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Loose Canons on Deck

by [Kadorienne](#)

Summary

Josh has been flooding fandom with old paper 'zine fics, and Mina is suspected of pseuicide.

Notes

Thank you to Grey Bard, invaluable humor consultant and beta reader, and to Mina for allowing me to play with her toys.

When the new term at St. Schol's began I felt things were coming along in quite satisfactory fashion. I had gotten most of the more tedious course requirements out of the way and now could devote myself to the study of literature and history which would give my future works greater depth. In the shorter term, I could think of all sorts of fannish applications for my computer graphics class. Already I was riding rather high on the popularity of a nice angst-filled crossover I'd written, and feeling a bit chuffed. Fans were giving me more praise than was probably good for me, and rivals were skulking around in varying degrees of delicious envy. Jen, I couldn't help but notice, was in a decidedly dour mood.

It was on a Friday evening when I had logged on for some richly deserved recreation that ChristineErik messaged me. "Mina, dear, I'm asking everyone I know in fandom: do you have any old phanfics by someone named Shannon Rozzi?"

To put this in context, I think I had better explain: ChristineErik is a

Completist. Every fandom has a few of them, enabling each other in their crippling vice. She must, absolutely must, have every fanfic ever written in her fandom. For fandoms of things that began after the Internet became popular, it's not too difficult, just a matter of saving everything to your hard drive and maybe buying a few fanzines as they come out. But if the canon's been around since the Net was just a gleam in Al Gore's eye, it becomes more challenging.

Completists are the sort of people who strip-mine the dealer tables of yellowing dead-tree fanzines at cons for forgotten stories and poems in their fandoms. They scour eBay for them. If they so much as suspect that someone might have an as yet undiscovered fic, they will beg and badger them for photocopies. At the slightest rumor of an old fic, they're off, baying to their fellow hounds: "Has anyone ever heard of a fic called 'Boats Against The Current' from the 1980's by someone named Deb or Debbie?" they demand on every mailing list and forum. The collection at St. Schol's is forever awash in letters and emails from these marauders requesting copies of ancient stories - which, in exchange for copying and shipping costs, they receive.

One would find their fannish dedication inspiring if it weren't for the fics themselves. It's a depressing thing to learn about one's forebears, but more often than not they are perfectly textbook cases of badfic. Oh, there's a shining exception now and again, but as a rule, they defeat even the Pit of Voles in their infinite variety of badness. Mary Sue is only the merest beginning of it. Brief, disjointed vignettes about the characters randomly meeting unicorns or walking through a rainy deserted street at midnight musing on the depressingness of life in general are par for the course. I still wake in a cold sweat from dreams about the slash mpreg fic about the Phantom and an elf named Ra'oul.

And of course, the Completists are never content with merely *finding* these deservedly forgotten fics. Instead of allowing them to rest in peace, they hunt down their authors and beg permission to expose their youthful folly for all on the Net to see.

"I can check at the library and see if they have anything," I offered, which was I thought rather generous of me, considering that ChristineErik was neglecting more recent and far more deserving fics to exhume ghastly old relics.

"I would really appreciate that!" ChristineErik enthused. "Though I don't know if you'll find anything. I looked at the collection index on the website and you don't have any copies of the APA that published most of her work."

"Er, what precisely *is* the difference between an APA and a fanzine?" I asked, hoping I wasn't getting into one of the perennial debates of fandom, like "What's the difference between slash and yaoi?" or "Should any more songfics be written, ever?"

"They were such a wonderfully communal experience," she enthused. "To get a copy of an APA, you had to contribute to it. Even if all you could manage was a one-page scene or a short essay. The editor compiled everyone's works and then mailed copies to each person who'd contributed. That way, no one got a free ride."

I refrained from pointing out that ChristineErik was herself getting a free ride on these fics, or that this explained rather a lot about some of these stories. Besides, the phanatic was going on:

“Shannon Rozzi's stories were published in an APA called *Loose Canons on Deck*. It's very rare. If it weren't for Josh, I don't think I'd ever have found a copy!”

I truly doubted that any APA or fanzine could evade the bloodhound-like focus of a Completist on the scent. Honestly, if the FBI had that kind of crazed dedication, no evildoer would ever escape the long arm of the law. I suppose I ought to have told ChristineErik this, she would have taken it as a compliment, but I was too alarmed by the mention of a certain name calculated to strike trepidation into the stoutest of hearts. “Josh?” I asked cautiously.

“Josh Amos. He was bequeathed copies of it by an old-time fan before she died, and he has been *so* generous in copying stories from it for people!”

Perhaps I was being unkind - what more estimable activity could there be than keeping these madwomen busy and off the street? - but when one knows Josh as I did, one can't help but be a trifle suspicious of his motives. Though it was a little like the fannish conspiracy that had gotten me my scholarship to St. Schol's; if it *was* a conspiracy, how much more benign could it be?

ChristineErik flipped me a pdf of one of Shannon Rozzi's works. Since it was only two pages long, I indulged in idle curiosity and skimmed it. It was what one would expect: written on a defective old typewriter which made lots of little spots on the paper and smudged the top half of every letter *e*, full of typos, and with very little plot. The margins were decorated with rubber-stamp unicorns. She also sent me a couple of other scans of *Loose Canons on Deck* fics by other authors, and they were much the same. The various uneven typewriter fonts gave me a headache even before I got to the plots, one of which involved the Phantom of the Opera and the Phantom ghost-who-walks having Thanksgiving dinner together.

Loose Canons on Deck had evidently been a strikingly varied APA, bridging not only fandoms but genres, and including works from some highly obscure fandoms. It seemed to have something for every fan I knew, making it impossible for me to check my friendslist without being bombarded with outpourings of gratitude to Josh Amos from various Completists in different fandoms. Warr1or was the grateful recipient of several *Gallant Men* fics about male bonding. BalletChic received, and shared, a charming slash adaptation of an oldish movie called *Turning Point*. MrsSev hadn't been in Brontë fandom in years, but she was still pleased to receive a *Jane Eyre~Wuthering Heights* crossover, no matter how dreadful. There was no living with Xenalvr once she received *Nancy Drew and the Warrior Women From Venus*.

Accompanying the thanks to Josh were appeals to anyone, anywhere who might know where the long-since gafiated authors of these fossilized stories might be found. As far as I heard, neither hide nor hair of any of them were to be found anywhere.

Frankly, I thought that all this grateful adulation of Josh couldn't possibly be good for him, or lead to anything good generally. The solution seemed clear: another copy of *Loose Canons on Deck* must be found so that Josh would not be the only source of this Holy Grail of fandom. And since no other possessor of this APA had come forward, I simply would have to find one myself.

Alas, no matter what search term I tried, it handily defeated my google-fu. The only hits I got were people who had misspelled "cannons" and one priest making a pun about other priests who he didn't like. Electing to avoid the ecclesiastical wank, I instead went to the fanzine dealer sites and searched them all, coming up empty yet again.

There was only one other thing to do - what I should have done in the first place. I messaged Arc. "Have you ever seen a copy of *Loose Canons on Deck*?" If anyone knew about it, Arc would. She had been a fan back when fandom was conducted by the post.

"Until two weeks ago, I had never heard of it," she replied.

"Doesn't that seem funny to you?"

"It is a bit odd," she admitted. "But no one can keep up with everything in fandom."

I felt rather as if I had just found out that Superman wasn't really all that strong, but told myself I was being childish.

My search for the APA had to be put on hold after my mother broke several months of radio silence to inform me that I was expected at a family funeral. Apparently, an aunt of mine who I hadn't seen since I was ten had just died and nothing would do but that I drop everything and come. I wasn't especially eager to see my family, but under the circs I didn't really feel I could decline. I regretfully informed my friends that I would be bereft of internet access for an entire four days, packed a bag, and got on a plane.

The visit was mostly as tedious as anticipated, but I was able to collect some books from my old room that promised to be a pleasant stroll down memory lane. And one night I dashed off a little ficlet by hand, the first time I'd written anything by hand in years. As soon as I got back to the dorm late Sunday night I logged on, eager to catch up on everything I'd missed.

I went to my email box first and my eyes bugged out. I had expected a few dozen messages at most. Instead there were almost four hundred. Evidently something had occurred in my absence. I clicked on the top message. It turned out to be a forwarded comment from `fandom_gossip`.

I am terribly disappointed in Mina. She didn't have to do this, she was already a BNF. I would have thought she of all people would know better.

Know better than what? Seized with sudden apprehension, I clicked to go to the entry the comment was on. I got the shock of my life.

Breaking news: Mina de Malfois commits pseuicide!

Popular fanfic author Mina de Malfois has previously been featured here for

committing some minor plagiarism back when she was still a minor herself, for being plagiarized in turn by a certain profic author, and for having her socioeconomic origins and the significance thereof called into question.

Perhaps the years of the BNF grind got to be too much for her, because on Thursday this appeared on her online journal:

Hi, I'm Mina's roommate. I'm afraid I have some sad news for you all.

What followed was a heart-wrenching account of my tragic death brought about by a drunk driver. I followed the link to my journal and there it indeed was, big as life and twice as ugly.

The comments on both posts were exactly what I would have expected: outpourings of grief just as melodramatic as might be expected from the kind of highly imaginative and sensitive people who tend to inhabit fandom; snarky displays of skepticism and cries of "pseuicide!"; and links to every obituary of a young female and every car accident reported in the media within a one-hundred-mile radius of my university on that day, with very long debates about whether any of them could be the collision which had ended my life in its prime. Some of my bewildered but loyal friends, including Liz, PrinceC and Warr1or, had come up with a theory that made me seem merely silly instead of duplicitous: that I had staged my pseuicide as a joke, intending all along to reveal the truth a few days later. Not a very funny joke, but it was the only explanation they could come up with. I felt bad for them; they must feel terribly betrayed by me.

An anxious look back in my mailbox confirmed this. Besides the comments to my supposed post and the one at [fandom_gossip](#), my mailbox overflowed with sympathies to whatever relative of mine looked on my computer and with miffed accusations. I read those from my best fannish friends first, and they showed the same puzzled disappointment that I had seen in their comments. "I know you couldn't have meant any harm, but will you please tell me why you did this?" PrinceC asked. Warr1or reminded me, at length, that my position as a BNF required me to hold myself to a higher standard of behavior. I took some deep breaths before clicking on Arc's message.

Mina, please call me when you are able to. Whatever is going on, I think your actions have been precipitous, and by now you are probably realizing that. Don't let that push you into making more rash decisions. Let's talk and figure out a way to mend things.

I literally head-desked for the first time in my life. I felt guilty, ridiculous as that was, that Arc was still being a loyal friend and trying to help me when she thought I had done something that foolish.

I picked my head up and looked at the clock on the corner of my monitor display. It was much too late to call Arc. It wasn't too late to make a journal post, however, and I straightened up to do just that.

I had only typed a few words before my fingers froze on the keyboard. What was I going to say? That I hadn't made the post about my own untimely death and that someone must have hacked my account while I was out of town? That was what every person who committed pseuicide claimed when they got around to regretting it, or felt they had had enough attention. If I

said that, even though it was the simple truth, I would be laughed out of fandom.

I had to do something, though, so after what felt like an hour of false starts, I finally posted this on my journal:

Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated. There was no car accident and I am just fine. I will post more later.

That would no doubt give everyone plenty to howl about, but it was the best I could do. Maybe in the morning Arc could help me figure something out. With that in mind, I immediately wrote an email to Arc, PrinceC, Warr1or and Liz explaining the situation, swearing that I was telling the truth, and asking them what on earth I could do about it now.

I'll never know how I got to sleep. When I did, I had a jumble of unpleasant dreams about fandom holding a public stoning of me or burning me in effigy. Which was overwrought of me, I admit. BalletChic's reputation had, eventually, recovered and she was accepted in fandom, though anything she said about her personal life was still subject to skepticism. Some fen would turn against me forever, some would believe my story, many would get a great deal of amusement from the whole thing, and life would go on despite my tarnished reputation.

I slept later than usual the next morning, thanks to what a troubled night I'd had. When I did get up, I barely took the time for my morning *toilette* before logging on anxiously. As I had expected, my new post had attracted displays of outrage, relief, and snarkiness. I was cheered to find replies from all four of my special friends expressing relief, speculating on who the culprit could be, and expressing only mild doubt about my story. As for advice, Warr1or was ready to go on a crusade against the scoundrel who had blackened my name, when we learned the identity of said scoundrel. It was touching but I wasn't sure it was the best way to go. Arc counseled me to simply tell the truth, trusting that my years in fandom meant that the fen knew me well enough to recognize my sincerity.

As greatly as I esteem Arc's advice, I couldn't help but think that this plan left something to be desired. Plenty of jealous aspiring BNFs would be eager to cast aspersions on my character. This would plague me for the rest of my fandom life.

No, what I had to do was find out the identity of the "roommate" who had hacked my account and thus clear my own name.

Easier said than done. Online journals will log the IP addresses of commenters, but not of posters, so that as a means of detection was no good. Listing people in fandom who had the motive to blacken my name would make for a list too long to be useful; as I know all too well, BNFs receive a lot of envy. The culprit could even be some unknown, brand new to fandom and looking to make a name.

That left my gut feeling, and my gut said Jen. She had climbed into my room through the window before, and I keep myself permanently signed in on my computer, a habit I vowed to break on the spot. It would have been easy for her, and she's shown herself to have an overdeveloped sense of mischief in

the past. It feels like every time something goes awry I blame Jen, but honestly, most of the time I turn out to be right.

I dressed and set out to find her. She wasn't in her room, or at least there was no response to my knock. I tried the computer lab and finally found her in the cafeteria, sitting alone, absorbed in *Zombies of the Gene Pool*. I came to stand near her, folding my arms.

When she looked up at me, she smiled lazily as if she were completely at ease. With most people this would have allayed my suspicions, but Jen doesn't seem to know the meaning of the word guilt.

"Mina! So nice to see that you survived that terrible wreck."

"Did you make that post to my journal?"

Her smile widened a fraction. "Why, Mina, why would I do a thing like that?"

"You tell me."

She considered for a moment. "*If* I had done such a thing - and this is not an admission," she added, with an unbearable smirk, "but *if* I had done such a thing, it would have been for the amusement of watching the usual fandom drama unfurl exactly the same as it does every time."

"Fandom as a whole is crying for my blood. The fandom_gossip stalwarts are making popcorn as we speak. You've ruined my reputation. Congratulations, no one will ever believe me should I tell them I didn't make the post myself."

"Oh, Mina, you exaggerate. *Some* people will believe you."

Now I was sure that she had done it. "Jen, I'm asking you on your honor as a fellow fan: please go to fandom_gossip and tell them the truth about that post."

"Oh, but Mina, this is so much more fun," she said in a damnably smug fashion.

I left, trying to think up some way I could get her to come clean, or that I could publicly accuse her without sounding like I was trying to get out of a mess I had made for myself by putting the blame on someone else.

The next few days were a blur. I attended my classes, but I was too preoccupied with my own pseudoicide to concentrate properly. I couldn't amuse myself online the way I normally did because I was avoiding virtually everyone I knew. When I forced myself to check the fandom_gossip entry or the comments to my last post, I encountered wild speculation and demands that I explain myself. Not that I could blame them, but I wasn't ready to just tell the truth and hope they would trust me. Not yet.

I was supposed to be reading *The Great Gatsby* for literature class and researching a term paper for history, but since I couldn't focus on either, I decided to get my computer graphics project out of the way instead. I had already decided what the images I was going to create would look like weeks ago, so actually making them would be just the sort of rote task I needed,

something to keep me occupied without demanding too much of my little grey cells.

A couple of hours in the computer lab typing in hexadecimal color codes and clicking on assorted brushes did a surprising amount to soothe me. When the time came to start putting in headings, none of the fonts already on the computer were quite the thing, so I went to one of those free font sites in search of something more interesting.

I found something interesting, that much is true, but it wasn't a pretty font.

I wouldn't have found it except that it happened to be one of the day's featured fonts. It was intended to look like a font from an old and not terribly robust typewriter, with tiny spots scattered around the letters, some letters aligned just slightly off, and a letter "e" with a smudged top half.

This must be what "Eureka" feels like, I thought.

I was sure it was the same smudged "e" I had seen on that phanfic ChristineErik had shared with me. I immediately set forth to find every typewriter font the site had and printed out samples of all of them. Saving my work on my graphics project, I hurried back to my room with the sheaf of printouts.

Once I had printed out samples of all the *Loose Canons on Deck* fanfic pdfs that I had or that had been posted where I could download them, it didn't take long to match each of them up to the font that had been used to create them. Really, one would have thought that Jen might have learned from Dan Rather's mistakes.

With the evidence in hand, I set forth to confront Jen once again. She was in her room this time. I didn't speak when she let me in, just entered and started spreading the papers out on her desk. When I had a few of them laid out, I glanced up at her to gauge her reaction.

She didn't have one. Her expression was so blank she could have been a department store mannequin.

I have to admit, having Jen at such a disadvantage was a heady feeling. I wasn't going to be so low as to take undue advantage, however. Only due advantage.

"There never was an APA called *Loose Canons on Deck*, was there?" I asked, trying for a gentle, understanding sort of tone.

Jen met my eyes and lifted an eyebrow.

"A lot of fans are very grateful to... Josh Amos... for these fics."

She stared at me, and then, just when I thought she couldn't surprise me anymore, she *smiled*. Not a supercilious smile like the one she had worn the last time I saw her, but a real smile, one that showed in her eyes as well as the teeth she was displaying. And then she started to laugh.

I didn't see what was so funny, and it was very irritating, losing my handle

on the situation so quickly. I frowned at her, but before I could say anything she got her laughter under control enough to speak.

“Oh, Mina, Mina, Mina. How much you have learned over the years. I would never have thought you had it in you.” She bowed to me with a flourish like a musketeer in an old movie. “Well played, O respected adversary. This round to you.”

That boded well for me, but I was rather put out that she wasn't more unhappy over my checkmating her. “Well? Are you going to-”

“Whatever you wish, my dear Mina. It will be done within the hour.”

She was as good as her word. She posted both on her own journal and at [fandom_gossip](#), confessing all, and exonerating me in any part of it. She defended herself by saying that it had only been intended as a humorous social experiment and she was awfully sorry it had gotten out of hand. I was able to link to her confession on my own journal, and aside from a few naysayers who were *sure* I had been in on it all along, I was welcomed back into the bosom of fandom.

Josh Amos announced on his journal that he had now scanned the entirety of *Loose Canons on Deck* and the well had now run dry.

And I got an A on my graphics project.

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