

With Confidence I Avenge Thee

By Carrienne Peters

To whom it may concern:

This is an account of my first assignment as a developing spy. Whoever finds this letter, ingeniously tucked into this glass bottle as per my innovative mind, shall be told a story of mystery, lies, and justice, along with my first disconcerting failure. Due to my want of time and paper, it will be cut short (especially the retelling of my failure); nevertheless, I swear to the truth of every facet of this recollection.

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She walked confidently under a cloudy sky. An older man with greying hair impeded her as she walked the busy street; her shoulders lifted, not loosely, and she unveiled a practiced, beaming smile while stepping carefully around him. Upon passing him, her smile disappeared, and she continued her walk unhindered for the length of the Atlanta City Cemetery, glancing now and again into dark alleys on the opposite side of the street.

That evening the air stung with a cold, unyielding tenacity, and the sun yearned for freedom. Hidden behind the dark clouds, it lingered in wait for the opportunity to gaze warmly over the street markets and the busy people to cast a kindly breath upon them. Alas, its wish was not granted.

In a short time, she had encompassed the entire circle of the map that was Georgia, a stranger in every town or city she passed through. She was seeking vengeance.

I would not have known this had I not been told. In fact, I knew a lot about her. At the same time, observing her, I realized I knew little. I had only ever heard stories about her (and perhaps I had exaggerated them a slight bit in my mind), but I carried an admiration for her that came close to outright reverence. Remaining a distance behind her on the opposite sidewalk, I quietly observed her and hoped to gain insight beyond my mind's perception.

She was independent, and when it came to her job she was beyond competent. She excelled in all things secret – I thought often that if I had merely a fraction of her proficiency I would leave the world a happy woman. Alas, that seemed a distant future, if a future at all.

After following her for nearly a week, I had noticed that she had a few odd quirks about her. One, that she brought her mother's pigeons with her wherever she went, in a hand-made bamboo cage. Not the prettiest or most exotic of birds, certainly. Two, she had a library (presumably, also from her mother, since what I knew of her father did not make him out to be the scholarly type). I would, on occasion, see her tossing half-finished novels into the trash, and upon later investigation I would discover them to be crime novels. Mystery. That was undoubtedly a genre she was familiar with, given her occupation.

At that moment, the city was suddenly cascaded with brightness by the eager sun, mere minutes before it would have disappeared behind the horizon to light another's world. Vaguely I noticed a shadowy figure in a passing alleyway become illuminated by the sudden light, but I paid him little mind. Sidestepping a young, shaggy looking boy running after a chicken I continued to watch my subject. She was smiling now, at a mother with about half a dozen children. Come to think of it, I'd been told she had been born into a large family in Russia. Her mother had frequently been ill and Perinetta, being the eldest, had had the burden of taking care of her younger siblings. I smiled too. Children likely reminded her of them.

To track one of our own was not my idea of honest work, especially one whom I so respected (then again, in my profession, integrity is often quickly overlooked). I had told them that. They were, to say the least, apathetic to my plight. "*As a woman, you will understand her,*" they merely countered. I wasn't so sure I would, yet here I was. My job? To follow her. To find out as much as I could about an elusive organization called *The Black Shadow*, which was in pursuit of her for a reason I had yet to uncover. All I knew thus far was that her name was Perinetta Lasqueti and she was looking for her father, a shady man with even darker intentions. My suspicions were that he was an avid member of *The Black Shadow*, and I'd been

told he may have murdered her mother. To me, that is enough of a reason to seek vengeance on the one who did it.

I did not know what the purpose of *The Black Shadow* was. I merely had suspicions. However, given its name I could not vouch for its uprightness.

I turned the street corner just as she did, still deep within my own thoughts. (Looking back, I realize this is where my mistake originated). I was not one to study. I much preferred action. That was one of the reasons I had accepted this occupation. Now, my job was simply to keep her under wraps – surveillance, if you will. “*One can never predict the actions another will take when vengeance on a family member is her key goal.*” The agency believed in avoiding close relationships on the pretext that it created weaknesses in their system. I was of a mind to agree.

As quickly as it had appeared, the sun dipped politely behind the clouds again. Only a moment thereafter, it began to rain, and I slipped quietly into the shadows, still following her from a distance. She was going someplace, and I wanted to know where.

She faded into the distance until all I could see of her was her pale silhouetted figure, blurred behind the haze of the rain. I blinked water from my eyes. The rain fell increasingly harder. The street emptied. Only a stray dog ran out in joyous pleasure at its newly found authority on the open road. I blinked once more and brushed a strand of escaping blond hair from my face; when I looked back up, my subject had disappeared.

At first I just stood there. *Stupid!* I mocked myself. My first assignment and I had proved inept by losing track of her! What only added to my guilt was the fact that she hadn’t suspected a thing! I had been assigned the easiest mission that I would ever receive, and I could not even keep track of my subject.

Incompetent fool, I derided myself again. I peered into the haze, but everything was still and empty – only the rain bothered me with its incessant companionship. I considered continuing along my path and seeing where it would lead me, but there was little chance of

finding her again tonight. With any luck I would relocate her tomorrow, and hopefully with no mistakes!

* * *

Before the sun even rose the next morning I was out of bed. Increasingly curious as to what Lasqueti had been doing after I'd lost sight of her the night before, I didn't even bother with breakfast. Instead, I headed out into the street and towards the place where I'd last seen her. Perhaps, if I was lucky, I would attain some information.

Heading out into a quiet street I felt more like a detective than a spy. Here I was, searching for clues. Now, looking back, I suppose that I had little realistic ideas of what spies did, despite my partially-completed training. (It shames me to admit it, but perhaps I was slightly naïve at the time.) Perhaps my superiors had known this and that was why I had been assigned this job. Perhaps, even, they wanted me to learn from Perinetta Lasqueti.

Walking along the street in the direction she'd been going last night, I was fortunate to come quickly across an old warehouse surrounded by trees. Certainly this was where she'd been heading. The warehouse was old, in a secluded place just outside the perimeter of the city, and therefore a perfect meeting place for a nefarious group such as *The Black Shadow*.

I walked daintily, prepared if anyone was watching and thought I was anything but a city woman out for an early morning walk. With increasing confidence I slipped silently between the barrels that surrounded the building and found a door. I studied it. *No mistakes like yesterday*, I told myself. A quick glance around me (behind, beside, and above) revealed nothing overtly suspicious.

Gently I pushed the door open. I slowly leaned down and pulled a knife from my boot, gripping it in my left hand.

The large open area I was greeted with was silent and empty of life. Barrels and boxes lay piled up on one another around the edge of the room (with what they were filled I did not know and I was only remotely curious to speculate). Dust clung to the wooden floor, to the

windows, to the air. Spiders had cast their nets high in the rafters where they were illuminated by the innocent rays of the sun. An eerie silence pounded in my brain.

I couldn't waste time. Neither could I afford to be seen, if anyone were here. Ducking swiftly behind barrels and boxes I made my way to the other end. I did not know what I would find, if anything at all. I had a thought, but it was a grotesque one, that perhaps I would find Perinetta Lasqueti here, without life.

I turned a corner and pushed a solitary barrel out of the way. (Now I was used to the sight of blood, but experience butchering chickens when I was a child was *nothing* like the scene I came to.)

A man, perhaps sixty years old, lay brutally slain on the cold floor. His unseeing eyes were wide and open with a look resembling fear. I could almost envision the scene, now, as it had occurred –

A knife plunged into the man's abdomen. His eyes widened and his mouth opened but no words came out, no help came. The dark shadows slinked into the corners of the room and cowered there with no inclination to assist; the knife twisted, was pulled out, and then forcefully thrust in again. The murderer was apathetic and cold in the act, and the man fell to the floor an innocent victim, his eyes open and staring with a wild plea that was not heard, with a hopeful gaze that was not seen. In the morning light, the shadows vanished in a scurry of blurred motion, fleeing from the scene and the one who committed the act.

I stood silently. Suddenly it was clear to me what had occurred here last night. With that in mind I looked at the warehouse in an entirely different way. I saw for the first time, in my mind, those black shadows cowering in the dust-filled corners. From the barred windows came rays of light I deemed as pieces of grace. Looking anew at the scene, I no longer thought of murder, but of justice.

The murdered man had fled, too, once. From Europe he'd fled to America and started his new life with the shadows in the corners. He had not counted on me, nor his murderer, nor his untimely death.

A few days later, I saw Perinetta Lasqueti again, at the ship yard. She was looking at me. A sudden realization hit that perhaps she had known the entire time that I had been following her. Perhaps I had never outsmarted her.

The last I saw of her was the day she boarded the ship, a few suitcases and the pigeon cage gripped confidently in her hands.

Written by Adelaide Scarlett Cohen