

The Lorelei Kiss by Marina Boccuzzi
For Beccy Younan

If William Barker thinks I'm stupid, then he has another thing coming. I thought once Katrianna was gone, things would get back to normal for Rum Point but then I realized that nothing is ever normal in that place.

Now, where are my manners? My name is Alfred James Sparks, debonair adventurer, businessman, and proprietor of the Belonna museum, the only museum around in two counties that boasted of ancient Egyptian artifacts, Sumerian texts and oddities too strange to be hidden away. I showed it all to the public because each and every piece I brought home had involved me in some strange adventure.

For instance, I was recently involved in circumstances so horrible that it resulted in the death and destruction of my good friend, the artist Jonathon Noble and the strange disappearance of his non-human wife, Katrianna who seemed to be a demon of the sea...

Wait! It would never do to tell the story at the end, but I shan't tell you the beginning because you know the beginning. Perhaps I should start where we left off?

Picture the day. Hot as anything but with a touch of clouds in the sky threatening rain from far off. It was Jonathon's funeral. There was a line of mourners walking through the dirt road from the Church to the graveyard, which was quite large and rather old. Some of our ancestors were even buried here in the late 1600s.

Yes... now where was I? Oh yes! William trudged next to me silent, more than usual. He was never one to talk too much but he seemed to fold into himself like a ghost. The graveyard was near the woods and had large iron-wrought doors with a metal fence circling the plot of land. A few old crypts peeked about along the path and some fallen headstones lay askew on the ground, some shattered and unreadable.

We reached the end of the path where Jonathon's grave was located. The pallbearers had set the coffin under the wooden scaffolding, beneath which yawned the open grave. The mourners fanned out around the hole. There were many outsiders who came to pay respects for a man whose talent and genius was cut short in the most tragic of circumstances.

Reverend Albright, who had married Jonathon and Katrianna, stood in front of the grave and gave his sermon. I can't say I paid much attention to it except to say "Praise God!" at the end.

I looked at William who stared straight ahead.

Half of the pallbearers began to remove the scaffolding while the other half were on each side of the coffin, slowly lowering it.

William strode forward and stood in front watching. I stared at his straight, rigid back.

Then, one of the pallbearers who was lowering the coffin slipped and the vessel bounced into the grave. I ran over next to William in time to see the lid come loose and Jonathon's head bouncing against the coffin, his eyes open wide!

Some of the ladies fainted while the men scurried to catch them. The pallbearers tugged and pulled to right the coffin, and Jonathon with it. I looked at William and touched his arm.

He looked at me, his eyes dead and whispered, "No one truly dies Alfred. Not you, not me. Life is never finished." His eyes clouded over and he stumbled into me. The Reverend

Albright helped stand William up. Once we succeeded, the dazed man shook his head as if to force out some reverie.

“I don’t feel so well,” he said at last.

“Well then, let’s take you home.” I gripped his arm and we shambled out of the graveyard and away from the wailing of the mourners and ladies being revived out of their frightened states.

Now, I am a believer in the soothing powers of whiskey. I gave William some of my special stock, kept in a flask that I always kept with me from the good old Prohibition days. I put William to bed and sat in a chair just beside him. I thought about what he said about never dying. William was not a staunch believer in reincarnation. Why would he say something like that? I looked over to make sure he was sleeping. And then I drifted off.

I dreamt of Katrianna and Jonathon on their wedding day. I dreamt of that house with the stained glass windows and then I was in a white room with William with his back to me. I went over to him and said his name. He slowly turned in front of me, his eyes all black and lips curled in a sneer. He cocked his head and spoke “No one dies here!” Then he grabbed at my arms.

I screamed myself awake to see William sitting up in bed staring at me with his eyes wide. The shadows under his eyes were disturbingly apparent. I looked at the clock. I could see in the candlelight that it was 4 a.m. Two more hours until the sun came up.

“How are you old boy?” I offered, trying to get up.

“Don’t get up,” William called softly and I sat gratefully back down.

“You had a nightmare.” He murmured as if shaking himself from sleep.

“I don’t normally have nightmares William,” I replied, wishing that I could drink some whiskey.

“I see,” said William thoughtfully. He looked down at his long hands for a time before he looked up at me. “Alfred?”

“Yes?”

“There’s something I remember about that night. Something Katrianna said to me before she died.” He leaned over to me. “She said no one ever dies. Don’t you find that strange?” His eyes looked sad and for the first time, I did not know what to say.

July turned into August and the heat became unbearable, as is custom in the late summer months. I would visit William every day after dinner to sit with him and talk of things in the world. The Depression was in full swing and we were both worried about the economy of Rum Point. We were an isolated fishing village where we could hold our own but some businesses had already closed down. Even my beloved museum was visited less frequently. Although it was free to see the wonders inside, people were too preoccupied with financial worries to revel in mummies and Asian swords.

Then one day, I came to call on William as usual. It was raining hard—a welcome relief from the humidity.

The door was ajar and I stepped cautiously inside. The place was a disaster. Books were overturned and papers were strewn everywhere. William was lying on the couch with an ice pack on his forehead.

“My head” he said. “I can’t sleep. It feels like someone is driving sticks into my brain.” His bloodshot eyes looked at me. I decided to contact my doctor friend who came two hours later and prescribed a sedative and for the rest of the night William slept.

William started to take naps in the afternoon as well as at night. He couldn’t explain why he was so tired all the time and the doctor said that perhaps he was mentally exhausted. I thought perhaps the strain of everything that happened to him took his toll. William told me, as he slowly recuperated, that he was looking forward to going back to teaching. He thought that it would be good to keep his mind occupied.

Summer became fall and we found out from the police about Katrianna’s non-existent family. Both William and I were invited to the station to examine Katrianna’s forged deed to the house and the original deed going to one Jeremiah Sainsbury. The Constable, who had interviewed us the night of Jonathon’s death, told us that the London police had located the Sainsbury family and they did not know who Katrianna was. I was also told that the British Sainsburys had rarely spoken to the American Sainsburys and they wanted nothing to do with that house. Now the estate would be on the market and I thought no one would ever buy it because of its reputation.

As the meeting drew to a close, I looked over at William who had also examined the forged and original deed. He shook his head at the clever fake. He had looked like he had lost weight since last I saw him. We had both been busy, him with his school and I with the unfortunate task of dealing with financial cuts and letting go of good employees because the museum had to be temporarily shut down.

“How are you feeling William?” I asked as he turned to face me. At least he looked like he had been sleeping. His dark head bowed in thought.

“I am well,” he said at last. “This whole Katrianna thing... I want to put it behind me.”
“Of course,” I said, as we walked out of the police station. I hurried after his long strides and asked him if he would like a drink at the tavern. He shook his head and replied that he had a lot of reports he had to correct. He turned and started to walk away when I called his name. He turned around to look at me, his troubled eyes peering into my own.

“Please take care of yourself,” I said.

William smiled tightly and walked away. I watched him disappear before I decided to embark for a lonely drink or two at the tavern.

I did not see him for the rest of September, and I thought perhaps it would be best to give him some time to heal and forget about the past.

I soon realized my mistake.

On October 6, I awoke at 1 a.m. to hear frantic knocking on my door. I was frightened out of my wits and grabbed my pistol from the bedside drawer. I hurried down the stairs, and opened the door a crack. I looked into William’s terrified eyes.

“What is the matter?” I asked as I opened the door wider to let William in.

“Things moving...Doors slamming...I’m having nightmares of her,” he stammered as he hurried in.

I shut the door and locked it and turned to look at the cowering figure backed up against the wall. I held my hands out to him.

“Saw the dresser move. I felt unseen hands on me. She’s back...she didn’t die. She—“

“Calm yourself.” I walked past him into the sitting room and found my flask. William took a big swig and started to cough violently. I pounded his back while I took a swig myself.

“Stay here tonight,” I said. William nodded and I walked him to one of the spare bedrooms.

William told me his wild dreams while I prepared a hot bath for him. I admit they frightened me. Tales of Katrianna rising out of the water and enveloping him like some sea witch. He told me that Jonathon would always be in his dreams too, staring at him with his eyes and mouth wide open and whispering that that he was dead. I made William get in the tub and I saw him shiver violently.

“William, I will contact the doctor in the morning,” I said as I laid towels next to the sink. He looked up at me and nodded again. The warmth of the tub seemed to help his shivering and he appeared more relaxed. When he was finally put to bed, he fell asleep almost at once. I myself could not sleep so easily and resorted to having several swigs of whiskey before dropping off in my armchair in the sitting room.

The next morning, I contacted the doctor, who came over immediately to have a look at William. When I looked in on him earlier, he had still been asleep. But when we opened the door, we found William on the floor, his body contorted and stretched out. He was panting heavily and his eyes were glassy. The doctor and I picked him up from the floor and put him to bed.

William thrashed and snarled as the doctor gave him an injection.

“Stupid!” he yelled over and over. “Stupid man, son of a whore!”

His eyes flashed on mine and opened my mouth in surprise at the venomous look he gave me. Then his eyes started to droop as the injection took its effect. He lay back on the bed and I helped the doctor throw the covers over him.

The doctor told me that he would check on him every day. William seemed to be having a fit of some kind. Perhaps with rest and no work, he could recover. I thought something different but remained quiet. My thoughts were not normal.

They filled my soul with fear.

William took a week off of school and slowly recovered from his episode. Every day I saw him and brought him dinner. Once again we would talk about current events and their effect on Rum Point. I thought to myself that he looked better and he wasn’t having any episodes. Perhaps now he could get on with his life. A couple of weeks later, I discovered how wrong I was.

On October 31, I went into town for a haircut and shave at Mr. Joden’s barbershop. The air was crisp and sweet as it always was around All Hallow’s Eve. I strode out on the porch of the store and was about to open the door when I saw William walking in my direction. I heard him whistling a strange tune.

“Hello, dear friend!” When he caught up to me and hugged me fiercely, I hugged him back but almost flinched when I looked at his eyes. They were darker than normal, and his face looked almost emaciated. His tall figure called to mind a tattered scarecrow. I noticed that people walked by and looked at him with fear.

“William, what happened?” I asked.

He looked genuinely puzzled. "Why, nothing of course. Except that Jonathon has left everything to me."

"What?!" My eyes widened.

"Jonathon had written a will, where everything went to Katrianna in event of his death. But everything went to me. The letter came to me three months late!" He almost grinned and I shuddered.

"Oh, Alfred," he continued and put a cold hand upon me. "I think I will buy his house and fix it up." His head twisted around to leer at a pretty girl keeping a wide berth when she saw him. Then he turned back, his eyes looking through me.

"What about school?" I stammered. He was too close to me.

He cocked his head on the side like a puppet with one of its strings suddenly gone slack. "What about it? Don't you worry! I only missed a week. Those boys will be given their lesson." He sniffed and tightened his lips.

"At least tell me you are happy for me!" He was breathing into my face. A horrible, musty odor.

"I'm happy for you," I stammered, trying to breathe through my mouth.

"Good. Well, I'm off!" William turned abruptly and strode away.

I stood on the porch and watched him leave until a young gypsy girl touched my arm. She was pretty with unkempt hair and sorrowful eyes. She pointed to the receding outline of William and gave me the evil eye.

"Yes," I whispered, and had an idea. "How long have you been here?" I asked her.

"Two days." Her husky voice sounded sweet.

"Take me to your camp," I said and pressed some money into her hand.

The gypsy camp was on the outskirts of Rum Point and close to the woods on the other side of the cemetery. It was a small camp with a few caravans and barking dogs. The fires abounded everywhere and a cluster of people, mostly women, looked up at me. The girl told me to wait while she went to speak to her leader.

After a few minutes, she came back and led me to the largest caravan in the camp. She motioned for me to go up, so I opened the door and went inside. There were candles lit everywhere and strange books and devices strewn on tables. I saw the leader in the back sitting on the floor with a bunch of pillows. He was smoking a pipe and staring at me.

He was old and oddly dressed in a dark red robe. His wrinkles were deeply etched into his skin and when he took a drag on the pipe, the wrinkles stretched grotesquely.

Suddenly the gypsy leader spoke.

"Why have you come to me?"

"I think maybe my friend has been possessed," I began.

The old man laughed. "Why don't you get your church to exorcise the devil?"

"I better start from the beginning." I quickly told him everything I knew and when I was finished, he sat with his eyes closed.

I thought I made a mistake and made a move to leave when he said, "Wait!"

I stopped and turned around.

The old man continued. "The sea is a strange thing. Perhaps your friend is possessed by the essence of a Sea being."

"Do you think that Katrianna was human at one time?" I suddenly asked.

"Perhaps. No one can know. If so, then the essence must have been in her a long time. What I know is they need other people's essences to stay alive and young." The old man paused and smoked his pipe.

"You say you used a mirror?" he asked after a moment.

"Yes."

"Use that mirror again." He leaned in closer. "And say these words." He took a pen and a piece of paper from a little table and wrote a few words down. He handed it me. I looked at them quickly and put it in my pocket.

"If he is infected, you must submerge him in the sea and say these words. You must suffocate him so the ghost slithers out and back into the deep. But first, find out if he has changed. Use your mirror, Mr. Sparks and proceed with care. That is all I have to say." He waved me away, eager now to be rid of me. I left without delay, happy to be in the fresh air.

The young lady that brought me to the camp walked past.

"What is your name?" I called out.

She stopped and said "Souzan," gave me a beautiful smile, and walked away. I walked back to my house feeling very strange and lonely.

I did not see William until November 10 when I was next in town. I watched him as he walked out of the lawyer's office. He looked hollow. He saw me, and walked towards me. I formed my lower face in a polite smile.

"Alfred," he said. "I have bought the house. You must come when I have finished redecorating." He brushed absently at my sleeves with his fingers and then looked up at me expectantly.

"Yes of course," I obliged.

"Good, Alfred. I haven't seen you in a long time. I thought you'd forgotten me." He blinked but said nothing more.

I just stared at him. I couldn't believe that my quiet and shy friend was acting so strange.

"Well, I better go," he murmured. "And I'm sure that you have a lot to do." He nodded at my paper bag full of alcohol and my ears burned.

“Goodbye, Alfred.” He turned around and walked slowly away.

I turned and walked the other way as fast as I could towards home.

I thought I wouldn't do anything until he had invited me. After two weeks, I started to relax but then I received an invitation to a dinner party at William's house on December 3. I decided that I was going to swallow my pride and see if William was indeed possessed by some sea thing.

On that appointed day, at 8 p.m., I was in front of William's door. I had brought the mirror, blessed by the full moon, the archaic words and my gun.

I would not be unprepared.

I knocked on the front door and William answered it in his finest black silk suit. He smiled. “Finally! I have been looking forward to this,” he said, ushering me inside. I saw that the rooms had not much changed. In fact it looked more dreary than before! There was an awful smell coming from upstairs. It smelled like... urine.

William sat me down in a leather sofa and gave me a brandy that I pretended to sip while he elaborated on the things he had updated in the house. He turned his back and I took out the mirror. I held it out in front of me and looked. He looked normal. I sighed quietly in relief. Then he turned and I saw his face in the mirror. His face was green and scaly!

“Oh, Alfred! Now look what you've done!” he opened his mouth and I saw fangs. I saw his reflection coming towards me fast. I was not prepared! He grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me hard.

“No fair Alfred! I wanted to show you what I've done. Now I'm going to have to start ALL over again. Now I'm going to have to find someone else who's an idiot!” Then something crashed over his head and he fell to the floor.

Souzan stepped back.

“I've been watching you. I knew you were in danger so I followed you. We must hurry if you want your friend back,” she said, her big eyes wide with fear.

She grabbed his arms and I his feet. We made our way out the door and down to the beach. We then submerged William in the water. He woke up and thrashed wildly.

“Say the words!” the gypsy girl shouted.

I hastily remembered them and said them out loud, haltingly at first but louder and louder until my voice was heard over the crashing waves. William's thrashes grew weaker. He was dying!

I needed to hurry.

I repeated the words and as William slowly grew weaker, a phosphorus light trailed out of his mouth and nose. It traveled rapidly out towards the ocean, a strange flash of light. Then it was gone.

We hoisted William out of the sea. As he spewed water from his lungs he threw a look at me as if to say, “What in god's name?!”

I only answered him by holding up the mirror and peering in. William looked at the mirror, understanding creeping into his face.

“Oh no.”

“It’s a long story. Do you remember anything?” I said quickly.

“Not much...bits and pieces.” William shook his head, dripping water around him. He then looked at the gypsy girl. “Who’s this?”

“That’s Souzan. Now, William, let’s get you to my house. Your house has the odor of the dead.”

We stayed up all night and talked about what happened. William was genuinely distraught over the way he acted, but was glad everything was normal once again.

As the sun came up, William stretched and let the light shine in his peaked face. He said finally, “I will keep the house.”

Then Souzan spoke.”Perhaps you should clean it first.”

I paid the gypsies a good sum of money to go through the house and the caves. The section where William had killed Katrianna glowed with ancient writing painted on the rocks. The gypsies painted over it and said their prayers throughout the caves. The process took a whole week but on the last day, the old leader came to me while I looked out at the sea and said, “The house is clean, yet it will always be sensitive. Watch what you do.”

I nodded and smiled at him and the old man smiled back.

The next day the gypsies left. I waved goodbye to Souzan who was in the last caravan that rolled down the dirt road, spewing gravel everywhere. She smiled and waved back and blew me a kiss. What a wonderful girl! I had given my address to her and she promised to stay in contact. I hoped that one day I would see her again. I turned away as the gypsies disappeared and walked to William’s new house with the stained glass windows. Perhaps it will have better memories now that the evil was cleaned out.

Epilogue

It was December and the first snowfall came and went. I was in the graveyard. I stood in front of Jonathon’s headstone and laid a bouquet of roses against it. I felt very peaceful. I heard a noise and saw William trudging towards me, a rose in his hand. His face had begun to fill out.

“Hello, Alfred.” He held out his hand and I shook it. Then we both looked at Jonathon’s grave.

“My life is changed.” William suddenly said.

I smiled. “Well then perhaps you’re ready.”

“For what?” he asked.

I pulled out three small, bound books from my coat pocket and handed them to William. He looked at me quizzically.

“I know that you’ll appreciate them. You may not be adventurous as I was but you are a curious fellow.”

“What are they about?” William said, thumbing through the books.

“They are about my dark adventuring days, William. This is not the first odd thing I’ve seen and it won’t be the last. Once you’ve seen strange, there is no going back.”

I looked at Jonathon’s grave and decided to take a walk.

“Hey, where are you going?” William called as I walked away from him.

“To meet an old friend,” I answered.

“Who?”

“Read the books,” I called, leaving him to gape after me as I reached the edge of the wood. I pulled out another bouquet of roses and smelled them deeply. It was a wonderful day and everything was fine for a while in Rum Point.