

Sparrow – Sandani, Year 8, VIC

“Do you think I ought to say yes, Miss Laurens?”

“We’ve been through this Hanna,” said Genya not unkindly. “Whether you go to Lord Sparrow’s ball should not be affected by what I have to say on the matter. Your decision should be yours and yours alone.” Genya paused for a moment, wanting to add that if Hanna had a single intelligent bone in her body she would say yes in a heartbeat. Who in their right mind would say no to a *lord’s* invitation? However, Genya thought it better to simply return to sharpening her daggers.

“I think,” Hanna said hesitantly, “I should say no.”

Hanna Schuyler, though very earnest and loyal, happened to have as much wits as sheep. Genya repressed a sigh from escaping her and instead settled on acting as though Hanna hadn’t made one of the worst decisions in her life. At Genya’s perceived disapproval, Hanna began to look very flustered.

“You think I made the wrong choice don’t you, Miss Laurens?” Genya remained silent. “Do say *something* Genya!”

Placing her daggers onto the small table in front of her, Genya turned around to face Hanna. “This lord has taken the time to invite you to his ball and I merely thought it impolite to refuse an invitation from someone of such *high* social status,” she said gently.

“I would hardly call Lord Sparrow a *proper* lord,” Hanna said, her contempt for the young lord obvious. “You have heard the rumours, have you not?” Genya rolled her eyes slightly. It was impossible to have not heard them.

It seemed that there was a time not too long ago when all one could hear were the various tales about the new lord of East *Ales Poeta*. Hanna’s father, Lord Schuyler, had been very displeased when all the information Genya could get for him that week was what the citizens of the city thought of the new lord. Thanks to her particular line of work, Genya was the bearer of many of the dark secrets that belonged to much of the nobility of *Ales Poeta*. She found it rather ironic, considering that the reason she was serving Hanna’s father was because of a rather nasty bit of information *he* had on *her*.

Despite her skill for finding secrets of all sorts, she knew surprisingly little about Lord Sparrow. Quite frankly, she felt this was a blow to her pride. Never before had she been at loss for knowledge on an important individual. In spite of this, she couldn’t help but be impressed.

Sure, she’d heard many merchants whispering earnestly about the lord’s dubious claim to his title and an endless supply of common folk discussing his upbringing in the crime-ridden West *Ales Poeta*. Genya found it was rather hard to trust what they had to say when they were also claiming that Sparrow also had the soul of a *dragon* and told Hanna as much.

“Well if there is one thing that seems to remain true no matter who one asks is that Lord Sparrow is cold and heartless. Some even say that he *doesn’t* have a soul,” Hanna said firmly.

"I'm afraid I have no way of confirming or denying those claims, Miss Schuyler," Genya said carefully. "Your father has given me very clear orders to not make contact with others while on my little expeditions." Silence fell as Hanna contemplated what to do with her newfound information.

"I suppose that we have no choice," Hanna said slowly. "I do believe I ought to go to Lord Sparrow's ball. How else am I to quench my burning curiosity?"

Though Genya was quite sure that Hanna's 'burning curiosity' would go out overnight, she gave a small nod. "Shall I send for a messenger to send your reply?" she asked politely.

"If you please Miss Laurens," Miss Schuyler said. "Oh, you truly are a wonderful counsel!" Genya stood up to leave without acknowledging Hanna's compliment but once she was in the doorway of Hanna's sitting room, she couldn't help but smirk. Genya had won. She was going to find a way out.

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"Lord Schuyler, I really do appreciate this kind gesture but are sure this is quite necessary?" Genya said in a flustered manner. "It doesn't seem as though someone of *my* social status should be at an event such as this."

"Nonsense Miss Laurens," Lord Schuyler replied jovially as they navigated the maze of tables and crowds of people that occupied Lord Sparrow's ballroom. "My daughter was very clear that you were to accompany us on this little endeavour."

"It's true Genya," Hanna said, helping herself to a small glass of some sort of bright red liquid. "I think it only fit that you were to be my chosen companion for the evening."

Seeing that Genya was about to protest, Hanna's father added, under his breath, that it would be an excellent way to find more information on the secretive lord. To Genya's relief, she noticed that anyone within earshot appeared to be uninterested in Lord Schuyler's remark. After two years of serving the House of Schuyler against her will, Genya knew how irritated Lord Schuyler found it whenever he knew little about someone of high social status. To his credit, Genya noticed he did a believable job at hiding it.

"How this lordling has managed to evade your investigations, I don't know," said Lord Schuyler, shaking his head. Genya gave a brief shrug. Perhaps if she was given some pay for her troubles, she might have tried harder. To Genya's dismay, however, Lord Schuyler had found it far more profitable to simply blackmail Genya into doing as he wished.

"Well papa," Hanna said, lowering her voice conspiratorially, "I heard that Lord Sparrow might not be from *Ales Poeta* at all! Rather, I heard that he's from the undercity."

"You ought to not listen to all that people say, dear," Lord Schuyler said kindly. "And the 'undercity' is still a part of West *Ales Poeta*."

"Oh, you know what I mean, papa," Hanna said. Before her father could reply, Hanna let out a shrill shriek that made the lord jump and sent Genya's hand to one of her daggers. "Oh! Is

that him papa?" A hush fell swiftly over the lords and ladies as, upon an elevated platform, a deep red curtain was pulled away with a flourish to reveal a rather striking figure.

Genya, despite knowing vaguely of his age, was still surprised to see he couldn't have been much older than she was, eighteen at most. He stood as proudly as any of the lords, if not more so, and though his demeanour was that of warmth, Genya couldn't help but notice his eyes were filled with a bone chilling cold.

Lord Sparrow had arrived.

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Once Genya had guided Hanne's limited attention to a particularly intricate statue and diverted her father's attention to a rather important looking gaggle of aristocrats, she made her way up to where the young lord had appeared from in order to acquire a better vantage point to look at the flocks of frivolous nobles.

After a brief speech wishing his guests to enjoy their time in his care, the lord had taken to roaming the ballroom to socialise with the many lords and ladies to perhaps, Genya thought, win their favour. She found it likely that that was the entire reason for the ball in the first place. Once again, she couldn't help but be impressed.

"Best not to make a habit of it," she muttered to herself, but smiled all the same. He truly would make a fabulous candidate for a new employer.

Despite her protests against Lord Schuyler's decision to let her join them, she'd *needed* him to let her come. There was one bit of information that she'd gotten on the lordling that Genya had neglected to tell Hanna and her father. The young lord in question was in the market for a spy. Someone with Genya's skill set, willing to spy on his enemies and friends to let him know which was which.

Seeing a chance to confront the young lord about this potential proposition, she swiftly moved down to meet him on his way out of the hall. She was, as usual, quick and quiet in her work and was behind him in a matter of moments. Only then did she make her presence known. He turned around, seeming to be slightly startled. They stared at each other for a moment.

"Your dress, though lined with bells, made no noise as you approached," he said, narrowing his eyes slightly.

"I hear you're in the market for a spy," Genya said tentatively. At this, the lord smiled and gave a small nod. Genya noticed that his eyes glanced over her tattoo of the Schuylers' crest she bore on her wrist. He made no comment on it.

"My name's Lukas Sparrow, and you are?"

"Genya Laurens."

"Well Miss Laurens," Lukas said, "I accept your proposition."