



Rogue Sketches

A Challenge for Omnes

(A Prologue)

by Peter Damian Muhich

My father had been a second son of House Kreal. He abandoned his familial duties, however, for the life of an actor and soon became highly regarded for his portrayals of warrior women and maidens in the traditional theater of the Illuminated Peaks.

It was after one such performance that he met my mother, the only child of the grandmaster of one of the region's most powerful shadow clans (though he didn't know it then), she effortlessly finding her way past the backstage guards. He was entranced by the poise and grace of the mysteriously profound beauty; she, with the exotic artist's charms and preternatural allure.

Perhaps not surprisingly, news of their romance was ill-received by both their families. His people had all but given up on him and learning he was betrothed to an apparent commoner was the final straw; hers feared the threat to their ancient, endangered lineage, especially in the midst of desperate matchmaking remedies. They were secretly married and, when my mother became pregnant, chose to leave the area before the already hostile situation broke into violence, overt or otherwise. My first journey ended with the newlyweds being sheltered by distant cousins, their only relations who would do so.

My childhood with these good, unassuming people, I remember as a golden time. They cared nothing about rumored improprieties, whether imagined or real, involving my parents or me. I grew especially close to their elder child, Ionna; she, more older sister to me than cousin. Too soon, however, word came that my mother's family had found us. Rather than subject our benefactors to their immoderate attentions, we decided to travel on.

Eventually, we settled and managed to remake our lives. The years were uneventful, except for my parents beginning to teach me the more practical aspects of their arts. They called the lessons *my challenges*. These sometimes had me secretly researching and taking on the roles of ordinary men or women in the town. This had to be done so that no one, not even an acquaintance, would see through the artifice; and later, I needed to impersonate particular individuals, not just plausible examples of a type. In many ways, my father was the more helpful with this, his craft giving him a sophisticated eye for such details; his art, subtle ways of





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conjuring them. I found these assignments so diverting, I was reluctant often to put them aside.

While in my adolescence, my father took suddenly and terminally ill. In her darker moments, my mother sometimes blamed her father for some far-reaching, yet undefined, final plot, but her skills had long been more than a match for my grandfather's declining abilities. In spite of their recent history—or perhaps because of it—my father's people wished to have their son interned in the family crypt. My mother escorted his body to House Kreal.

When there, she'd attracted the unwanted interest of one of my father's elder brothers. We nevertheless settled back into our everyday routines—or at least we attempted to. Our livelihood, while always modest, became increasingly unpredictable. After struggling thus for some few seasons, my mother reconsidered my uncle's perennial suit, my protests overruled. I found ways to be absent during his visits: training in the wilderness, travelling with players, perfecting my challenges. In addition, with our distance from Krea'al, they would usually meet at some midway point.

My mother claimed he reminded her of my father, and their relationship developed with the pragmatic speed of maturity. I was nevertheless surprised when they were wed, my uncle disowned as my father was. Unlike him, however, he had financial resources of his own. A wagon was sent to carry me to my uncle's tower, the servant insinuating how much his master would enjoy finally seeing me. The gloomy pile was worse than I'd imagined; the meeting with my uncle, worse still. He was nothing like my father: Inebriate and wheezing, he was unable to look directly at or away from me.

I fled from the hall and almost ran into the skulking servant. I shadowed him until he seemed to vanish behind a tapestry. Later, I entered the secret, locked chamber; curtains covered one of its interior walls. Clumsy footfalls in the hallway interrupted my exploration, and I disappeared behind a decorative screen. A door crashed open, my uncle staggering into the room. I slowed my breathing, pulse and thoughts, though it seemed unnecessary. He opened the curtains, revealing a life-size full-length portrait of my father as a young man. My uncle stood swaying before the painting as if it were a magical looking-glass.

He collapsed on the couch backed against my screen and muttered something that may have been “smelled like ripened pears”, all the while pawing himself. I knocked over the screen





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and bolted from the shrine, my mother's discipline forgotten. Crying out my father's name, he begged me to wait and stumbled to the flags.

I found my mother and hid my face in her lap. "What's wrong, Omnes?" she asked.

"Your husband . . ."

"You should call him father, is that so difficult? It would be easy for you to do and would make him so happy. Isn't it our duty to submit to him as the head of our family?"

I up and ran, shaking my head wildly, bewildered by my mother's inability to see the truth, thinking her bewitched. Later, I'd come to realize that my uncle's loveless seduction was but jealousy of her and envy of my father.

That night found me drugged, battered, and nearly defiled; my mother, uncle, and his servant dead. During the crisis my mother's senses had been returned, her maternal instincts flaring like a dying star.

Watching the flames consume the loathsome tower, I drew the salvaged gown and a glamour about me; I turned, and took again to the safety of the road.



Afterword
A Challenge for *Omnes*: Rogue Sketches

A Rogue Sketch should feature Omnes [AHM-nays] (even if the story is told by another).

A Rogue Sketch should be less than 1000 words (without the title), but it can be as short as needed.

A Rogue Sketch can be written in first or third person.

A Rogue Sketch should not need an afterward!





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A Rogue Sketch, of course, is not the only type of work that can feature Omnes.

Omnes is a mercurial vagabond trickster.

Omnes is an adept illusionist, an accomplished entertainer, and a skilled and subtle warrior.

Omnes is a competent and resourceful jack-of-all-trades.

Omnes, while not a polymath, is an autodidact and a quick study.

Omnes can fit in anywhere, but is truly comfortable nowhere.

Omnes can get along with anybody, but is close to almost nobody.

Omnes can appear as a distinguished elderly headman from the Sea of Grass or a beautiful young maiden of the North Realms.

Omnes can be virtually anyone or anything.

Though the prologue may be grim, Omnes is not especially so.

Omnes tends to be good-natured, though a bit cynical, and to take life as it comes.

Omnes accepts that most of the world wishes to be deceived, and he lets it.

Omnes understands that much of the world wishes to deceive, and then Omnes sometimes intervenes.

Omnes usually only takes advantage of those who wish to do so of others.





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Omnes's character is a bit of a mystery, sometimes even to Omnes.

Omnes has concluded that many project their desires, both dark and light, upon Omnes.

And with apologies to Raphael Sabatini: Omnes “was born with the gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad.”

Please leave Omnes in as good shape as you found the character so that other artisans can play. This does not mean that Omnes cannot suffer financial, social, or even physical reversals of fortune (he probably should), but they should be nothing that the next artisan cannot quickly rehabilitate if necessary.

Please resist placing cousin Ionna [YONE-na] in peril just to “up the stakes” lest you compromise the one place Omnes can relax, rest, be recognized and be known.

It is not necessary to completely explicate Omnes's and Ionna's relationship. It's enough that they know.



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