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## *Rogue Sketches*

### The Shorter Story

by N. Young

“Omnes . . . Omnes . . . Omnes-i-a!” came the calls, twice too many to be only a hailing from Ionna. This was warning! Someone had come and was asking after me. I grabbed the bag I was in the habit of keeping packed and stuffed into it the dress I’d been mending and made for the balcony.

Half a dozen steps and two easy jumps took me to the street and safely around the corner from my rooms at the Wheyward Inn. Ionna would explain what a runabout I was and how there was no telling where I might have gotten off to, but if the fine gentlemen wouldn’t mind the wait, she was sure I’d be back by evening to take my meal. She would ply them with drink, affording me the time I needed to make good my departure. Ionna spun a tale, as pretty as you please—it was a gift!

That hadn’t taken long, not so much as a month before they’d come, looking for someone they couldn’t quite describe. Now in trousers and a hat, I walked like a man with a destination on his mind, all focus and impatience as I surveyed the rush of the city, except all that was going through my mind was, where to now?

Ionna, in addition to being a distant cousin on my mother’s side, was my only true friend, though it had been over a season since I’d last come to Wheyside.

As always, she had immediately seen through my meticulous disguise and, without one moment’s hesitation, introduced me as a relation come to stay from a small farm after the untimely loss of a dutiful husband.

At the end of the street, near the river, I saw a tinker’s caravan hung with all manner of pots and rope. These were travellers heading for the ports in search of work. They would take my small money and not bother with too many questions as long as I kept my hands to myself and did my share at camp.

Their leader, I surmised after watching them for about ten minutes, was a wizened old man named Papa, for that was all anyone called him. He had the look of one who’d spent many long days out of doors and a crag somewhere on his amazingly browned face for every one of them. I approached him with the air of someone who was soul-wounded and apologetic, and so pathetic as to be almost easy pickings. Should they turn out to be a cutthroat bunch, I would deal with it in the miles to come.

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As it was, I had three confirmed cutthroats not twenty yards away, who had managed to follow me through one city and now two towns: bravos in the employ of a very respected and powerful house, where now resided a broken-hearted brother and sister from whom I'd reluctantly accepted tokens of affection pilfered from the family trove. I hadn't solicited attention from either of the twins or so much as suggested the gifts, but these were a grown man and woman who behaved and were indulged as the spoiled girl and boy of yesteryear. Each in turn had wanted me, and expected nothing but my gratitude and to be granted their whims as they were in every other matter. It had not been clear that I was playing to each until such time as the two heirlooms had gone missing. At that point, I took my leave, and for my kind heart and generous nature, had been rewarded by a trio of louts who had intentions on my well-being and designs upon my rings. None are so tedious as those who find themselves fascinating—I earned these!

I said to the old tinker, "Sir, I come to you a man in need of aid. I see you are travelling and am told that you may be headed for the ports. Would you consider, of course for a reasonable fee, letting me journey along with you?"

"Who said we was heading for the ports?" answered he.

"Why, the man in the tailor's, sir, though he did not seem an over-kind or generous fellow. He mentioned that you were leaving for the ports and that he was glad to see your backs."

"Ha, ha . . . That he is! We did him out of a good bit of business this trip, but there's bigger fish to fry due south, and if you've got some money, son . . . say five silver, we could take you along and share such as we have."

"Thank you, and may your kindness be rewarded by ten." I asked if there was time for me to finish one errand.

"Be quick about it," said the codger. "Daylight's burning!"

Quick as a wink, I made my way back round to the kitchen door of the inn and asked one of Ionna's urchins to bring her to me without arousing unwanted attention. This much I'll give them, these waifs that Ionna seems bent on adding to her sister's orphaned brood make a tricky crew. In a moment she was there, head cocked, wondering, no doubt, what I was still doing anywhere near the inn she'd inherited; our hellos and goodbyes had always been informal and often-hasty affairs since that day I unknowingly wandered into the Wheyward.



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“I want you to have this,” I said, and I pressed a ring into her hand, “though you might want to keep it clear of your guests.”

“Oh, cousin, you shouldn’t have, and I mean, *you should not have!* These are some unsavory friends who are waiting on you.”

“It’s a long story, Yo.”

“Isn’t it always? Off with you now before it’s cut even shorter!”

With that I was gone.



“Omnes” and “Ionna” created by Peter Damian Muhich in [Rogue Sketches: A Challenge for Omnes \(A Prologue\)](#).

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