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## Benice and BarbaRossa's Story

I was excited to be one step closer to finding my father, but now I needed to solve the mystery of Levend. Why had my father taken him? What was so special about this kid? I believed that my father would never kidnap a child, and so I also knew there must be a very good reason for the current situation. I took a sip of hot tea and started to tell my parents' story. I had to earn the trust of Ayshin and Auntie Aysun; I had to convince them that my father had taken Levend for a good reason, and that he wouldn't hurt him. If I couldn't earn their trust, I would never find my father.

“BarbaRossa had a very unfortunate life,” I began. “You probably already know that he lost his one eye, one hand, and one leg when he was very young. He had a rough childhood

without parents or relatives to take care of him, and people treated him badly. They mocked him, saying that with one eye, one hand, and one leg, he had the natural talent to be a beggar. But he had dignity, he worked hard, and he overcame many difficulties. Even though he slept on the streets, he still attended school. He made a little money to survive, but he never begged. He worked whenever he could.”

“A sad childhood does not justify kidnapping my nephew,” interrupted Auntie Aysun.

“I don’t mean to make BarbaRossa’s upbringing an excuse,” I said, “but rather to show that BarbaRossa *is* a good man, so you don’t need to be as worried as you are. Take his name, for instance! I wasn’t surprised to hear he had called himself ‘Mr. Ben Ice’. That is my mother’s name, split in half. She was named ‘Benice’, you see. He probably called himself ‘Ben Ice’ to hear people say her name.”

I paused for a moment, ready for Auntie Aysun’s interruption, but she was clearly touched by BarbaRossa’s cleverness and passion.

“My mother, Benice,” I continued, “was the most beautiful girl in my hometown, Gemlyk. Everybody wanted to marry her. So many rich people: businessmen, artists, noblemen, even princes knocked on her door! I asked her how she chose BarbaRossa out of all her suitors. Her answer was just three words: ‘I loved him’. She wasn’t looking for money or fame; she

wanted to marry the person with the best heart, someone who would truly love her on the good days *and* the bad days. Since I had not met my father, she wanted to tell me everything about him. She told me stories about him every night before I went to bed.”

“Orion, excuse me for interrupting,” said Ayshin, “but how can you tell me that he’s the best father in the world if you haven’t even met him! What kind of father was he to have deserted you and your mom? He sounds more like a coward!”

“Please excuse her, Orion. She is worried about her brother,” added Auntie Aysun, “but she is right. You have some explaining to do.”

“I understand your concerns,” I replied, “but let me explain. Now, where was I?”

“You were talking about your mom,” Ayshin replied.

“Oh, yes! She especially enjoyed talking about the day she met BarbaRossa...”

On that day, she came out of an expensive restaurant with Prince Maganda. BarbaRossa and his best friend Abdi were working at the restaurant entrance. While Abdi was cleaning the windows on a ladder, BarbaRossa was wiping the floors with his good hand, and my mother noticed him. She went over and asked, “What are you doing here?”

“I am working here, ma’am,” BarbaRossa responded.

The prince didn’t want to waste his time with common

people. After all, he was a nobleman! He opened his wallet, took some money, and threw it at BarbaRossa.

“Apparently, you’re not much good at what you do,” he said. “You’ve been trying to clean this spot for the last thirty minutes and still haven’t finished. Why don’t you stop, go sit on a street corner, open a handkerchief, and do something you’re good at? You’re despicable, crawling on the floor like this.”

Abdi came down from his ladder and took a few steps toward Maganda to teach him a lesson, but Maganda’s goons easily stopped him before he got any closer.

BarbaRossa didn’t even have a wooden leg at that time. He struggled to stand up and look the prince in the eye. My mother liked to say that when those two men stared at each other, the prince had all the money he could want, but no heart, and BarbaRossa didn’t have any money, but he had dignity.

BarbaRossa told Prince Maganda, “Sir, I don’t want your money. I never accepted money from anybody. I work for a living; I work very hard, and I do the best I can. It is true I am not as fast as others, but I do my job well, and I finish what I start. I make little money, but little is enough for me. I never, ever felt the need to sell my dignity.”

After their first encounter, my mother’s heart belonged to BarbaRossa. She told me that she fell in love with my dad the moment he stood up and looked the prince in the eye. He

didn't even need to say a single word. She didn't care about his missing eye, hand, or leg. He was the one for her.

She encouraged him to get a wooden leg and learn how to use his hook to become a blacksmith, and he partnered with Abdi to open a little shop. BarbaRossa became the best blacksmith in town, making iron tools, furniture, and kitchen utensils. They got married a couple of years later, and their love grew as they faced the struggles of life together. They couldn't have a baby for a long time. My dad gave two parrots to Benice as a present, meant to entertain her while he was at work. One of the parrots was Beacon, and the other was Toy. Beacon was so talented; she could fly to faraway places and memorize many words. Benice trained Beacon to take messages and lunch to BarbaRossa while he was working at his shop. Unfortunately, Toy wasn't as talented. It took BarbaRossa a long time, but he finally taught Toy to say just four words: "Benice, I love you."

Many years later, my mother finally got pregnant and they started to prepare for a baby. They were the happiest couple in the world!

"That baby was you, right?" asked Zhen Zhen. She was enthralled by the story, and eager to help me. Of course, I would still have to win over Ayshin and Auntie Aysun.

"That's correct, Zhen Zhen. The baby they were expecting was me. Unfortunately, my parents' happiness didn't last long.

Before she gave birth, my mom got sick. Doctors told BarbaRossa that her only chance for survival was Zanzibar Elixir...”

BarbaRossa couldn't accept the death of the love of his life and his unborn child. He stepped outside, not knowing how to save his wife. He didn't even know where Zanzibar was. A few minutes later, he saw a muscular Jynx man running toward him. He was carrying one big and one small package, one under each arm. He told BarbaRossa that he was running away from a thief who had tried to steal his bags. He begged BarbaRossa to help him. He looked to the top of the hill and, indeed, someone was chasing the man. He told the man to hide behind some bushes.

A few seconds later, an angry man came running down the hill. He stopped right next to BarbaRossa, breathing heavily.

“**有没有看到刚才有个人提着两个袋子跑过去了?**” he asked.

“Calm down, please. I can't understand you. Who are you? What do you want?”

“**我是吴昊， 这个疯子偷走了我的双胞胎儿子·凡凡和颯颯,**” the man continued.

“Fan Fan? Yang Yang?” BarbaRossa asked. “What are you talking about? Speak slowly and say something I can understand.”

The man realized he wasn't being understood and did his best to reply in kind.

"I am a thief. Steal babies. I will kill him. Two bags."

The guy looked worried, but he also admitted he was a thief and ready to kill somebody. This lined up with the first man's story, and BarbaRossa decided to send the angry man in the wrong direction.

"Yes, I saw a man carrying something in his hands. He ran that way." He gestured and sent the angry man the wrong way.

After the angry man disappeared, the man with the packages came out of the bushes.

"Thank you for saving my life," he said.

"No problem."

"What are you doing out here, all by yourself?"

"I need to find a way to Zanzibar, but I don't even know where it is!"

"It's your lucky day, mister. Do you see those two ships, there?"

"What about them?"

"Those ships are going to Zanzibar, and I'm already a passenger! I know the captain well, and I'm sure he would be willing to return the favor you have done me and take you to Zanzibar with us."

BarbaRossa couldn't believe his luck. He immediately accepted the offer. He told Benice to hang on and protect their



baby, and promised that he would go to Zanzibar, find the elixir, and bring it back to her. They knew it might take a long time for his return, and that it would be unbearable to spend that much time away from each other, but what choice did he have?

BarbaRossa told her to look at the brightest constellation in the sky every night. He would do the same, wherever he was in the world. That constellation was Orion, and it's visible from any point on earth. Benice promised him that she would look for Orion every night, and in that promise, they found my name. They would be bound together by Orion, night and day.

BarbaRossa and his new friend arrived at the beach. A row-boat was waiting for them, and they got in and started to row toward the ships.

At the most unexpected time, a bird landed on BarbaRossa's shoulder and screamed, "Benice, I love you!"

He didn't even look up.

"I knew that you wouldn't leave me alone in this journey, Toy, but you were supposed to stay behind and tell my wife the only magic words you know."

Nevertheless, he was happy that he would have a companion during his quest.

TREASURE HUNT





Ayshin, Zhu Zhu and Zhen Zhen recovering Zanzibar treasure

## FRIENDSHIP MEMORIES