

Manouche in Fiji

Note from Pam: I've included the "confronting Nate" posts here, because they lead up to everything else. I also wanted to mention that, though this first entry was posted to the board under my name, Kim contributed Willy's dialogue, and I never could've written properly for Nate without Kat's invaluable input and a few supplied lines. So y'might say this first post is a ménage à trios, as it were. Blimey, hope there weren't any eunuchs about ... *looks down*

OK, read on!

Confronting Nate ...

Blake: *as he and Willy approach the courthouse* Remember, we're gonna keep cool. Our girls are right. Bein' vigilantes won't solve anything. Nate's not the danger anymore, but he knows who is. Let's jus' talk to him, maybe we can get some information.

Willy: Oh it'll take me enough not to kill the bastard ... I swear I would if it wasn't for the two of them in my way.

Blake *smiles* Willy, don't mind my sayin' so, but ... you're not a murderer. Anyway, it's a compliment. Besides, we don't even know if they'll let us in. He's prob'ly under heavy guard. Portsmouth'd never let just anyone wander around in there. *sighs* Let's see what we can find out.

They enter courthouse, find their way to lockup. Peek around door, find that fortune has smiled on them – lchy's on guard, and sound asleep in a chair leaning up against the wall. They pass him easily and head for the cell block. Down the stairs, squinting in the dim light ... they approach the only occupied cell, where Nate lies on a cot, facing the wall.

Willy: Nate. NATE. Get up you disgusting mongrel.

Nate: *Stirs, mumbling, turns around, blinking* Ehh, who's here? *Slowly sits up, stretches, peers at them, eyes narrowed.* Who th' hell are you? *Leans closer, sees Willy, smiles* Well, well, I'll be damned, it's the Green Hornet! What brings you here?

Blake *Puts hand out to stop Willy, who has moved forward, fists clenched.* We wanna talk to you. We wanna know about ... about this man you're workin' for.

Nate: 'That so?

Blake *Curbing anger* Yeah, that's so. We wanna know why he wants ... what he wants.

Nate: *smirks* You mean the blood of those two strumpets? Why should I tell you? *shakes head at them* Look at you two. Sorriest-lookin' interrogators in known universe! I've seen harder ladies at a garden party. Anyway, what's it to you? *Pauses, peers at Willy, remembers.* Oh, yes, you did have some vested interest, didn't you? You and your missus, you really ought to be more selective of your friends and not waste your time with trash. *Looks at Blake* But you ... Don't tell me you and Kat *peers closer* No, you're not her type, decidedly. I know her well, I know her type. You look like you lean more toward Gypsy trash, laddie. *Laughs*

Blake *Starts toward cell. Willy tries to hold him back, he presses against bars, stretching hands for Nate, who's out of reach.* Y'better tell us, y'bastard, or ...

Nate: Or what? A threat's no good without something behind it, don't forget that. I won't tell you a blasted thing. Understand, I have nothing to lose. In here, I answer to your legal system, which most likely'll lead to my demise. Out there ... well, I failed at my job. And my, ah, shall we say, overseer is most unforgiving. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy. So you see, even a plea bargain of sorts is no incentive. I could tell what I know for a lesser sentence. But out there, my life ain't worth sod-all. It's the bloody end of the line for me, no matter what. *Pauses* I'll tell you both this: There's only one person I'll talk to freely, and that's Kat.

Willy: Why Kat? You threaten both my wife and Blake's girl but you won't talk to us? I had a gun to your head and you still won't tell me anything. *glares, grabs the bars of the cell with both hands, looks at Nate directly in the eyes* You're even dumber than you look, you bloody bastard.

Nate: *shrugs* Sticks an' stones, luv. You don't look so smart yourself, standing there demanding answers to things you can't possibly understand.

Willy: *glares, manages to lighten up, somehow hiding all his anger and not tearing Nate's head off* WHY Kat?

Nate *scowls* Never mind, that's my affair. *Nods toward office behind them* You tell those paid assassins in there to let Kat see me, and I'll talk to her. No one else, end of story. Savvy?

Blake *wearily* C'mon, Willy, let's get outta here. I can't listen to him anymore. *Turns to leave*

Nate *calls out to him* How's the Gypsy strumpet's throat healing up? Hated to do that, but she wouldn't shut the hell up, an' I'm not known for my patience. *Laughs as Blake turns and glares at him.*

Willy *grabs the bars again, screaming, reaching for Nate to strangle him* YOU BLOODY NO-GOOD BASTARD. I SHOULD'VE USED THE GUN WHEN I HAD THE CHANCE!!! YOU'LL MEET YOUR END NATE!! I PROMISE YOU!! YOU'LL NEVER SEE THE LIGHT OF DAY AGAIN!!!

Nate: *infuriatingly unruffled* Yes, you probably should've used it. But your missus, she was right about you, wasn't she. You're not a killer. Very interesting, watching you struggle with that little conflict. I was half hoping you'd prove me wrong. Would've been worth 'meeting my end,' as you put it. *snickers*

Willy: YOU'RE JUST LUCKY I LISTEN TO MY WIFE WITH THE UTMOST RESPECT YOU SLIMEY MONGREL!! UNLIKE YOU WHO HAS TO BE EVER SO EVIL TO MY SISTER AS WELL. YOU PUT A SWORD OR ANYTHING TO HER THROAT AGAIN AND YOU'RE MINE NATE. YOU UNDERSTAND THAT? MINE!!

Blake *trying to control his anger, hand on Willy's shoulder* Take it easy, Willy, don't listen to him, he's jus' tryin' to get a rise outta you.

Nate *laughs, looks at Blake* You tell him, laddie! You've got a cool head. Very admirable. You'll need it if you're going to throw your lot in with her. Why would you choose to take that on? Do yourself a favor, find a nice girl, and hand the tramp over for the bloodlettin'. At least then she'll be useful for something. *Still talking to Blake, he motions to Willy* This one here, he can call her "sister" all he wants. Nothing will change the fact that she's thievin' Gypsy scum. Death is coming for her, even as we speak, he's searching. *laughs* And when he finds her, her end will be sheer ecstasy ... a long ... slow ... agonizing death. Satisfaction guaranteed. A most stimulating image. *draws a long breath, smiles evilly*

Blake's face turns crimson with rage; he cries out, and he and Willy leap for the cell, swearing. Nate stands back out of reach, laughs at their shouting and ineffectual stretching through the bars. Ichy appears, grabs Willy and Blake, hauls them out ... the sound of Nate's laughter a terrible racket in their ears long after Ichy tosses them out of the courthouse and slams the door.

After confrontation ...

Blake *Walking slowly, returns to Libertine Trailer after he and Willy have parted after their confrontation with Nate. Finds Manouche working hard, polishing some of the ship's brass. He approaches, says nothing, just watches her for a few minutes, trying to bury his despair over Nate's words.*

Manouche *feels eyes on her, turns and beams at him* Ahh, there y' are. Where ye been, luv? Y'know, it's cleanin' days like this when I wish I 'ad a few oompa loompas around 'ere. Sure would be helpful, wouldn't they, in gettin' things all ship-shape an' Bristol fashion. I bet y' thought that were jus' an expression. *winks, turns back to work*

Blake *comes up behind her, wraps arms around her, hugs her tightly, speaks with a slight catch in his voice* Let's go away for a few days, honey. Just the two of us.

Manouche *turns, looks at him* Funny y'should mention that, 'cause I were thinkin' th' exact same thing. That's one reason I been workin' on th' ship. I were thinkin' it would be nice to combine a little business with pleasure, savvy? *pauses, looks at him carefully* Y' all right? Where ye been?

Blake: Nowhere, just walkin'. *smiles* I'm -- I'm fine, really. But, ah ... no, I don't savvy. What business?

Manouche: Well, I been thinkin' on what's been happenin' as of late. I'm beginnin' t' think it may serve me well t' investigate me heritage a bit more than I've cared to in th' past. *remembering Nate's words, smile fades* So I thought we could take th' ship, 'ave a few days o' pleasure, an' after that ... there's somewhere I want t' go, someone I want t' talk to. Y'may have t' occupy yer time while I'm at it ... but I think it's time t' fight fire with fire, as it were. Luv, I don't even know what I'm capable of, if anythin'. It's time I find out. Past it, rather. I hate t' leave Kat on her own, considerin' we share a similar concern at this time ... but seein' as how what I'm doin' is fer our ultimate good, I reckon I'll trust that she'll be sound in me absence. Not sure how much good I could do 'er right now, anyway. *looks up at him, smiles* I -- I don't sound completely daft, do I?

Blake: You make perfect sense. *kisses her* Y'know that anywhere you need to go, I'll follow. Where are we going?

Manouche *glances around worriedly* L-let's get out t' sea before I tell ye, luv. As of late, it feels like th' very air around me has ears. Let's jus' go, we won't tell anyone. Well, I'll inform Kidd, after all, I'm 'er boatswain an' wouldn't leave her in th' lurch without explanation. An' I'll send word t' Willy an' Madame. Willy can't abide me keepin' secrets from 'im, he freaks right out. Ye haven't seen him when he's angry. Ye'd never know it's th' same person. *smiles gently* He's very loyal an' protective ... me big brother.

Blake: *nods* We're lucky to know 'em both. I -- I'm glad he's been here for you, he's a good man. *looks at her, puts a smile on* Well, Captain, what can I do to help? Sooner we can go, the better. Few days of heaven at sea, just what the doctor ordered. I've never taken a pleasure cruise before.

Manouche: Then I'll be delighted t' introduce ye to this particular joy, m' love. *They kiss, then get to work on the ship.*

Several hours later, the Libertine Trailer sails away from the harbor. Manouche watches the town as the distance broadens between ship and shoreline – Chez Roux, the Wonkas' factory, the fountain with the statue of the Mayor in it, Grape's Grocery, the courthouse. Blake comes up behind her, puts his arms around her, tears fill her eyes.* Au revoir, Deppville, me home, me dear mates. I'll be back with wings on me feet, as quick as I can.

*“A little bit of courage is all we lack ...
“So catch me if you can, I’m goin’ back” ...*

Manouche *approaches small, run-down frame house near beach. House is gray, paint chipping, seen better days. Hesitates, almost turns away. Shakes herself, squares shoulders resolutely, enters house. Walks through enclosed porch, pushes aside beaded curtain into first room, approaches woman seated at table.* ‘Afternoon, luv. I, ah, was wonderin’ if I could see Alifi. *Tips hat slightly*

Woman: Do you know who I am?

Manouche: N-no. Apologies, luv, I don’t see how I could, don’t believe I’ve had th’ pleasure ...

Woman *cuts her off* You could choose to know. *Pauses, leans forward, looks at Manouche with interest* You’ve known trouble as of late, haven’t you? Someone wants you ... wants you dead ...

Manouche *eyes wide* Aye ... that’s th’ truth.

Woman: Do you know why?

Manouche *thinks for a moment* I ... I ‘ave somethin’ he wants.

Woman: Do you wish on falling stars?

Manouche *blinks* I- I wish on stars, but not fallin’ ones.

Woman: Why is that?

Manouche: Blimey, y’don’t point out a fallin’ star. Y’see, each star is a soul on earth. A fallin’ star is a thief on th’ run. Y’point it out, an’ that’s like grassin’. Ah, that is, squealin’. Savvy? It’s true, stealin’s wrong, I can’t argue that. But there’s two sides t’ every story, mate. Sometimes people have t’ steal t’ feed their children. You an’ me, we’re in no position t’ judge.

Woman *nods, smiles, waves toward doorway behind her* Go on in, she’s waiting for you.

Manouche: Oh. T-ta, luv. *Cautiously enters room, stands by door, peering into darkness. Eyes grow accustomed to dim room, sees many candles, fire burning in hearth at opposite wall. Sees very old woman seated at large table near fire. The table is filled with glass bottles, bowls, other containers* Ahh, Alifi ...

Alifi *Looks up. She is very old, but her face is surprisingly smooth and tranquil, clear gray eyes, long white hair. Sees Manouche, her surprise turns to amazement, pleasure, then sympathy* Manouche! *Stands, comes over to her, gently embraces her* I expected you sooner. *Looks closely at Manouche, deep into her eyes, smiles* You have a good reason for your delay. I see great happiness despite the shadows. You’ve never known anyone like him. He believes in you.

Manouche *startled, starts to speak, then simply smiles, beaming*

Alifi: And are you finally ready to believe now, as well?

Manouche: I- I was afraid you wouldn't see me.

Alifi: My door was never closed to you, bird. You ran, and I understood why. Now you've faced fear, you've returned. You've been confronted with an outer fear bigger than your inner fear of your own power.

Manouche: You ... y' always told me there were nothin' t' fear.

Alifi: No worries. It's played out as it had to. It wouldn't have worked otherwise, you wouldn't have believed it. Now perhaps you're ready to believe, and it won't scare you.

Manouche *nods slowly* I'm—I'm bein' hunted, as it were. I'm no stranger t' bein' hated fer what I am—

Alifi: But he covets what you have. All the more horrific, coming from one who hates you. *Brings Manouche over to table* I'm going to show you something. I need to cut your left hand, just a tiny cut, it won't hurt. *Picks up knife. Manouche hesitates, then holds out hand. Alifi makes a tiny cut in palm; blood comes to surface, she squeezes a few drops onto a small piece of glass. She then cuts her own hand, places her blood on a separate piece of glass* Now, watch. *Places glass slide with her blood in a small iron holder over fire, takes bowl from the table, sprinkles powder over slide. Mix starts to bubble, soft lavender mist rises from the slide, room fills with smell of tuberose* This is an old Romany ritual, bird. See what's happening ... this is the response of Rom blood to a substance handed down through our generations, which gauges the being's time on this earth. Results vary, depending on the time in the person's life in which the ritual is performed. Had we done this when I was a young girl, the results would be very different. I'm now closer to the end of my life ... so the color is lavender, and the scent is tuberose, which represents death. *Manouche places gentle hand on her arm; she smiles* No, it's all right, I've had a long, wondrous life. I'll be ready when the time comes. It's just a transition, Manouche. We none of us completely die.

Holds up other slide Here's yours. *Places slide over fire, sprinkles powder, same as she did with her own. Bubbles and fizzes, as before—then starts to sizzle. Sapphire and gold sparks shoot out, the holder starts to shake on its own over the fire. Robust cloud rises from glass, multi-colored, beautiful, changing colors as it billows and builds. Slide finally bursts into sparkling explosion, like fireworks; Manouche cries out, jumps, staggers backward*

Alifi *smiles* The sense of smell is the most powerful memory trigger human beings have. What do you sense?

Manouche *trembling* B-blimey ... well ... I smell th' sea, first an' foremost, salt water, salt air. Ahh ... tulips, me favorite flower ... an' th' forest, th' one where I hid when I were young an' I lost me brother ... th' campfire, with th' Gypsy family what took me in ... *eyes grow wider* Then — then everythin's more recent.

Alifi: What is it?

Manouche *concentrating* It's ... rum! An' absinthe ... Kir Royales ... y'know, Alifi, I make 'em like nobody's business. Oohhh, blimey, chocolate ... Wonka chocolate! Oh, Alifi, I 'aven't told y' about Willy an' Madame ...

Alifi *smiles* I know about them.

Manouche: ... Aye, I s'pose y' do ... *sniffs air* oh ... I smell Marijike's cookin'! Gol, she's an artist ... y'wouldn't believe 'er homemade soups an' baguettes. Ahhh ... tobacco, that'd be me Mr. Blake's ciggies ... by th' powers, mate, he's sent from heaven, he is, he's th' most beautiful man ... *sniffs again* what's this *grins* Kidd's perfumed soaps! Gol, don't tell 'er I said that. *Laughs*

Alifi: You've sacrificed for others in the past. Remember the ones you protected, either taking the blame for what they did, or refusing to name names?

Manouche *shrugs, embarrassed* Bloody 'ell, Alifi, that were nothin'. It's – well, it's what anyone would've done in me place.

Alifi: No, it isn't. You risked your life some of those times. When you did those things, according to Rom belief, you gained a little part of your benefactors' souls. *Sees Manouche's distressed expression, laughs* Oh, no worries, you didn't deplete theirs! Don't you see, Manouche, in Rom terms, what this means is, you have enormous life-giving qualities inside you. It's a combination of the date and time and place you were born, and the choices you've made in your life. *Rises, moves over to Manouche, puts her hands on her shoulders, looks into her eyes* Your coming godchild is very blessed. And ... your enemy needs your blood desperately. Especially mixed with that of your friend.

Manouche *looks at her quickly* I—I suddenly find I 'ave a lot t' live fer, as it turns out. I've never been prouder than when me mates asked me t' be godmum to their boy. An' me dearest Mr. Blake ... *Lowers head for a moment, then looks up at her again* Oh, Alifi, what th' hell am I gonna do?

Alifi: You'll do what you've always done. Your best. And I'm going to help you.

Manouche *smiles* Cheers, mate. I'll try. Let's get started, th' sooner th' better. Don't get me wrong. It – it's good t' see ye again, an' I'm most grateful. But ... I'm already so bloody homesick.

Alifi smiles, puts her arm around her shoulders, leads her into another part of the house.

The Devil and Manouche Rousset

Manouche *approaches the gray frame beach house the following day. It's nearly noon, later than she wanted to be. But she got little sleep and is exhausted from the previous day, trying to concentrate on what Alifi was teaching her. Despite her weariness, she's determined to continue. Enters house, steps through beaded curtain to first room, again approaches woman seated at table* 'Mornin' ...

Woman *looks up from reading* I have a riddle for you:

I eat and also he eats of me
They eat beneath and over me
Tell me then, how can that be?

Manouche *closes eyes wearily* Ohhh ... *Brings hand up to eyes, tries to think. Runs hand through hair, looks at woman, shrugs* I-I'm sorry, luv, I 'ave no idea what that means.

Woman: Don't rush it. *looks at her closely* You've only put in one day, you have a long day ahead, and already there are dark circles under your eyes. *Manouche lowers her head, Woman's voice softens* No shame in it, little pirate, just observation. *Picks up teapot on table, pours tea into a chipped cup, holds out to Manouche* Drink this, and you'll know if you wish to continue.

Manouche *frowns* I know that before I even take th' cup from ye, mate. Why d'ye think I'm here? *sniffs tea, face brightens at the exquisite aroma. Breathes it in, heavenly expression on her face, tastes it. The tea is surprisingly fortifying. She tries not to drink it too quickly, but it's like a banquet offered to a starving person; her hands shake as she relishes every drop. Finishes, steadies her shaky hands, brings cup down, sets gently on table * That's a tonic, that is. Cheers, luv. *Woman has gone back to her reading, simply raises hand, waves Manouche into the next room.*

Manouche *enters room, glances around* A-Alifi? B-bloody 'ell! *Yells, jumps as Alifi swoops at her from a space in the room where she hadn't seen her standing before*

Alifi: Manouche, you're late! Come, we must hurry, not a second to lose. *Sweeps her long cloak around the two of them. Manouche feels the sensation of being swept up and swirled around, like scattering leaves; one second Alifi is there with her in the wrap, the next she isn't. Soon they settle on ground, Alifi whips her cloak away from them, revealing a clearing in a deep forest, the foliage so thick it's impossible to tell whether it's day or night.

Manouche *blinks* Where are we? *looks at Alifi* What's all this, then? *Eyes grow accustomed to dark, sees a tall desk with a man seated behind it. To one side is a panel with twelve people sitting silently. To the other side is a young man sitting in a chair, head bowed, shoulders shaking, weeping. Wrinkles her nose at smell of sulphur; turns to see, standing near panel, a tall, swarthy man in a beautiful suit. Gasps* By th' powers ...

Alifi: Manouche, that young man foolishly made a pact with the devil. Some time ago, he was very poor and hungry, and found himself passing an inn. He went in, ordered four eggs and a half-liter of wine. He then confessed he couldn't pay for anything. The innkeeper, who was Scratch himself, told him he could pay him later, after he'd made a good living for himself. He said if the young man didn't pay him at that time, he would take his soul. The man agreed and

went on his way. Who knows, perhaps he didn't believe it, he probably also had that immortal mentality of the young. Ten years passed, fortune smiled on the young man, and he became rich. So he returned to the inn to pay his debt. He told the innkeeper, "I owe you for four eggs, four rolls, and a half-liter of wine." The Devil then calculated a bill, saying that four hens would have hatched from the four eggs. Then he added in how many eggs those hens would've laid in ten years, how many hens would've come from those, and so on. The resulting bill was astronomical, more than the young man could afford. The Devil was ready to cart him away but I intervened. I said the man deserved a fair trial. Scratch has agreed to grant you ten minutes to convince him to spare the young man's soul.

Manouche *looks at her quickly* ME?? Y'must be daft! I--I mean, beggin' yer pardon, luv. But – but ... that is t' say, y'want ME go up against th' bloody devil? Wh-what could I possibly do?

Alifi: Think, Manouche. Concentrate.

Manouche: But Alifi, th' man's soul, all hingin' on me. L-look at 'im, he's jus' a boy ...
Waves hand at weeping young man. He raises his head, and Manouche sobs as she sees her beloved brother's face. DANI! *Starts to bolt for him, is held back by Alifi. Struggles, weeping* L-let me go, damn you! It's—It's me brother ---

Alifi *holds her fast* Stay put. You cannot, you MUST not. *sharply* MANOUCHE!
Manouche stops struggling, tears streaming down her face Listen to me. You have ten minutes to save his soul. Are you going to spend it weeping, or are you going to help him?

Manouche *shaking, brings hands to face, wipes tears away, sniffs* I—I can't—

Alifi: Yes you can. Concentrate. Go on now. Speak to the jury, the judge, address Scratch.
voice very stern But keep your distance from the young man. Savvy? *Releases her, gently but firmly pushes her toward the clearing.*

Manouche *head lowered, clenches and unclenches fists, shudders, tries to compose herself. Approaches them, trying not to look too much at her brother, or she knows she'll break down and all will be lost. Murmurs* Concentrate ... concentrate ... *Stands in middle of clearing, raises head, looks at faces of jurors, judge, finally turns to the Devil. All the faces range from indifferent to hostile, the Devil's particularly contemptuous. But she holds her own, straightens her shoulders, returns the Devil's stare defiantly.* L-let 'im go, y' bastard. This is wrong. It's all t' cock, an' ye bloody well know it.

Devil: *Bursts into horrible laughter* Ha-ha! *looks at Alifi* THIS is the best you could do? I don't know why we bothered. You've wasted everyone's time! Look at her, she's pathetic.
strolls up to Manouche, circles her, examining her with distaste, touching her clothes, her hair, quickly removing his fingers as if contaminated. Sad, worthless piece of trash is all she is, all she'll ever be. She didn't even have the courtesy to be on time to defend her own brother. Doesn't give a toss if he burns for all eternity. *Glances to see whether he got a rise from her; she stands very still, face white as a sheet but expressionless. Scowls, waves his hand, and Manouche cries out as she's picked up off her feet and slammed painfully against a tree, pinned, unable to move. Devil approaches her.* And just why are you late, pig? Where were you?

Manouche *trembling, breathing hard, starts to answer, then stops herself, thinks. Something comes to her. Musters up all her courage, looks the Devil in the eye.* I—I ... I went home t' boil some beans ... so I could plant 'em.

Devil *sneers* Stupid, sad little vermin. How do you expect beans to grow if they're cooked?

Manouche *swallows* The s-same as YOU would get hens f-f-from cooked eggs.

Jurors' mouths drop open. Judge sits up, amazed; bangs gavel Not guilty. Defendant will pay amount owed for four eggs, and a half-liter of wine. Case dismissed.

Devil's sneer is replaced by expression of shock, then rage. Reaches terrible clawed hands for Manouche's throat; she squeezes eyes shut. His hands stop short, he lets out a horrible scream, bursts into flames, disappears in a booming explosion of smoke. Manouche drops to ground. She looks up quickly; jury and judge disappear in a flash, leaving her brother standing alone not fifty feet from her. She scrambles to her feet, stares at him. Starts to move toward him cautiously; he holds a hand up, signals her to stop. Smiles tenderly* Merci, ma soeur bien-aimée. *He blows her a kiss, softly fades, then disappears ... leaving Manouche and Alifi standing alone in the forest clearing.*

Alifi *approaches Manouche, places hand on her shoulder* Flying colors, brave little bird. My deepest apologies, but I thought it best to start with the worst. It's the cruelest test you could've faced, and you beat the Devil. I'm so very proud of you, my dear. *Turns her around, looks deep into her eyes* Do you begin to understand? Can you continue? Will you continue?

Manouche *nods slowly* Till I can't no more. *looks at Alifi* He—he were 'ere, weren't he? Dani ...

Alifi *tears fill her eyes; embraces Manouche, softly strokes her hair* We're done for today, my love. Come, I'll take you to your Mr. Blake. *Sweeps cloak around them, as before, Manouche vaguely aware of the swirling, spinning sensation. They come to rest, Alifi removes her cloak ... and Manouche finds they're standing on the dock, before her ship.* Go rest, darling. Can you forgive me?

Manouche *smiles wanly* T' not fergive ye would undo all I did. It – well, it'd be like turnin' away from me brother. We're sound, luv.

Alifi leans down, kisses her, turns and quietly slips away, back toward her beach house. Manouche watches her, looks up at sky, sees the sun is already setting. Shakes head, boards ship.

Blake *in cabin, sprawled in chair, feet up, reading. Glances up, smiles as he sees Manouche standing in doorway. Smile fades at her expression. Leans forward, puts book down* What is it, honey?

Manouche *tries to speak, can't. Lets out a cry, bursts into tears. Blake moves swiftly to her, sweeps her up in his arms, settles in chair with her in his lap. Holds her tight, soothing her, as she sobs, heartbroken.*

Charmed

Next evening, after dark, not late. Manouche and Blake, arms around each other, approach gray frame beach house, stand before it for a moment.

Blake: Y'sure?

Manouche *nods* I'm not givin' up. She said yesterday was th' worst I'd go through, an' by th' bloody stars, I can't imagine how that could be wrong. *shudders* Besides ... I 'ad a dream last night.

Blake: I thought so. Y'were so restless, an' you were talkin' but I couldn't understand you. Then y'seemed to settle down, so I didn't wake you. What'd you dream?

Manouche: I saw our Cap'n Jack, he wanted me t' do somethin', but I can't remember what it was. But that weren't th' bad part. I dreamed somethin' were wrong with Kat. She ... she'd 'ad a bad scare, an' she'd lost somethin'. An' she couldn't speak. *Turns to Blake* I know Alifi said I can't rush all this, but I got t' get back, maybe be of some assist.

Blake *shakes head* I know I can't talk you out of it. *kisses her* Take care, honey, don't be too late. *He embraces her, smiles, watches her turn and climb steps to front door. He waits till she enters house before his smile fades; sighs, turns away, returns to ship.

Manouche enters house, steps through beaded curtain to first room, again approaches woman seated at table. She nods slightly, says nothing, continues to read. Manouche stands quietly for a moment, then brightens. Hey, I 'ave an answer t' yer riddle. Don't know if it's right, but ...

Woman *still doesn't look up from book* Riddle? Oh, yes, I recall:

I eat and also he eats of me
They eat beneath and over me
Tell me then, how can that be?

Very well, what's your answer?

Manouche *takes slip of paper from pocket, unfolds it, reads*

Y' stand on a little bridge an' eat
Yer baby sucks upon your teat
Fishes are eatin' down below
While crumbs to the hungry birds you throw.

Woman *raises eyebrows* Well done. But you still don't know who I am.

Manouche *grins* It's comin' t' me.
Woman waves her hand, Manouche enters back room.

Alifi *rises from chair next to hearty fire. Smiles, greets her warmly* Your timing is perfect, I'm glad you waited till after dark. Tonight, we're going to make a draba – a magical charm or amulet. It'll be a lesson in Rom tradition, and it'll show you how the ordinary can be quite extraordinary. *Wraps cloak around her shoulders, motions for Manouche to follow her. They

leave through back door, walk up from beach, through jungle, down dark road to old cemetery on edge of town. They enter cemetery, and Alifi leads Manouche to a space between two ancient graves. She points at a small red earthenware crock with a lid, set on top of an ant hill.* I placed that there nine days ago, when the moon was full. Now it should be ready. *Nudges her* Go fetch it, but don't open it.

Manouche *steps gingerly between the tombstones, leans down, carefully picks up crock, notices with interest that it has many small holes drilled into it. Brings back to Alifi.* Don't mind tellin' ye, I feel right spooked. So what's in it?

Alifi *places finger to her lips* Shhh, let's take it back and I'll explain. *They leave the cemetery (not a moment too soon for Manouche), return the way they came, enter Alifi's bright, warm room. She sets crock on table, removes cloak* Nine days ago, I found a dead male frog in my garden. I picked him up, placed him in that crock, set it in the cemetery, as you saw. The timing was ideal—the frog must be placed on an ant hill on a Friday night with a full moon. And the ant hill must be in a burial ground.

Manouche: Why the holes?

Alifi: There must be 390 holes drilled into the crock, no more and no less. *takes up crock* After nine days, you return, collect the dish ... *opens it* ... and all that's left are tiny little bones, thanks to the ants. *peeks inside, smiles satisfactorily* Splendid. *looks at Manouche* Now for your part. Ideally, I should perform the ritual, since I began the process. The magic would be stronger. But it should still work. At least, this is how it was taught to me when I was a young girl. *Holding dish, takes Manouche gently by the arm, brings her over to stand before a large mirror. Sets crock down in front of her on table before mirror, removes lid.* Now, bird, you take each bone, put each one in your mouth, one by one. Eventually, you'll come to one that will make you invisible.

Manouche *looks at her quickly* What? C'mon, pull th' other one!

Alifi *smiles* I'm not joking! *moves dish closer to her.* Go on.

Manouche *Looks down at the tiny white bones inside, bright against the deep red of the earthenware. Selects one, grimaces, places it in her mouth, tries not to think of where it's been or what it is.*

Alifi *grins at her expression* See, no taste at all, right?

Manouche *raises eyebrow at her* It's th' idea of it, luv. *Looks in mirror, nothing. Looks back at Alifi*

Alifi *nods toward bowl* Try the next one. Keep going.

Manouche *frowns reproachfully, but does as she's told. Continues, one by one, until she's down to the last bone.* Blimey, I should'a known! This were a joke, weren't it? *scowls, grabs the bone, sticks it in her mouth* Y've had yer laugh, mate, hope y'enjoyed yerself! Magic, hell. This were a con job, pure an' simple, an' I'm a sight humiliated to 'ave been taken in. This is usually my forte, this. Why, even Kidd has said—

Alifi: Look in the mirror.

Manouche *glances at the mirror* Aye, so what of it? By th' bloody powers, I can't believe I— I ... *looks again, sees ... nothing.*

Alifi *delighted* Viola! *senses Manouche's panic* Now, bird, listen to me, you must remain calm. You could do harm if you don't, do you understand? Remain calm, you're perfectly fine, I wouldn't say you were if you weren't. Trust me.

Manouche: H-h-how – how did ... wh-what h-how long does it last?

Alifi: No worries, look in the mirror. It's wearing off already.

Manouche *looks, sees her trembling image slowly fading back into view, heaves sigh of relief. Removes tiny bone from her mouth.* Th-thank th' stars. *turns, stares at Alifi* This, ah ... it ain't recurrin', is it?

Alifi *laughs* No, that was it! It might happen again if you put it in your mouth again. I'm not sure. Had you been the person to place the frog on the ant hill that night, the magic would be stronger for you. Stronger still if you set out with the purpose in mind, caught the frog yourself, placed it there still alive.

Manouche: I-I couldn't do that t' th' wee critter, that'd be too cruel. I'd 'ave t' be desperate t' be invisible t' do that.

Alifi *smiles* I know. *nods toward bone* There, now you have your draba. Keep it with you, it's special just for you. I got it started, but you've made it yours.

Manouche: Does th' power transfer dependin' on who's holdin' it?

Alifi: You're thinking of your friend who's in trouble. These things can work sometimes if we pass them along to others, but the receiver has to have faith in it, has to believe. Do you think she would?

Manouche: I honestly don't know. *sighs, looks down at bone.* I'll hang onto it. I'm no stranger t' belief in tokens, as it were.

Alifi: You gave your most powerful one to your dear Madame. Very generous, Manouche, but take care. Don't give them all away, or you'll have none left for yourself.

Manouche *shrugs* She's carryin' twins. Seemed best t' save three instead o' one. 'Course ... *smiles* ... well, now I don't recall whether it were before we knew she 'ad twins or not, when I gave it t' her. *beams at thought of the twins, looks back at bone.* Right, I won't ferget th' lesson. Extraordinary in th' ordinary. *holds up bone, sniffs at it, makes a face.* Jus' me luck -- it WOULD be the last bloody bone I try before I find th' good one. Story o' me life, innit?

Alifi *laughs, pats her on the back, turns to hearth to put kettle on the fire for tea.*

*“And the tales you have taught me from the things that you saw
make me want out your heart, please, please from behind that locked door”*

Manouche *Enters house next day, senses something different. Notices that the woman isn't in her usual place at table.* Alifi? *Steps into next room, surprised to see no fire in hearth, Alifi dozing in chair. Approaches her, touches her arm gently.*

Alifi *stirs, opens eyes* Ahhh, you're here. Apologies, bird, I'm ... having a hard time getting started today. *Pulls up in chair, sits up straight.*

Manouche: Should I come back? Y'look tired, luv. No disrespect intended ...

Alifi: None taken. I am rather tired, but I'm all right. Our time together is nearing an end, so no worries, I'll rally. Be a love, light the fire. I'll put on some tea and be good as new in no time.

Manouche: Y'won't do sod-all, ye'll stay right where y'are. *Places hands on Alifi's shoulders, firmly pushes her back into chair. Lights fire, puts water on to boil, straightens room, soon everything is warm and inviting. Pours out two cups of tea, hands one to Alifi, sits on low footstool next to chair.*

Alifi *smiles* Bless you, dear, this'll put me right. *Takes sip, closes eyes, opens them again, turns to Manouche.* You've learned a lot, there's not much more I can teach you. *Reaches hand out, lightly presses fingertips over Manouche's heart.* Most of it was already there, anyway. You just needed to have it shown to you.

Manouche *worried* I dunno. I—well, I've learned some wond'rous things, t' be sure, an' I'm grateful fer yer efforts. But I still feel somethin's missin' ... like there's somethin' I'm not gettin'.

Alifi: Enlightenment is an ongoing journey. It's not like a switch going off. You've come farther than you realize. *Takes another sip of tea* Today will be a little different. You're going to go it alone. *Waves hand toward table* Hand me that jar, please.

Manouche *stands, picks up jar from table—round, ceramic, like a small cookie jar, Celtic symbols painted in the glaze. Passes it to Alifi.*

Alifi *Removes lid from jar, holds it out to Manouche* Pick one. *Manouche reaches into jar, brings forth a small, green wafer, holds it up questioningly. Alifi gazes at it with an odd expression. Murmurs* As it must be. *Sets cup down, faces Manouche, takes her hands* Here's what you must do. I want you to clear your mind of everything as best you can, save your biggest concern. Concentrate on what you would like to be able to do that you've heretofore thought impossible.

Manouche: What, y'mean like flyin'?

Alifi: If that's what you want.

Manouche: Or curin' a deadly disease?

Alifi *laughs* All right, this could go on awhile! Come, let's begin. Think, but don't tell me what it is. Just concentrate. *Manouche closes eyes* When you're sure you've got it fixed in your mind, eat the wafer you took from the jar. I rather wish—well, never mind.

Manouche *opens eyes, eats wafer.* Hmm. Tastes like ... *grimaces* Geeeshh, never mind what it tastes like! Blimey, where's it written that th' best bloody magic o' th' world has t' taste vile?

Alifi *grins* Apologies! Now ... when you feel you're ready, I want you to go through that door. *Points at small, blue door at other end of room.*

Manouche: What --- I never noticed that door before.

Alifi: You've never eaten one of those wafers before.

Manouche: *looks at her uneasily* Wh-why're y'lookin' at me like that, luv? Y'have me a bit worried.

Alifi: *pauses, then smiles* I've always been fond of you, from the first time I saw you here, years ago. You so wanted to be like everyone else, you hated your Rom heritage. But the potential was always there, shining through. You couldn't hide it, no matter how you tried. And now, I'm so proud of you. I've attempted to teach these ways to many before, but I've never had anyone follow my advice so well, and get so much out of it. It's ... well, it's very gratifying. And now that we've reached what will probably be your last test ... I'll miss you, that's all. *Stands, motions Manouche to her feet, hugs her. Reaches into pocket in her skirt, pulls out small envelope.* Take this with you. It's something very special, very powerful, just for you. It's to be used only if you're truly at your wit's end and don't know what else to do. Listen to me, Manouche, DO YOUR BEST NOT TO USE IT. And don't bother giving it to anyone. It'll only work for you. Savvy?

Manouche *Startled, because she'd already been considering giving it to Kat. Grins* Y'read me like a book, luv. Aye, I savvy. *Puts envelope in pocket.*

Alifi *smiles* All right, off with you. I'm sure you'll do well. Sorry I can't go with you.

Manouche: No worries. I've already been through th' worst. *Eyes grow dim at memory of her brother. Shakes off thought, resolutely walks over to blue door. Opens, bumps head on low doorframe, glances back at Alifi ruefully. Steps inside, closes door behind her.*

Alifi *whispers* Take care, bird.

*“Today the darkness, don’t despair
tomorrow the glimmer and flame”*

Manouche *Closes blue door behind her, finds herself in complete darkness. Takes a step, cries out as she feels herself falling. Seems like a long drop, but she lands relatively unharmed. Stands up slowly, brushes herself off – sees beam of light piercing darkness. Starts from high above, beams onto a platform about four feet high. Approaches platform cautiously, sees a bundle.* By th’ powers ... a baby?

Carefully picks up baby, tiny hands reach out and tug at her hair, pat her nose. Pulls coverlet back, smiles at baby’s sweet face. Then gasps, startled, as face changes before her eyes, very subtly ... showing resemblances to people she knows, like baby pictures – innocent versions of Blake, Madame, Willy, Kat ... free of adult cares and concerns. Slowly melting into one another, beautiful, brings tears to Manouche’s eyes. Ahh, lil’ one, what does this mean? *Baby responds with a gurgle, she hugs it close.* I’m gettin’ ye outta ‘ere right now, enfant magique. *Starts back, looks up, hesitates.* Hmm, can’t go back th’ way I came, can I? *Jumps at loud crash, like a huge metal door slamming shut. Space suddenly floods with light. Manouche squints, sees figure approaching. Holds baby closer, wave of horror washes over her; Nate. Murmurs to herself* It ain’t real ... it’s a test, this ...

Nate *smiling nastily, nods at baby* Well, the gypsy scum has found my little temptation. I suppose you’re already counting the money you’ll receive once you’ve sold it. *laughs*

Manouche *trembling* H-how’d you— *eyes him closely* Wait, yer not ... bloody ‘ell, who are ye?

Nate: I’m worse than your worst nightmare. Sorry, that’s cheap dialogue, I know, but I’ve always wanted to say it. Yes, you’re right, I’m not Nate. This is merely a convenient form for me to take, to allow us to chat. The real Nate is still locked in his cell, guarded by those incompetents. If they only knew how easily he could escape if he wanted to! But he knows what’s waiting for him if I ever lay hands on him again. *Shakes head* Outsmarted by a shovel-wielding loony, and a piece of gypsy trash. Even behind bars, he can’t keep his stinking mouth shut. He said way too much to those two laddies who seem to think you’re of some worth. And he has no business consorting with Kat at this point—

Manouche *looks at him sharply* Wh-what? What two ... what’re you talkin’ about?

Nate *sneers* Go back to your drugs, junkie, at least then you had some idea of what was going on. *Glares at her intensely, eyes yellow-gold, puts vision in her head.*

Manouche *Moans as searing pain fills her world under his glare. Sinks to her knees, carefully sets baby on floor. Brings hands to her eyes; in her mind, sees Willy and Blake at lockup cursing Nate, hears Nate’s words* Ohhh ... oh, my god in heaven ...

Nate: You have no god in heaven, you were damned the day you were born. Why not accept it and be done with it? I’ve watched you stumble and grasp at straws – pathetic. You haven’t a clue. I can do great things with the power in your blood. Your blood ... Kat’s ... the baby’s ...

Manouche *shaking from the pain, tries to think. Baby gurgles and giggles; she glances at baby, baby smiles at her. Runs hands through her hair, slowly rises, looks Nate in the eye. Frowns, says nothing, draws sword.*

Nate *laughs* Oh, right. Pirate! Very well, vermin, by all means, let's play. You win, and –

Manouche: I win, an' y' let th' baby live.

Nate: What about you?

Manouche: Do we have an accord?

Nate: I'll go you one better. You win, and I'll let the baby live. Hell, the baby's optional, I was just being greedy. I'll also promise to remove your blood as quickly as possible so you won't suffer for long. If I win, I get you both. And I'll take my time with you. Slow, agonizing death ... just like poor ol' Nate promised your young man and that would-be brother of yours. *With a zing of metal, he produces sword seemingly out of nowhere. Waves hand* Ladies first. *Manouche moves toward him, brandishing sword; they begin to duel.*

Nate *impressed* You have done your homework, I can't deny that. It's like you put your whole heart and soul into it. *Swings back, strikes viciously hard, blade against blade, pushing her down and against a wall, face close to hers.* Remember that tattoo, heart and soul? Do you know if it caused Kidd any pain when you destroyed that locket? That was your idea, wasn't it? You have no idea the trouble you brought on your friends when you did that. When it's all over, they'll wish they'd never even heard your name.

Manouche *falters slightly as his eyes literally burn into hers; feels them tearing up. Blinks, glares at him fiercely.* Me mates'll be too busy dancin' in th' streets at yer misfortune – no matter how small – to 'ave time to curse th' name of ol' Manouche, y' murderous bastard. *Pushes him away, lunges at him with sword. They continue to fight. She begins to tire; she's no match for him in terms of physical strength. Too late, she sees he's backed her up to small balcony with low wall, high above the ground. Glances nervously over shoulder at the drop; he presses advantage, savagely slams his sword into hers, knocking it from her grip, sends it flying over the wall.

Nate: And now ... you have no weapon.

Manouche stares, horrified. Baby gurgles again, Nate turns at sound. Manouche manages to run past him as he's distracted. He curses, runs after her. She reaches baby, picks it up, holds it close to her, glares defiantly at him as he approaches.

Nate: Right, game over. We made a deal, it's time to go.

Manouche *breathing heavily, shakes her head, then hears a voice*

Baby: Manouche! You've forgotten something!

Manouche *stares at baby, glances at Nate as he draws nearer* Wh- what did –

Baby: Think, mate! Now, quickly ... throw me high up in the air with all your strength. Hurry, he's almost on us.

Manouche *Trembling, does at it asks—throws it straight up in the air as hard as she can. Baby turns into beautiful white raven, calls back to her.* Well done! It brings great fortune to save the life of a white raven. Remember what I said. *Flies around room, then out window where Manouche lost her sword. Before it can sink in to her what has happened, Nate is on her.*

Nate: Well, I have you anyway, bitch. *Spins her around, slams her face against the wall, she screams as he roughly twists her arm behind her back. He grabs her hair, pulls it hard, brings her face close to his, snarls in her ear* You've almost been more trouble than you're worth. Makes me sick to my stomach ... a gift of this magnitude, bestowed on a sub-human too stupid to know what she has. *She squeezes eyes shut as he searches her, finding only a small knife, items in her pockets of little worth. Then he finds something else.* What's this? *snorts with contempt* Cheap cigarettes and candy! Is this the sum total of your plunder? Some pirate.

Manouche *sobs* No, don't eat those! Y'can at least grant me a last request. Those're from me brother Willy—

Nate: Shut up. *Yanks her hair* Ah yes, Willy, your rescuer. And where is he now, when you need him? Maybe he finally wised up, realized what bad news you are. *Pops candy in mouth, swallows. Pulls her away from wall, throws her to floor, stands on her hair.* Now come, you have a date with an assortment of sharp implements. It's going to be a long, drawn-out process ... you'll be screaming for mercy ... you'll be ... *Voice trails off, he staggers back, clutching at his stomach. Starts to groan miserably. Manouche jumps to her feet, runs. Nate tries to pursue, but doubles over from pain. She keeps running, doesn't look back, not even when she hears the explosion. She's now remembered what she forgot – Willy's explosive candy rejects.*

*Force of explosion sends her flying, everything goes dark in a billowing cloud ... and she's thrown through the blue door, busting it off its hinges. She becomes dully aware of lying sprawled on the soft paisley carpet in Alifi's warm, comfortable room. Pushes herself up painfully, looks up, sees Alifi standing above her, bottle of rum in her hand.

Alifi *beaming* Well done, Manouche, well done! *Drops down next to her, sets bottle on floor, takes her in her arms.* See what you're capable of? Physical strength is admirable ... but ultimately, it won't prevail if it's not balanced with heart. Now, when you return home and face your adversaries in the flesh, you'll be able to -- *Stops, looks closely at her.* Manouche? Manouche, speak to me, are you all right?

Manouche *shakes head dizzily, blinks. Looks at Alifi, then nods longingly at rum bottle.* Aye, that'll do me fer starters. What'll you be 'avin', luv? *Passes out, Alifi hugs her close.*

Graduation Day

Manouche *approaches house the following day, enters reception room, sees Woman back at her usual place, reading.* 'Mornin', didn't see ye yesterday –

Woman *cuts her off without looking at her* She's waiting for you, get in there. She has a very busy day today. You're not her only client, you know. *Waves her in*

Manouche *slightly hurt by her tone, enters adjoining room, smiles at Alifi.*

Alifi: Manouche! *smiles, comes over and hugs her, as always* Well, bird, this is it, isn't it? Just look at you. *Holds Manouche by shoulders, gazes at her approvingly* You're ready to go home now?

Manouche *nods* Alifi – I, ah, didn't get to ask you much about ... about yesterday ...

Alifi *arm around her shoulders, seats her in chair next to her favorite chair, pours tea for them both.* Of course, dear, ask me anything.

Manouche: Well ... I understan' these experiences 'ave been fer me welfare. I understan' they've been illusions, as it were. But ... but some of 'em was so real ... I were jus' wonderin', were any of it real?

Alifi: Yes and no. It's difficult to explain. These were situations played out in a part of your subconscious. At times, the danger was real. You were never in danger of dying; at least, I don't think you were. But obviously, you were able to feel pain, physical and emotional. Your senses were heightened. The plus of heightened senses is, that's how you were able to get so much out of these experiences. The down side was ... *gazes at her sympathetically* ... sometimes you were deeply hurt.

Manouche: I—I still don't know who I were dealin' with yesterday. It weren't Nate, it were th' bloke he's been answerin' to. I don't know how we're gonna stop 'im when we don't know who he is. *scratches head* It seemed so real. An' whoever he was, he gave me a vision, did I tell ye that? Blimey, I can't bear t' think about it. It were me Mr. Blake an' Willy, confrontin' that bastard Nate in his cell. *looks at Alifi, anguished* If that'un really happened ... by th' powers, Alifi! Madame would be so upset. She an' I, we begged 'em both not t' do that very thing. I couldn't even bring meself last night t' ask Mr. Blake if it were true. My dear Madame ... we can't be upsettin' her, she's 'avin' twins. *beams* Did I tell ye they've asked me t' be godmum t' their son? ...

Alifi *laughs* Yes, you've told me, several times! *places hand on Manouche's arm* No worries about all that. It was probably just more of your adversary's attempts to distract you while you were fighting him. Remember? He was saying all sorts of things to get a rise out of you. It's an age-old and very effective tactic.

Manouche *nods* Th' one thing I wish were true, was ... *eyes fill with tears*

Alifi: I know, I know. But think how it was, to see your brother so clearly, and as a handsome young man, instead of the boy he was when he was taken from you. That's a gift, bird, and that's all inside you. As long as you have that, he will always live on inside you.

Manouche *wipes eyes impatiently, sniffs, motions toward front room, grins* Yer Lady Sunshine out there tells me yer busy today, an' that I should keep it short. *gulps down tea, stands* I s'pose I should let ye get to it. I-- I don't know how t' thank ye.

Alifi *stands, hugs her again* Safe travel to you, my star pupil. If you wish to thank me, come back and see me again. Maybe now, Fiji will hold more good memories than bad.

Manouche *smiles, then brightens* Oh, I fergot, luv, I do 'ave somethin' fer ye. It's nothin', really, but ... I wanted t' give ye somethin', show me appreciation. *digs in pocket, pulls out tiny bracelet of colorful plastic beads.* I've 'ad this since I were a child. It's too small t' wear, though I were never without it till I outgrew it. I'd be very happy if ye'd accept it, seein' as how ye've shown me that ... well, that there's nothin' fer me t' be ashamed of in what I am. Romany.

Alifi *takes it* I'm proud to accept it, bird. *blinks tear away, looks up, smiles* Now, off with you, back to your Mr. Blake, your beloved ship, and your friends back home. You will win, I doubt it not. *hugs her, kisses her, ushers her to doorway. Smiles reassuringly; her smile fades as Manouche leaves the room.

Manouche enters reception room for last time, approaches Woman seated at table. No longer reading, she's shuffling a deck of tarot cards

Woman *Speaks to her without looking up* You've done very well. Alifi isn't easily impressed. For that matter, neither am I.

Manouche *glows, knowing this is high praise from her; glances back at room* I hope I see her again. I prob'ly owe her me life. Per'aps those o' me mates, too.

Woman: That remains to be seen. *continues to shuffle*

Manouche: Aye. But we 'ave more of a chance than we did before I came back here.

Woman *spreads cards on table* Pick three cards, one at a time. Don't look at them, I'll turn them over.

Manouche *pauses, looks them over carefully, indicates three. Woman flips them over to reveal the Fool, Death and the Star, in that order.* W-what do they mean?

Woman *nods* Promising. This is the Romany Draw layout for the Tarot. Three cards, past, present, future. The Fool is your past. Not a bad thing at all ... this card represents the complete faith that life is good and worthy of trust. Some might call the Fool too innocent, but his innocence sustains him and brings him joy, which makes him strong. *picks up Death card, holds it up* This is your present. *glances at Manouche, snorts at her fearful _expression* Not to be taken literally. Death is not a permanent end, but a transition into a new state. It often represents an important ending that will initiate great change. To grow, to move, to live ... we must die to the old to give birth to the new. *Picks up Star* And here is your future, your light at the end of the tunnel. It's not the final answer, and your work is far from done. But it indicates you're on the right track. Use the light of the Star to guide you.

Sets card back on table. Very well, little pirate, on your way. You came looking for help and you're leaving with everything you could've possibly gained. Don't forget what you've learned here. *leans forward, peers at her.* Do you know who I am?

Manouche *hesitates, then smiles broadly.* Aye. *Reaches into pocket, pulls out the frog's bone, her draba, sets it on table in front of Woman.* I'm beholden t' ye, luv. I won't ferget.
comes around table, throws arms around her.

Woman *gruffly* G'wan. *Pushes Manouche away, waves her out door impatiently. Waits until she's gone, picks up bone, looks at it, smiles gently. Places it in her mouth ... shimmers, turns into Refugee the dog. Hops down from chair, runs out the door.*

*Back in Alifi's room ... *

Alfi *Still standing, looking at the bracelet Manouche gave her. Hears someone come through the rear door. She doesn't turn to look, but speaks* Well, that's it. I've done my best, she's on her own now. *Turns to face visitor* I suppose you heard everything.

Malachi: I heard enough. Heard enough to know you didn't even try to knock that sentimental streak outta her.

Alifi: Your error is, you see it as a detriment. To some, that would be true. To Manouche, it's a gift. You'd have to kill her to remove it. *Eyes him, amused* Besides, why do you care? You've always said she constantly gets on your last nerve.

Malachi *shrugs* I don't care. Just don't see much sense in doin' something halfway, is all. *pauses* All right, I admit, she's shown so much promise in the past, I figured your little training program might turn her into somethin' worthwhile. Kinda wanted to watch that happen.

Alifi: Your secret is safe with me. *laughs* So you'll be going back to Deppville, won't you?

Malachi: Damn gypsies. *But he grins, drops a few coins on the table, tips hat and leaves the way he came. Alifi laughs softly, picks up one of the coins, bites down on it, nods approvingly, puts the rest of them in pocket.*

Manouche and Blake return to Deppville

Adrift on the Libertine Trailer ... Manouche and Blake sit on deck, arms wrapped around each other, holding drinks, watching sunset.

Manouche: S'been lovely, hasn't it? This combinin' business with pleasure ... I could get used t' it.

Blake *nuzzles her neck* One of these days I'll whisk you away for a purely pleasure trip. But I'm glad if you found the answers you were lookin' for. *pauses, draws her closer* I've been really worried about you.

Manouche *sighs* Y'should've found yerself a nice girl, luv. I hate t' say it, but chances are slim ye'll have many peaceful moments, takin' up with a pirate.

Blake: Promise?

Manouche *laughs, kisses him. Turns back around, gazes at beautiful sky.* I learned so much. Alifi, she's a fine teacher. I, ah, saw a lot o' interestin' things, as ye know.

Blake *holds her tighter, murmurs* I know, honey ... your brother ...

Manouche: Aye, there were that. An' there were other things, as well ... I saw th' bloody Devil himself ... I saw a beautiful white raven ... an' ol' Nate showed up, put a piccie in me head, as it were. 'Ave a guess what it was: You an' Willy, at th' Deppville lockup, tryin' t' beat some sense in Nate's head through th' bars. Of course, he weren't havin' any of it ...

Blake *tenses* Wh-what?

Manouche *continues to gaze at sky* Oh aye, there ye were, th' pair o' ye, doin' jus' exactly what Madame an' I had begged y' not to. It were so real. *shivers slightly, voice lowers* I heard what he said about me, too. *Shakes it off, continues* But then, I talked t' Alifi about it, an' she assured me it were no doubt one o' Nate's tricks, to rattle me. It were all in me subconscious, savvy? I agreed with 'er, an' said that were th' most likely explanation, seein' as how ye both know how upset Madame an' I would be if ye were t' do such a foolish thing.

Blake *relaxes somewhat* Well, there y' are. Of course, Alifi's right. I mean ... sure, we thought about doin' just that, we were so angry. But ... well, after we knew how you an' Madame felt about it, why would we have done it? *smiles disarmingly*

Manouche *turns, takes his glass, sets it next to her. Climbs into his lap, faces him, arms around his neck.* Well, here's me theory, purely conjecture, of course. Ye both could be jus' that dear ... jus' that gallant ... an' jus' that determined that no man's goin' t' make me feel like Gypsy scum as long as either of ye has anythin' t' say about it. An' fer what it's worth ... th' fact that th' pair o' ye even went so far as to think of doin' that fer a poor girl such as meself, with nothin' about her either worldly or of worth ... is jus' as dear t' me, an' jus' as gallant t' me, as if ye had acted on said impulse. It's the thought that counts, innit? An' I don't think I could love ye more fer harborin' that particular thought, Mr. William Blake. *Presses against him, kisses him deeply*

Blake *returns her kiss passionately, then looks up, over her head* Wow, we're there already.
He points out at the Deppville skyline, appearing on the horizon. It'll be good to see everyone.

Manouche *grins at his tone* Ye sound less than thrilled at th' prospect, luv. *snuggles closer*
An' under th' current circs, I'm inclined t' concur. *Pauses, then adds* Y'know, th' beauty of a
ship is, it's not jus' a keel and hull an' a deck an' sails. That's what a ship needs, but what a
ship is ... what th' Libertine Trailer is, here an' now ... is freedom. Might I suggest we, ah,
weigh anchor out 'ere fer a time. We been away this long, I don't reckon another ... oh, hour or
so, would give anyone cause fer concern. *raises eyebrows suggestively*

Blake *grins* Make that two hours. *kisses her*

Manouche *gasps, catches breath* Do I hear three? *Rises reluctantly to weigh anchor*