

The Fever Dream

I run through the empty streets of morning, heading towards the docks. Around me a few vendors are beginning to set-up their wares. Behind me a man staggers after me, his voice a hoarse whisper as he tried to yell after me. One hand grabbed uselessly at the dagger embedded into his voice box, while the other weakly pointed at me before he fell. Damn shame too... I liked that dagger.

I enter the area surrounding the docks just as the sun breaks the horizon. Its early rays sparkling across the harbor. Dockhands, as in most harbors had been working all night to ready the ships for the morning tide. A quick glance around, watching the activity of the morning, tells me which ships are preparing to leave. Now I just had to pick the right one. I hate trying to answer questions. I stop and begin to lean on a nearby post, just observing the men. Occasionally flirting with the dock workers here and there. I knew most of them; we tend to frequent the same taverns.

I watch and question a few of the more trusted dock hands, with the right looks a woman can get a man to tell her anything. But the important information I need now is tricky to get without questions. But luck is with me... Course that is not always a good sign. One of the ships is preparing to leave with the tide and all her hands have stayed on deck except her Captain and shipwright. They came off the ship two days ago to see that provisions were delivered and repairs made. Rumor says that the Captain met someone in an inn, but no one can say the truth on that case.

I suppose that if I were thinking I would have been wary of such

circumstances. But as it is, I needed a way out of town as soon as I could get it and they were leaving in the hour. Sounded like a great deal at the time. So, without thinking really hard about it, I strolled up to the gangplank. The dockhands were just delivering the last of the provisions, I took a bag of something that smelled like grain and headed up the gangplank. I took the bundle into the hold and headed back up the steps to the deck. Once there I stood around and took in the ship.

It was the most beautiful ship I had ever seen. Of course I knew nothing about ships but she seemed impressive all the same. She had 5 masts, three with crows' nests, the center one taller than the others. Inside its crows nest there was a man looking down on me curiously. She had four cannons on the deck loaded with grappling hooks. Two to a side. On her prow there was an image carved that I couldn't make out from my vantage point. Behind me, there was a tall oak door, the castle rose high above my head. From where I was standing I could see a strangely tattooed and pierced man at the wheel. Behind him stood a tall and attractive man. The two were talking quietly. From the tall mans bearings I guessed he was the captain and the man I needed to speak to.

I called out to the man as I began to climb the stairs to the Castle. He looked out to me disapprovingly as several men called my name from the gangplank. I waved them away and ascended to the captains' location. Several of the crew had weapons drawn and were headed towards me as I reached the captain. Nice to know they were loyal anyway. The captain turned to me, waving away his men.

"Well, you're a brave one little girl, what do you want?" The captain laughed toward me.

I stopped for a minute fighting back the sharp words that instinctually came at such a remark. Drawing a deep breath I ignored the snickers of the men and the amusement in the captains' face.

"I need passage and no questions... How much?" I stated seriously as I reached for my belt pouch.

The crew laughed uproariously. The man at the wheel chuckled and turned away from me, dismissing me as if the captain had already dispatched me. The captains' expression darkened and he raised an eyebrow.

"Lass, do we look like a cruise ship to you? Look around you girl, Do these men look used to traveling with ladies?" The captain yelled as if I had insulted his crew and ship

"Well, if any ladies try to board I will happily throw them over the side for you... and cruise ships ask questions. I know what manner of men you hold on this ship... that is why I am here... How much?" I asked still pulling out belt pouched from my clothing. The men thought this funnier than the last statement, their laughter rang through the morning air.

The captain chuckled involuntarily, amused by my brashness. His head cocked to one side as he considered me.

"We will not make a side trip for a woman... But your brave and you have amused my crew... That hasn't happen in a while. So, you tell me where you're headed and I will drop you in a port and set you up with someone I think can help you. That I will do for free..."

"I am going wherever you are Captain and I need to leave with the

morning tide. So, either lets get sailing and you'll take my money for a full passage, or I'll have to stow away on another ship. That will be a lot messier for me and I don't know enough to sail the ship alone should I get caught and have to slaughter the crew... How much!" I yelled, angry now, and tired of being patronized. Besides I was sure I could hear the city watch coming down the dock.

The crew laughed even harder and this time the wheel man joined them. The captain smiled wryly and held up his hands..."Truly you are a fierce warrior and a great negotiator. But I do not tolerate women on my ship for long periods of time... I am sorry lass. I will take you out of town and to the next port... But unless you can give me a better reason then money to risk having a woman on board, you're out of luck there."

I sighed... I hated this part. It always got so weird. I looked at the captain, anger flashing in my eyes. Taking a deep breath, I raised my shirt showing just the captain and the wheel man the tattoo of an hour glass on my stomach and the other of a vine with black thorns wrapping around my wrist. The wheel man inhaled sharply as the Captain whistled.

"Why didn't you just say so milady?" Turning to the crew he yelled so loudly and suddenly, that it startled the men and me. His command being thrown in his voice. "Well, what are you waiting for? Set sail you curs or I'll let the lady flay you where you stand.... Connor..." He waved to a young man who jumped and ran to his side with the devotion of a favorite pet.

"Yes, c-c-cap'n?" the young man stuttered in anticipation. The captain smiled as he laid a hand on the mans shoulder. Turning him toward me he paused.

“This is Lady Widow; you will be her personal Valet while she is with us and see that she gets what she needs... Understood... and Connor... be careful, she is not as nice as she looks.” He chuckled as he introduced us. Connor darkened and went rigid at the mention of my name but he answered...

“Aye, cap’n.” the child look suddenly dark and serious.

“Good, go and clean her a room below deck and pass the word that it is not to be entered AT ALL!” He patted the child on the back and sent him on his way. I began to count out money and looked at him expectantly.

“Put away your money lass. Your reputation precedes you and when people see you on board it will improve the reputation of this ship. That means more work and better loot. We’re even.”

“I don’t think so captain. I will not be making any appearances; I am trying to be hidden and such. So, How much do you want?”

“Alright, the stories are wrong about you lass... But if you insist on payen me, I will not be the foolish man to cross you today, five hundred gold will get you wherever I am going and buy your privacy besides.”

“Fair price then... and my blades have already fed today, you needn’t be worried about them. And my name is Sarrin. There is no Lady in front of it and I am not some whiny noblewoman who can’t tie her own bootstraps. I’ll do my fair share of work on this ship, and my blades will not be fed amongst your crew unless they truly deserve it. Agreed?”

“Of course Lass... But I have to say, I thought you’d be older... I have been hear’n the stories of the widow my whole life but you can’t be more than 18. Want to have break yer fast with me and talk about it?” His accent thickening as the wind suddenly picked up and I could feel us get underway. The breeze filled our sails and moved us quickly out of the harbor; I smiled at the captain as I followed him into his cabin. Just before the door shut I had time to think that there had been no wind a moment ago...

As lunch was being served and he worked hard to prove himself the proper pirate, flirting and gesturing and getting no where. We were finally alone and the captain grew serious once more. He looked at me curiously and sat back in his chair.

“So lass, tell my yer story. I likes a good story.”

“I have no story to tell Cap’n... My story is better shown if you think you can handle it.” I said smiling; I stood and stepped back from the table. The captain sat a little straighter a knowing smile played across his face. I gave him a quizzical glance and he nodded in return.

Drawing a deep breath, I stood me calmly and released my tension. A wind blew quietly through the cabin; on it was the scent of strange flowers. I cast my form like an old coat, from a young woman with brown hair, green eyes and a very human look, came a very tall slim creature with long black hair, silver streaks at the temples. My eyes, slanted slightly, were the purple of a deep sunset. My features were long and thin. Only my clothing remained the same . . . well, and the tattoo's.

"I am currently 205 years old. I have been the Black Widow for about 100 years. She is a useful disguise and when I am older I may lose her and settle down but for now she suits my needs. Any other Questions cap'n?"

The captain had jumped back and drawn his sword just after my transformation. Now he stood there, trembling slightly, sword useless in his hand. But to his credit the wooden stake in the other hand drawn and ready. His eyes watched me suspiciously, watching for signs of a more dangerous nature to show through. For a few moments we sat there... watching each other closely. His stake poised and ready to strike the instant I showed my self to be anything other than what I had showed him. I waited for him to take it all in. It was something I was used to.

I used time to think about what I had done. I was shocked with myself. I never revealed these things to men with out years of trust built up. Why had I done so now without hardly knowing the man? I was not sure; there was something about the man that inspired loyalty and trust. I knew he was safe.

Suddenly I roused out of my own thoughts by his movement. At last he sighed and put down his weapons. He stood gracefully and bowed as deeply as any man at court might have. As he stood he showed me his own tattoo. An oak leaf embedded in the multitude of other tattoos. Hidden unless you know what to look for. He was of magical descent himself. Possibly Druid, or some other such family line. He had been raised with the stories of Elves and magic and the loss of it all.

"Ancient One, We are honored to have you aboard our ship. We thought your kind long gone to us. How is it you didn't cross the mists of

time with your brethren?"

"A few of us didn't cross. Some felt their place was here amongst the humans we had grown to love. Some of us just got trapped here when the mists fell. Others still. . . Well, reasons are unimportant. We all accept that we are human now. Or might as well be and will be in our next life." I handed him a mug of ale. Resuming my disguise and sitting across from him, I looked at him with an eyebrow cocked loosely.

"So I can assume my secret is safe here correct?" I asked as I began to drink.

"Of course Wise one... I "I quickly gestured to stop him. "That will be quite enough of that. . . I didn't deserve it before the mists fell. I certainly don't deserve it now. I chose to stay here, whatever my reasons, I expect to be treated as you would any other human woman." I finished mine with one long drink. Slammed the mug onto the table and leaned back.

"Tarnyn, right?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Yes milady, at your service. But I should warn you that I have been told I do not treat women very well." He laughed, visibly relaxing.

"Milady, may I ask you a question? Just one last inquiry before you resumes your human existence?"

"If you must. What is it Captain?" I asked irritated.

"What is your elven name Milady?" He asked.

"Sa'arrynn Karmana of house Karmana, elven bane to the Sapphire Throne" I replied formally, my disguise glowing with elven magic, giving

the human skin a sickly death pallor and my hair looking green in it's glow.

Without meaning to Tarnyn giggled at my appearance, forcing me to laugh out loud. As we passed the mead around another time, we both laughed and drank till the sun set. By the time I tried to make my way to my own cabin, the sun had set and the night sky loomed over the ship, the moon shown large over the open sea. It was a beautiful night and I stayed on deck for hours listening to the stories of the men.

That 500 gold was the best I ever spent. It bought me five years with that crew. I sailed every harbor they entered and just couldn't find one where I was more comfortable then on the ship. I don't remember exactly when I quit looking, but I knew that the Fever dream was my home. Besides the lake it is the one place I felt at home in this world. My days on the Fever Dream often play through the fires of my memory.