



ILL OMENS



Captain Arnold Bonne's Journal

June 14, 1895

We disembarked from the Port of Varna this morning to fair winds and a friendly forecast, though with many dark omens that trouble my mind. On the dock as we prepared to cast off, a group of crows gathered and sat upon the dock, unmoving, making not a sound, but

just seeming to stare at our ship as we made way. Once we had gotten away from the dock, the murder rose into the air and flew ahead of our boat almost as if an escort all the way until we reached the mouth of the harbor and set out onto the open sea, at which point they raised a great croaking ruckus and turned away.

My crewman were not undisturbed, as several drew out the medallions they carry engraved with the image of Saint Erasmus and uttered prayers while crossing themselves. This, in turn, drew my attention to another ill omen: the girl, Daciana. Never have I seen skin so pale, nor hair so red. A passenger with red hair is always an ill omen, as is well known, but this girl carries with an unclean feeling as she wears only dark dresses as would be more fitting at a funeral, and her eyes have a hard, glassy mein. I have never seen her even hint at a smile, and her dour demeanor is quite unnatural for a member of her sex.

When the crows began their squawking, she did not smile, yet there came into her eyes an unholy glee, almost akin to madness. She caught me looking at her, and that look instantly vanished, replaced by her usual cold and emotionless expression. She turned and went down into the hold, which is filled with boxes of earth from her native Transylvania, a strange cargo, indeed.

I suppose to look on the bright side, whereas having an unescorted young woman on board the Demeter might normally pose a great temptation to the crew, they are all quite disturbed by her, so there is that.

I wish I could just lock her in her cabin, but I am a man of honor and will abide by custom. I have invited the young lady to dine with me at Captain's table, and she has accepted.

June 16

I slept poorly the last two nights, leaving me foggy and struggling to focus. Took a stiff glass of whiskey in the hopes it might break me from my malaise, then met Daciana for our breakfast. She says little, and my efforts to pry some details about her life back in Transylvania have proven futile. She seems quite excited about visiting England and asks

many questions, so I am able to fill the time and make the meals not too dreadful. She seems to have a bit of a mothering quality about her, which at least suggests to me she may be at least something of a woman. She takes great interest in directing what I eat at each meal. There is something feral about her.

June 20

I had arisen and relieved my First Mate, Rogers. Looking out over the rolling waves, studying the wispy clouds, I felt we were likely to enjoy more good weather, our sails full as we plowed the seas. Then, a voice cried out "The Devil" and a great commotion arose below decks. As I was minding the wheel, I couldn't run down to see what was happening, so I sent my Second Mate, Johnson, down only to have him return some time later with a slender, red-haired boy in tow. "A stowaway," I said.

Most of the crew had come up behind Johnson, and I heard someone shout, "a curse it is! Throw him overboard!" The men grumbled, and there were a few hear hears.

I mentioned earlier that a red haired passenger was an ill-omen. A red-haired stowaway, even worse. Yet, I would not have anyone murdered on my watch, and I knew I needed to put an end to this before it got out of hand.

"What's your name?" I asked the boy, whose pale cheeks turned pink with embarrassment.

He started to run off, but Johnson grabbed his arms and held them behind his back. "Answer the captain!" Johnson shouted.

Keeping my face impassive, I groaned inwardly at my ill luck. This was not a boy, but a young woman. With her arms pulled back, her shirt pulled tight against her breasts.

“Your name?” I repeated, now softening my tone having realized I was dealing with a member of the fairer sex.

The girl looked away, refusing to answer. Or, perhaps, she did not speak English.

“It’s Clancy.” One of the men shouted. “The devil’s curse has unmanned him.” The men grumbled, shouted, “Aye!”

“Toss him overboard!”

I couldn’t help but laugh. “Clancy? You think this girl is Clancy?” Sailors can be a superstitious lot, and I had heard many a mad claim come from a crew over my years, but a man turning into a girl? “Clancy is a huge wedge of a man with a great black beard,” I said, now wondering if perhaps someone had snuck some absinthe onto the ship and the men were all suffering delusions.

The girl began to weep and tremble. I could see how terrified she was. I am a bit of a fool for a woman’s tears, and I decided right then and there to put her under my protection. “Place her in the brig,” I said. Then added, “I will have Brother Garcone place protections around the cell.”

Brother Garcone nodded, touching the great cross he always wore around his neck. “We have nothing to fear,” he shouted, walking behind Johnson as he led the girl to the brig. “Lo, though I walk through the Shadow of the Valley of Death, I will fear no evil.”

As all this was happening, I spotted Daciana watching from the stern deck. As I have said, she doesn’t smile, but she did smirk as she watched, the wind tossing her mane of thick red hair around her head.

We got the men working. It was best to keep them busy even in calmer times. Vital when they were riled up. I went to see the girl along with Brother Garcone. A defrocked priest and one time missionary, he'd proven an invaluable member of my crew over the years, and never more than now. I hoped he might be known some words this poor girl would recognize.

When we entered the cell, the girl skittered to the corner furthest from us, curling into a ball like a pill bug, her eyes wide with what I could only think was terror. She had quite a pretty face, another weakness of mine. I wanted very much to protect her and make her feel safe.

“Garcone?”

He began speaking in one language, then another, then another.

The girl didn't look at us or respond, but then shocked me by suddenly blurting out, “I speak English.” She had the very voice of a song bird, though her English was salted with the odd and unschooled tones of the Irish lower class. I noted now that I had a chance to look at her more closely, she did have eyes very much like Clancy's blue eyes. Quite a coincidence I thought, along with her crude accent.

“Well, she does have a tongue, So, you needn't worry about being thrown overboard or otherwise harmed,” I assured her. “I'll make sure you get to port safely. What is your name, then? Do you have family in London?”

The girl glanced at Garcone. “May we speak alone, Captain?”

I nodded Garcone off. As soon as he was out the door, I offered the girl a friendly smile. “Your name?”

The girl crawled toward me, and once more tears poured down her smooth cheeks, her lips trembled. “Clancy,” she said in that sweet voice. “I **am** Clancy.” She pulled open her shirt then and showed me her white breasts. “I **have** been cursed,” she cried. “I **have** been unmanned.”



I froze as my eyes were drawn not only to her young breasts, but her sex which became clearly visible between her legs. For a moment, as if a flash, I saw Clancy trapped in that

shape, Clancy with that slit between his legs. The world spun. I felt faint. No. It was too wrong. Too cruel to take that from a man.

The girl lunged at me, thrusting her slender arms through the bars and seized the collar of my shirt. "It's that Transylvanian whore. She's in league with the devil."

I pushed her away and rose, stepping back outside her reach. My mind reeled. I could not believe, refused to believe this slender girl was Clancy, yet there was such conviction in her manner as I have never seen.

"Get rid of her," the girl screamed, grabbing her breasts, digging her nails into them. "Get rid of her before you end up like me!"

I left her there, but as soon as I came out of the brig there were crew members there, watching me. "What're you gonna do?" Welsh asked.

"You gotta kill her, right?" Paulson said.

"You can't believe the ravings of that poor girl," I said. "She's obviously mad."

June 21

Murmuring of mutiny creeps on every deck of my ship. The men are split. Some refuse to believe the absurd story that Clancy has become a girl. Such a claim is absurd, yet we have found that Clancy is indeed missing, and many want the Transylvanian gone. So, far, I have managed to quell the unrest, but Rogers suggests we port in Marseille and unburden ourselves of the witch and her cargo of dirt.

Yet, I am but Captain. I do not own the ship, and should I abandon my cargo in such a manner the damage to my reputation and career would be near fatal. I have asked a man I trust to stand sentry at Daciana's cabin door and escort her about the ship. I would not have murder on my watch. She is protected from my men, and if they feel protected from her. A strange turn, this, for these salty dogs to fear a mere woman.

June 22

Once more I found my sleep disturbed by unsettling dreams. I remember only fragments, as if from an opium den. Daciana appearing in my room as if from a mist. She climbing into my bed. Her teeth against my skin, and her hands upon my body. She mounted me and did make passionate movements upon my body, and as she did she whispered, "you'll make an excellent girl."

Reaching down between my legs, I found only the soft mound and wet lips of Eve's curse. I woke screaming.

Naturally, I found this dream most disturbing. I struggled to cast off the clouds of sleep, and my body ached as if I'd survived a shipwreck. My cabin boy came did not appear to help me dress. Once I managed to get myself dressed— did my clothes seem too big?— I went out to face the crew, determined to keep a strong and resolute manner in the face of their concerns only to stop in my tracks. The ship listed from side to side. The wind snapped in the sails. I grabbed a line from the sail not due to the listing but because I became so shaken. My entire crew now had red hair and the palest of skin— quite like Daciana, quite like the girl in the brig. They'd also seemed to have shed much of themselves, now with slender shapes and smooth, youthful faces.

"What the devil?" I shouted.

The red heads all turned to look at me, and I saw fear in their eyes. "He has black hair," I heard one of my crew whisper to another. "An ill omen," the crewman answered back. Their voices, like their faces, had now the higher pitched sound of youths.



“What’s going on?” I said. “Is this some prank?”

Rogers, my first mate, approached me. He now had a full head of red curls and the face of a boy. He put a dainty hand on my shoulder and leaned in close, at which point I noted he smelled of vanilla and roses. “You’re acting a bit mad,” he said. “Let’s talk in your cabin.”

I saw Daciana, perched on the stern deck as usual, the wind tossing her dress. Our eyes met. She slit hers, that sinister smirk on her lips. I knew she had to be behind this somehow, and I resolved to confront her once I had the chance, but for now I found myself eager to speak with Rogers alone.