom.”

“Yes, we know the sorceress,” Jovian said wearily.

“Did you also know the attack on DeLancey was aided by the dark heathen running these lands you see here?”

Elora gasped. “What?”

“Just who is this man— or monster, as you call him?” Leander asked.

“The Duke Sesseno,” the crone spat out.

Ozias screeched violently beside Elora’s ear and Elora felt her face go even whiter if possible. The grief-stricken crone turned to look at her.

“The witch traded the red-haired princess to the Duke for his soldiers. But then Carmira double-crossed him, killing the girl instead,” the woman explained. “I just think the witch was jealous, that she wanted the Duke for herself but he was lusty for a princess.”

“No... it-it can’t be,” Elora hissed.

“Elora,” Leander began. “What is—”

“How do we know we can trust a word you say?” Elora demanded the crone. “Just who are you?”

“Elora!” Leander chided. “Did I not just give my thanks to this woman? You should be thanking her too. She saved your life.”

“So we’re just supposed to blindly trust everything she says?!”

“It’s all right, young captain,” the crone said, and Leander couldn’t help bristling at the word *young*. “She needs a heavy dose of suspicion in her life right now. It will keep her alive. If only my Angelica—” she cut off, strangled.

“Angelica? Your daughter?” Leander asked softly, his eyes sympathetic.

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“How did she die?” Jovian asked. This time Gower whacked him on the side of his head.

The crone glared, then her eyes abruptly lost their fire. “I suppose you all should know.”

“I was Malone, the merchant wife to my tradesmen husband, Taorin. We had a beautiful red-haired daughter, Angelica. Last year she turned seventeen, the same age as the late red-haired princess of DeLancey, and the Duke’s men rounded her up with all of the other girls come - of - age. It’s called the Autumn Harvesting,” she ground out bitterly, “and it happens once a year. The Duke searches for a red-haired girl that closely resembles his late princess. It is this girl whom he says he will marry. All the others are... killed.. to preserve the rarity of his princess’ hair.”

“That’s insane!” Jovian exclaimed. “Barbaric!”

Gower shuffled his feet angrily. “The man is obviously twisted. Clearly not right in the head. But ma’am, couldn’t your daughter still be alive? Isn’t there some room to hope?”

The crone looked at him blankly. “That’s not possible. All the girls who fail to pass his princess— and so far, *all* have failed— have a lock of their hair trimmed from their head. This lock is sent back to the parents...”

The crew watched, horrified, as the mutilated hand revealed itself once again to reach into her robes to pull out a leather chord bound around her neck. Attached to the end of it were a few wisps of auburn-colored hair. Elora thought her legs would collapse.

“I’m sorry about your daughter, Malone,” Leander said.

“Not Malone anymore,” she disagreed. “Not a merchant’s wife, either. My husband and I tried to stop them when they came to take her away.” She rubbed her mutilated hand as she remembered the old pain. “They took my fingers, and my husband that day— my entire family, gone.”