

Catarena's Journal #2

Agents of Fortune

29 January 1566

Dinner turns out different than expected. Llewella makes her excuses and leaves us as soon as we are seated. And Bleys isn't present either. Instead, Llewella has left us to eat with a new acquaintance. A pirate-looking fella if ever I saw. A dangerous looking fella. Dark and swarthy, suspicious of everything, and propping his feet up on the table like he owns the place. Reminds me of me, come to think of it. He introduces himself as Caine.

Caine, as it turns out, is the spymaster of Amber. And Caine, having become tired of the lot of us running loose and causing trouble, got Random to agree to turn us over to his tender mercies. We are given the choice; we work for him, or he hunts and harries us until we wish for a death he will not grant us.



Kate Beckinsale

Well now. Nice to meet someone so direct. I just tuck in to supper while he speaks, and drink liberally. This is turning into a *wonderful* end for a trying day. The others, as usual, erupt into bickering and whining. They try to wriggle out of it, ask tons of pointless questions. Completely prove how much they truly are children. But Caine will have none of it.

He's done his research, I grant. He knows just about everything, including the true situation regarding my newborn son... Who has apparently lost no time besieging his father's kingdom off in shadow.

In the end, he actually asks for my thoughts, as I spent dinner listening and eating, as opposed to bitching. I just shrug. I've no problem with underhanded and dangerous work. I've done it before. I just don't like the idea of being saddled with such... incompetent accompaniment. For which Caine has no sympathy whatsoever.

Finally we are cornered into making the choice of swearing to him or leaving to be hunted. I swear without a complaint. I've done worse things. I'll work for him for a while. Spy and black operations agent of Amber. Why not. The others are so cowed that they swear likewise. But they

seem more motivated by fear. We are also sworn not to kill each other, though that is by far a looser sort of oath. There's a lot of harm that can be done short of killing.

The fact that the others seem actually fearful of the elders is interesting to note. I have found them to be challenging to deal with, and able to beat me in said challenges, but that doesn't mean I'm afraid of them. Hmm.

Caine then sets us our first tasks immediately; retrieve Leo from Amber's dungeon and get him to swear as well, and then to deliver the Jewel of Judgment to Random. Turns out Caine got it from Bleys himself. We're to meet Random in some shadow called Texaramie. Whatever. The Jewel is entrusted to Mannelous, as he was originally tasked with retrieving it some time ago. Caine calls it a 'Confidence Course'.

Right. Uh huh. Which means we're being tested. I find it hard to believe that we've actually been given the real Jewel. Not a bunch so obviously incompetent as this lot. But I'll go along and do as told. Hopefully in the future we'll be given assignments that don't necessitate the whole mob of us traveling together.

Regardless, I expect to be tested from the get go. Caine leaves us to our own devices thereafter suggesting we rest until morning. I am torn between trying to shadow Caine and see what is really going on, and guarding Mannelous.

I opt to guard Mannelous. I figure Spymaster Caine is good enough to know I'm following him if I try, and don't feel like pissing off the new boss right off. And Mannelous is inherently both incompetent and untrustworthy. I figure he'll either betray us, or get himself ganked, or both. So I decide to spend the night 'making friends' with him.

Luckily, having been present at my birthing not so many hours ago, it isn't difficult to convince him that the most pleasant way to spend this evening is playing cards over a few drinks and talking.

"Dead leaves always give up motion
I no longer feel the motion
Where prophecy fails, the falling motion
"Don't report this, agents of fortune"
All praise
He's found the awful truth, Balthazar"

- E.T.I.

Blue Oyster Cult

30 January 1566

By the time morning creeps up on us, I am still fairly rested physically, and mentally alert. I don't need much sleep. Manny seems more tired. But at least I can hope that being tired he's less likely to try something stupid.

Before we go to meet up with the others, who dispersed after supper bickering at each other, Manny suggests something. Apparently the Jewel is bothering him, he says, and he can't wear it much longer without endangering his health. He claims that prolonged exposure to it is dangerous. How lovely. So he asks me to hold it for a while. I can tell he is trying to pretend he doesn't trust me with it. I agree, saying that at least this way it isn't where it is expected to be, and therefore safer.

Not that I believe it is the real Jewel to start with.
But anyway. On the road again.

We walk up the great long stairway from Rebma to Amber. It takes all day, and I get to listen to the lot of them bitch and bitch. I especially find the little girl Mary to be a right pain in the rear. I'm so tempted to kick her ass, but it is so not worth the effort.

Finally we get there, and Leo is brought forth. He looks truly pathetic. I let him know that I accept he told the truth. He seems to think this clears up everything, but it doesn't. He is presented with our same Hobson's choice. Like the others he tries to squirm out of it; to lawyer and nitpick. And like the others, in the end he too is sworn. He is then allowed to clean up and prepare to leave.

In the meantime, I duck away from the others. I decide that I need to examine this jewel Manny gave to me. After a few moments in my room I look deep into it, and have my suspicions confirmed. It's only a jewel. Nothing particularly special about it. I suspect that Manny somehow copied the stone he was given, as I doubt he gave me his 'real' stone. But that would only make this, if my guess is right, a copy of a copy.

I just grab a change of clothes, and I'm off with the gang again. My ship still hasn't returned to Amber harbor, so it looks like either walking or horseback.

"Well I'm so tired of cryin' but I'm out on the road again
I'm on the road again.

...And I'm going to leave the city, got to go away.

I'm going to leave the city, got to go away.

All this fussing and fighting, man I sure can't stay."

- *On the Road Again*

Katie Melua

15 February 1566

Well, it seems we've finally reached the place called Texaramie. I've been watching for everything the past few weeks, but nothing has happened. Manny keeps asking me if I feel alright, continuing the farce that I am carrying the jewel. I just go along with him for now. The fact that nothing has happened just increases my sense that we don't really have the real jewel.

Texaramie seems an odd place, full of light and shadows. Technology I am unfamiliar with. A stark place. Random is in a jazz club. He's sitting in the back, drinking and playing cards. He dismisses everyone else around when we approach, and Manny acts all 'secret agent' when he finally hands over the 'jewel'. A jewel he was carrying, mind, not the one he gave to me. I say nothing.

Of course nothing can happen without a hitch. Just then, the club is full of gunfire as a bunch charge in. I don't know who they are or who sent them; Caine, Chaos, or someone completely else. I just fall in as a guard on Random. Real jewel or not, he's the most valuable person here. Manny briefly tries to get me to leave with him, but that won't happen.

I cut through a couple with knives, but then recover one of their firearms. It has a hell of a kick! It shoots many bullets amazingly fast. I like it!

Eventually we fight our way clear, and any thugs that survive take off. Random nods and Trumps away. I'm left wondering what really just happened. Was the jewel real? Was that really Random? Did we just screw up?



Kate Beckinsale in The Aviator

But nothing immediately develops to make me think we've immediately screwed up. And the lot of us starts making our slow way back towards Rebma. Manny tries to be friendly with me, saying I ought to deliver my jewel to Random ASAP, as I had it. I throw the damn copy back in his face. I know it for what it is. And the fact that he brought that up means HE didn't give Random the 'real' jewel either. Great. He betrayed us. But at least I know he betrayed us. The others don't.

"You planned to leave me cold
But you'll never get your wish
On the 24th of May
I'll gather up your reins
You filled me with a vengeance
And you touched me with your breath
I'm gonna pull you from this dance"

- *The Revenge of Vera Gemini*
Blue Öyster Cult

20 February 1566

On the way back to Rebma I sidestep to find my ship. The others return their own ways, which is fine by me. I find my ship in a relatively unpopulated place. As it turns out the crew was taken in by Dermott, who disguised his appearance in order to imitate me. Whatever. The ship is in one piece and right now that is good enough. Out to sea again and heading home with a stiff wind at our backs.

“We are the sharks of the open sea,
 We are the scourge of the king’s navy,
 We are the hard and the wild and free,
 We are the sharks of the open sea.
 Hard is the rock where the breakers roll,
 Hard is the eye and the cannon cold,
 Hard is the fight for a merchant’s gold,
 And hard is the royal judge’s soul.
 Wild is the waves on the northern coast,
 Wild is a fur-assed horseman’s boast,
 Wild is a drunken captain’s toast,
 Wild is a pirate’s wandering ghost.
 Free to sail where’ere we may,
 Free to brawl in a bar room fray,
 Free to shout what we want to say,
 And free to hang on the reckoning day.”

- *Sharks of the Open Sea*
 Traditional

28 February 1566

Back in Amber at last. I’ve received no word from anyone, so I decide that I have nothing I must immediately do. Caine said he would call us when he needed us. And that isn’t now. I suppose I should keep my eye on Manny. He’s a troublemaker, and I’d love to take him down. But maybe tomorrow. Today I have one other thing to take care of.

I get one of the pages to bring me up a bottle of Julian’s favorite drink. And then I hike out to the encampment in Arden. I feel like I ought to check in and see if he’s still angry with me. I don’t care much, but it would be mighty inconvenient to have a mission screwed up because Julian holds a grudge.

We have a drink, and I am assured he was just making a point. After all, accidents happen. Both assured we didn’t take it personally, we down a few and I head back to the castle. Julian isn’t a real social fella. But at least that’s one dagger I won’t find in my back tonight.

“I hold no grudge
 There’s no resentment und’neath
 I’ll extend the laurel wreath and we’ll be friends
 But right there is where it ends”

- *I Hold No Grudge*
 Nina Simone

1 March 1566

Once again summoned down to Rebma by Caine, for the ‘postmortem’ on our first venture. It seemed he only waited for all of us to reach home. Caine is not amused. As soon as we are all settled, he calls Manny out. The ‘jewel’ Manny still carries ignites like Greek fire. So, as I expected it wasn’t real anyway.

Manny tries to rationalize the venture before Caine, that he couldn’t be sure it was really Random, and since the jewel wasn’t real it didn’t matter anyway. But Caine isn’t having it. He simply says that it didn’t matter whether the jewel was real, all that mattered was doing as we were told, which Manny didn’t. The rest of us are simply kept to watch

Manny’s agony as an object lesson. And Caine also reveals that Manny himself called in the one that attacked us; from his family in Chaos. So, a double betrayal. It doesn’t surprise me at all. I am perhaps the only one, excepting Caine, not surprised.

After, we are sent our separate ways, until we are called for again. I just make my way back to Amber with the others. I change and eat a meal that would shame a man twice my size. And then I retrieve my violin. Maybe if I settle myself on one of the balconies I’ll attract some pleasant company. Maybe Rein... Who knows.

“True, true confessions, I lied...
 ...True, true confessions, we tried...
 ...We’re never sorry, we’re never sad
 We’re modern lovers, what fun we had”

- *True Confessions*
 Blue Öyster Cult

20 March 1566

Amber didn’t seem to promise any adventure in the immediate future, so I decided to take care of some outstanding business. I grow more and more curious to learn who my parents might have truly been. When I asked Caine if he’d ever been to Castile, he didn’t seem to recognize the name had any significance. But then, he’s a spymaster.

Best I find out what I can for myself. And so I landed once again in the old port. They say you can’t go home again... And the place does somehow seem different. Smaller, perhaps.

A search of records recovered little. The old estate was owned by a ‘Don Fernando’. The name didn’t mean anything to me. There were no portraits. No proper heraldry either, just a record that everything used to be marked in sable and argent. The house itself had been empty and closed up for years. My old governess had died. Most everyone had moved on or passed away. So much had changed in a few decades.

The only remaining folk that remembered my parents were an elderly couple that served as groundskeepers. They didn’t recognize me; but I left when I was much younger, and I look rather different now, I suppose. They described my father as a tall, dark and dour man. Of my mother they had no clear memory. They only said that after the Don’s daughter disappeared, he dissipated the family fortune searching for her. And then the family too disappeared.

Tall and dour? Black and white? Julian??? No... can’t be. I also can’t believe they spent all that time searching in truth. I’ve learned that if an Amberite searches for something, they find it! So I take this story too with a grain of salt.

It’s sad here, and this place depresses me now. I only want to go back to Amber. I don’t regret leaving; I still would not agree to settle down as someone’s wife and mother... Even now. But would that have been what happened? Hard to say. But I can only operate with the information I have at the time. I did what I felt I had to do, just like now. No sense over thinking things.

“Oh all the money that ‘ere I spent,
I spent it in good company.
And all the harm that ‘ere I’ve done,
Alas, it was to none but me.
But all I’ve done for want of wit,
To memory now I can’t recall.
So fill to me the parting glass,
Goodnight, and joy be with you all.”

- *The Parting Glass*
Traditional

21 March 1566

I head back to the docks to set sail again. If I never see this place again, it’ll be too soon. But the ship is silent upon my return. Too silent. Boarding her, I find the ship completely deserted. Not a soul in sight. Below decks I understand. Every surface is coated in blood, like it was painted. No bodies, just blood. Gallons of blood. The scuppers are a glut with it. My son has left me a message.

And then the Trump contact arrives. What now? It is Caine. Vacation’s over. Time to work again.

Once again unto the breach. To Rebma. He offers his hand and I step through. I get a drink and prop my feet up on the table to wait while he summons the others. I’m in a rotten mood.

And it just gets better. This time he informs us that my son is seeking to forge an alliance with his grandsire, Blondie. And that Blondie, aka Dalt, is our target. We are to assassinate him, by whatever means necessary.

Of course Fred isn’t at all happy about being sent to kill his own father. And Dermott seems weird about it too... But then I remember that Dalt’s friend Red is Dermott’s father. Oh, this isn’t shaping up well.

As usual Caine doesn’t care, and leaves us to our own devices to figure out this situation. Aside from Fred’s pouting, the others seem unable to formulate anything like a plan. As for me, I know that plans never work as intended anyway. I suggest we separate and make our way to Kashfa individually on our own pretenses, as all of us arriving at once would be suspicious. I have a ready way to get into Dalt’s presence. Red owes me a favor for the whole kraken incident, and Dalt thought I was cute anyway... Like father like son, it occurs to me. Urgh.

Of course, Dermott immediately leaves. He doesn’t wait for any help, or plans, or even for me to finish my sentence. Impetuous beast. Tuesday departs for the Pattern to make a direct departure as well. But she’s a trained assassin, I’ve learned, and I’m less concerned with her. She’ll at least know how to lay low.

As for me, I intend to retrieve my ship and recrew it. I will sail in as appropriate for the captain that Red owes a favor too. Of course, I acknowledge that will likely take me a couple months. But hey, the idea is not to be suspicious.

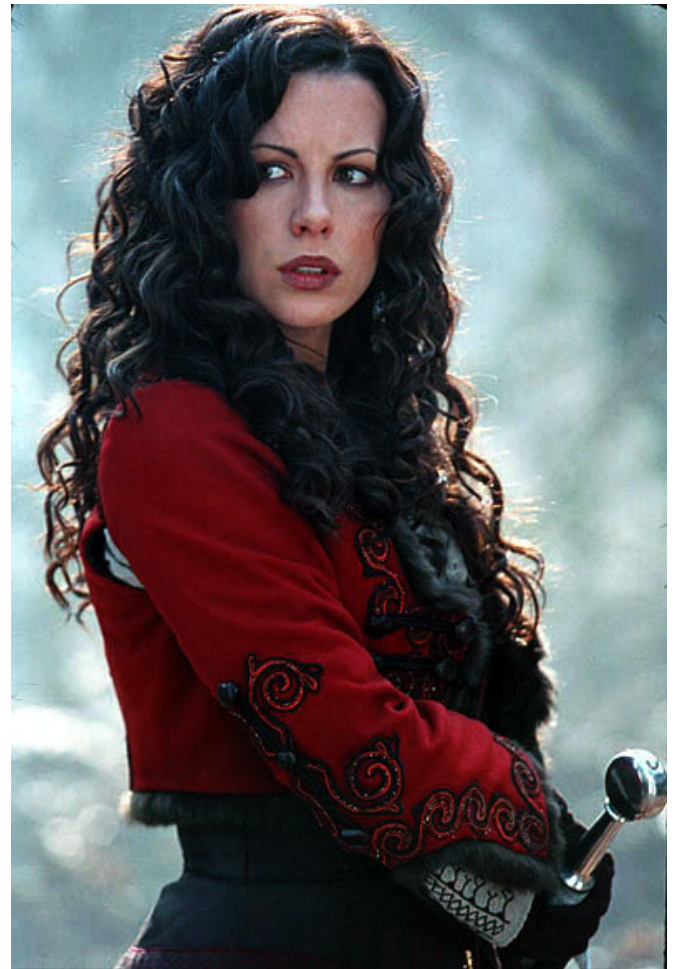
Mary, Fred and Leo seem less than enthused, but equally unable or unwilling to act on their own, so they follow in my wake. The one useful thing I get out of Fred is a few Trump cards; Dermott, Leo and himself.

I call Dermott immediately. I ought to let him know not to expect us. But as usual he thwarts me. I tell him I have to fetch

my ship, and he immediately agrees to do it for me, and hangs up. Damn it, Dermott! I call back and get a hold of him after some effort. I then tell him the point is to sail into Kashfa, and he agrees to leave the ship elsewhere. That’s about as good as it gets with him. And so Fred retrieves his horse, and the lot of us start to walk toward where my ship is...

“By a knight of ghosts and shadows,
I summoned am to tourney.
Ten leagues beyond the wide world’s end,
Me thinks it is no journey.”

- *Tom O’Bedlam*
Traditional



Kate Beckinsale in Van Helsing

29 March 1566

My ship is found in a shadow version of the Tortuga I remember from my raiding days. Not quite the same, but close enough I recognize the place. Not a bad spot for a ship like mine to be recrewed. But then I discover that Dermott ordered her here already crewed. And the rascals raided the place, kidnapping a large number of women and children apparently on his orders.

This I can’t tolerate. I don’t care if I have a crew of rascals ready to raid and plunder. My old crew was like that. But I won’t have a crew loyal to anyone other than me.

So I dig up enough cash to buy a fast little sloop and set out to intercept them. I know *Fleur Mare* is faster, but I hope that this new crew is less than familiar with all her virtues. And that my appearance should entice them to what would seem another easy target.

I am not wrong. When they pull up, they seem taken aback at my appearance, as if they almost expect me. But I don't let it slow me down. Before anyone says a word, I set about my grisly work. I dispatch every man, woman, and child aboard. I won't be bogged down with all the possible treacheries of a disloyal crew and unpredictable passengers.

The other three seem a bit dismayed; they expected I suppose to ride easy the rest of the way to Kashfa. But it is not so. I quickly put them to work, and with some direction we are able to get the ship going, albeit slowly.



painting "Glory of the Seas" by unknown artist

"“Captain, they cry, the fight is done,
They bid you send your sword."
And he answered, "Grapple her stern and bow.
They have asked for the steel.
They shall have it now;
Out cutlasses and board!"...
...They cleared the cruiser end to end,
From conning-tower to hold.
They fought as they fought in Nelson's fleet;
They were stripped to the waist,
they were bare to the feet,
As it was in the days of old.”

- *The Ballad of the Clampherdawn*
Rudyard Kipling

30 April 1566

My ship is recreated. And now it is official; none are left with me that knew *Fleur Mare* in the beginning. I had hoped that some of them might have lived to retire from my service, but such is not life at sea.

I have finally allowed Leo, Fred and Mary a lessening of shift work. They did earn it. Complaints and all. And this morning we neared unto Kashfa's shores. I found a quiet harbor outside the borders, just barely, and put the three ashore. I still want us to arrive separately to allay suspicion.

Besides, I fully expect those three to completely screw up. Hence my own plan... I haven't been complacent this past month. Aside from getting a hold of new crewmen, I've been

out picking up a few things I feel I may need. The others have of course been given their own shore time, but I've made sure they don't know what I'm up to. I doubt Fred would approve of my plans for our son.

When I have found a place suitably advanced, I track down a substance that will dissolve blood, thoroughly but slowly, like a disease. Whatever power spawned this demon, I would prefer he carried its doom back to it, rather than simply perishing on the spot.

In another spot I obtain a ring that can carry some portion of this blood-poison, covered in decoratively spiked bits that can convey the toxin by a scratch. Another place I get for myself a dagger than can carry it as well... 'Dagger of venom' I think they call it. Can't be too careful, after all.

Once I arrive in the city, I pull in and see Dermott, as flamboyant as ever, on the docks. He's apparently settled in here. He sees the ship, and that his crew is gone, and looks upset. But I ignore him, and head for the bar where I've met Red and Blondie before. I leave behind Caine's gift, that fancy knife. Nothing screams 'cabal' like all of us wearing matching accessories.

They aren't there now, so I settle myself at the bar, and order a drink, asking the barkeep how long it's been since he's seen them...

If I can get in with them, I can divert attention from the attempt on Blondie by making it seem the three stooges are an attempt on them sent by Julian. After all, what with the kraken, and Julian setting hellhounds after me because I killed it, the story is at least believable.

In that chaos, Tuesday or I may be able to take out Dalt all unexpected. And if the three stooges get themselves hurt, well, I didn't kill them... But one step at a time. I have to make contact first.

“Feeling easy on the outside
But not so funny on the inside
Feel the sound, pray for rain
For this is the night we ride
This ain't the Garden of Eden
There ain't no angels above
And things ain't like what they used to be
And this ain't the summer of love”

- *This Ain't The Summer Of Love*
Blue Öyster Cult

1 May 1566

Well, Red finally showed himself at the bar. As it was I had to leave a message with the barkeep that I wanted to talk to him, since I had no intention of sitting there all day and night for lord knows how long. He noticed me settled in the corner and joined me.

He was as cautiously courteous as usual. And so I began to put the plan in action. I told him the kraken was Julian's work. I told him Julian sent it for him and Dalt. And that my interference earned me a run-in with the hellhounds. I may have implied a bit more damage and animosity than truly exists, but nothing I said was untrue.

And then I started the yarn. That I know there's something more afoot. That I think a bunch of the cousins

have been set on him now. He seems to think it's unlike Julian, but I shrug that off. Overkill isn't unlike Julian at all; only using human (well, Amberite) agents. And maybe he's just finally decided that he has to change tactics seeing that previous attempts have been unsuccessful. And that having earned his ire, I would appreciate a place to lay low for a while as Amber isn't a friendly port at the moment. Again, like any good lie most of what I said was true, just skewed and a bit out of context.

Well, whether or not he believes me, I got myself an invitation to head back up to the castle with him. Which is as good as I could expect. Even if he suspects things aren't on the up and up, at least I'm one step closer to my target. Well targets, if what Caine implied about my son being here is true.

I'm given quarters, and invited to a dinner that evening. The dinner turns out to be formal, but not excessively large. I meet Red's wife Coral, who turns out to be quite pleased with herself. She shot Fred today, when he tried to barge into the castle uninvited. He's now crippled in the dungeon. I just smile approval there; I dislike Fred as well.

Tuesday has gotten herself into the castle, and invited to dinner. I note this silently, not really knowing her outside our 'arrangement' with Caine, I can't really acknowledge her. I learn that she is Coral's daughter, though not by Red! Apparently by some fellow Merlin that's recently been married and king of some other kingdom. Interesting. So Dermott isn't the only heir of Kashfa.

Of the others in our group there is no sign. But then, I didn't expect there to be. Especially now that I sold them down the river as a distraction.

Dalt ends up seated across the table from me. Other attendees include Red's mother Jasra, and some other nobles of Kashfa.

Tuesday seems to be trying to stay out of the spotlight. I can approve of that, so I try to be obliging. I don't speak with her hardly at all, other than polite formalities. I spend most of the evening flirting with all the other gents (other than Red) about, and generally being social and as much the center of attention as I usually become. Dalt I carefully don't pay too much attention to. He's the sort that loves attention, I gather, and nothing drives that sort crazier than not to be the center of attention.

Eventually, I ask Dalt for a conversation, say tomorrow? He leers and says he can arrange something. Uh-huh. He either thinks I'm hitting on him, or he suspects something. Either suits me fine. I'm not after him. Not yet. Besides, I think I'll leave that stroke to the master assassin. I want to have a word with my son, and I think his grandfather is the key here. The longer I draw this out without making a move, the less suspicious they are likely to become.

Other than that, it seems a perfectly enjoyable evening. I love it when a plan comes together...

"Masquerade! Paper faces on parade,
Masquerade! Hide your face,
So the world will never find you!
...Masquerade! Burning glances, turning heads,
Masquerade! Stop and stare
At the sea of smiles around you!
Masquerade! Seething shadows breathing lies,
Masquerade! You can fool

Any friend who ever knew you!"

- *Masquerade*
Phantom of the Opera

2 May 1566

Morning in Kashfa and Dermott shows up. In his annoying way, he lets me know exactly where he stands. Caine be damned, he has no intention of assisting in any way the death of Dalt. He makes vague open-ended threats of betraying us. He wants to know where I stand, and what I plan on doing about it.

But I've learned how to deal with him. I just shrug.

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" He doesn't seem to believe me.

"I came here because it *looks* like I'm doing what Caine wants. So he'll leave me be for a while. What *I* want is somewhere to lay low for a while. Julian is sort of pissed off at me right now. Amber isn't looking too friendly."

"Oh."

"Yeah."

"So you aren't going to kill Dalt?"

"Why would I want to do that? Caine can go to hell."

"Okay."

Dermott still doesn't seem convinced, but that really isn't my concern for the moment. Every moment I spend with him is like chewing on broken glass. I just want him to leave. He continues to hang on and blather for a few more minutes. Says something about charity matters, adopting Begman refugees, and a party at his estate in the city. Even gives me an invitation. But he finally leaves.

What he was really trying to accomplish I have no idea.

With evening's approach, however, I put Dermott's odd behavior behind me. I have other things to consider. Dinner has been arranged, in Dalt's quarters.

I wear the brocaded coat and sash I would wear on shipboard, with breeches and boots. I know that dresses and such fluff mean little to him, and I don't wish to give him any ideas of me as a fluffy flirt. Flirting with him isn't on my agenda. My purpose tonight is twofold. First, to see him on his own, and gauge his talents and reactions out of the public eye. Second, to determine if he's made contact with my son.

When I am shown in, I find him in a familiar posture. His feet are propped upon the table, and a drink is in his hand. He does not rise when I enter, just waving to another chair. I accept the seat with the same lazy disregard that he shows.

"So, what brings you to see me?" he asks. He seems to have no illusions that I'm here on purely a social call.

Fair enough. "I'm trying to get ahold of someone, whom I believe you may know."

He raises a sandy eyebrow. "Oh? And this person is?"

"A newcomer to the scene. Someone with a quite *sanguine* personality?"

He gives the faintest smirk. "And why do you want to get in touch with him?"

Him. So he does know him. Or at least it points that way. "Well, he went to *such* great lengths to get my attention, and then left no forwarding address. I figured he wanted to speak to me."

“When Samuel gets someone’s attention it generally means he wants them dead.”

Samuel? I that the name my son has chosen? It seems oddly fitting. I shrug. “Maybe. I have no idea. But if you could let him know I’m around...” Actually, I’m fairly sure he does want me dead. He has every reason to. But I can’t go back, only forward.

“Actually, he usually gets in touch with me, not I with him.”

“Ah, well.”

“But if I see him anytime soon, I’ll mention it.”

“Thank you.”

“Anything else? Or would you actually care to eat?”

The two of us tuck into supper with very little else said. We drink for a while, and I feel like I have to say something. This silence is just damn unnatural. It makes me paranoid.

“I just hope Samuel turns out better than his father.”

Dalt looks amused. “And he would be?”

“Your son Frederick.”

“Ah.”

I can’t tell if he already knew he was Samuel’s grandsire or not, but he doesn’t seem to care much about Frederick in any case. “Fred is just too brash.”

Dalt snorts. “I’m brash. Frederick is a *moron*. Even I would never be so stupid as to try and storm a castle single-handed. He deserves what he got.”

I laugh agreement. Though privately I wonder. I swear he did it on purpose. How more effectively to remove himself from this mission, without giving himself away? Although I am sure he thought he’d be arrested, not shot.

In any case I make a joke or two at Fred’s expense, down a few more drinks, and depart. I’ve learned a bit about Dalt, and my own son tonight. About as good as I could expect.

As I leave, I see Dermott, Tuesday, Leonardo and Mary (Melanie?) approaching the wing I am just leaving. Apparently going to see Dalt. Dermott greets me and tries to waylay me. But I really don’t want to hang about right now. I can’t stand him! I do manage to make some appointment to speak to Tuesday in a couple days. Lunch. She, being at least somewhat competent that I can gather, is worth collaborating with, unless Dermott has gotten her to bail on the mission as well. But somehow I doubt it.

But this all seems too funny. The stooges are running about just like I thought. They’ll draw the attention to themselves. I just hope Tuesday can manage to steer clear of it. A cruel sense of humor possesses me then. A few hours later I send Dalt a note. It says ‘My, getting crowded around here, ain’t it?’

“Meeting you, with a view to a kill,
Face to face, in secret places. Feel the chill...
Between the shades, assassination standing still.
...First time in years,
To drench your skin with lover's rosy stain.”

- *A View to a Kill*
Duran Duran

3 May 1566

I’ve come to the conclusion that this mission is gonna take a while. And one thing I’ve learned is you don’t leave sailors sitting around with nothing to do. The least bad thing I can think of is that they get in trouble and get themselves arrested. The other things that come to mind are worse.

So I spend the day making arrangements to keep them busy. I outfit the boat for a long sea voyage. Ostensibly, I set them out to hunt down a cargo of ambergris. A difficult commodity to obtain, and highly valuable. It ought to keep ‘em occupied for a while. I don’t care if they trade for it, steal it, or actually go a whalin’. As long as they don’t get themselves caught by the navy of Amber, as I’m still a retired officer thereof.

And the fact that this departure may give others the impression that I’ve left as well isn’t lost on me. All the better. I can lay low as well.

“All our times have come
Here but now they're gone
Seasons don't fear the reaper
Nor do the wind, the sun or the rain...
We can be like they are”
- (*Don't Fear*) *The Reaper*
Blue Öyster Cult

5 May 1566

I spent yesterday laying low and intend to spend today likewise. To try and spend too much time around Dalt would be suspicious. He might think I’m trying to crawl into his bed, or worse, that I’m up to something. Neither option appeals to me.

And I hear that Frederick has apparently been sprung from the dungeons by Melanie. With all the ruckus of an escape, I would prefer to keep the lowest profile possible.

Besides, before I move forward with any move against Dalt, I want to give him the chance to see Samuel. I want my son to know I’m not running from him. That I’m not afraid of him.

So I occupied myself in the library. I’m not usually much of one to poke around old paperwork, but I’ve got particulars I’m after. One is history on Dalt, of which I find a moderate amount. A few books I lay aside to read later. The other thing I’m looking for is heraldry. I want to know who around Amber and these parts uses sable and argent, if anyone.

I’ve decided I need to know where I fit in this mess of a ‘family’. I don’t have any nostalgic or naïve belief that my parents if I could find them, would give a damn. But it would make me feel better if I can assure myself that I won’t end up in bed with a brother. Cousins, or half-cousins, are bad enough. Lord forbid I actually catch the eye of my own father. Unlikely, but theoretically possible. The thought turns my stomach.

Digging around, I find that there are a few who use black & white. Julian, I knew. Also Deirdre, Corwin and Eric, who also tossed in red. All of them are (or were) black haired. Julian’s crest is that of a hawk, Eric’s was (as he is reportedly dead) crossed swords. Deirdre’s was a crescent, and Corwin’s

is... a rose. Hmm. DellaRosa. That is a bit too much of a coincidence, isn't it? Maybe I'll have to track down this Corwin fella once this is done with.

At any rate, I wrap up the day's work and grab the book that speaks most frankly of Dalt for reading tonight. Time to go back to my apartments and get something to eat.

Waiting in my sitting room is a surprise: a red-haired, red-eyed man, dressed all in red and wearing a ruby ring. There is no doubt to me. It is my son.

"Samuel." I say it levelly.

"Mother." He looks at me with such loathing. "You wanted to see me?"

I set down the book, and take a deep breath. I want to be upset with him. I want to be superior and snide. But I can't. My resolve fails as I look at him, and all I feel is remorse. "I..."

"Well?"

"I... wanted to know why you went to such lengths to get my attention." There, that wasn't a bad start!

"I want you to suffer."

His frankness shouldn't shock me, but it does anyhow. I know he hates me. I wanted to stand up to this terrorism he's leveling against me. But I can't.

I give a deep sigh.

Samuel just looks at me with contempt. He knows my resolve has crumbled.

"I wanted to be upset. To say how I made you strong. How I prepared you for your birthright."

"My birthright? You mean a world where no one gives a damn for you, and your family is your worst enemy? Yes, you did that quite well."

It hurts to hear him say it, but on the most basic level it was true. I splutter a second before I find my voice. "Uh, well, that is rather the truth." I wrap my arms around my waist. It suddenly seems cold here. "There were other things I meant to say but..."

"But they seem hollow now?" Samuel sneers. "Was there anything else, *Mother*?"

I can't look him in the eye. "Do as you will. God knows I deserve it. I can't change the past. I've reached a point in my life where I realize that, and that all I can do is try not to make the same mistakes again. I just hope you'll get over the adolescent vengeance someday."

"I'll let you know." He stands to leave.

"I'm sorry." I blurt it out suddenly, but he is already gone. He has disappeared in the blink of an eye. I don't even know if he heard me. I doubt it matters if he did.

I want to cry. I want to put my fist through a wall. In my frustration I remove the poison ring and hurl it into the fireplace, where I watch it shatter and melt in the flames. I really need to get drunk tonight. I head down to the kitchen to fetch a sandwich and a bottle. There I find Tuesday.

"Damn! We were supposed to have lunch, weren't we?"

Tuesday shrugs. "Doesn't matter."

"Well, I suppose we ought to compare notes."

She nods.

We talk in low tones, carefully avoiding saying anything the servants could overhear. She says that she can get into Dalt's presence easily in the guise of a servant. Turns out she is a skinchanger. Useful trick for an assassin I gather. I agree

to arrange another 'date' with Dalt to provide a distraction, and backup if needed.

"When blood sees blood

Of its own

It sings to see itself again

It sings to hear the voice it's known

It sings to recognize the face

One body split and passed along the line

From the shoulder to the hip

I know these bones as being mine

And the curving of the lip

And my question to you is:

How did this come to pass?

How did this one life fall so far and fast?

Some are lean and some with grace, and some without;

All tell the story that repeats

Of a child who had been left alone at birth

Left to fend and taught to fight

See his eyes and how they start with light

Getting colder as the pictures go

Did he carry his bad luck upon his back?

That bad luck we've all come to know

And my question to you is:

How did this come to pass?

How did this one life fall so far and fast?

When blood sees blood

Of its own

It sings to see itself again"

- *Blood Sings*

Susanne Vega

8 May 1566

Today is the day. Dalt has agreed to have lunch. Tuesday knows the particulars. I dress a bit differently than last time. I conspicuously don't wear my sword, only a small dagger tucked in my corset, under the ruffles of a lacy blouse. Where it won't be seen. A poisoned dagger, which I hope I have no need to use. I'm trying to maintain my innocence here in Kashfa.

The plan is for Tuesday to 'kidnap' Dalt and me, and Trump us elsewhere to finish Dalt off. She claims to have a way to incapacitate him. Fine by me. Neither of us wants a murder here in Kashfa. She's an heir to the throne, and I'd like to maintain this place as a safe haven, and stay 'friends' with Red and his court.

I show up at the appointed time, only to find I am not alone with Dalt. Damn it all! Dermott is here as well, and immediately begins to dominate conversation. He openly proclaims that there is a plot to assassinate Dalt. He hands Dalt a folded bit of parchment that he claims carries the names of all the conspirators. Himself included, of course.

Wonderful. I'm screwed. But what else could I expect. I respond the only way I can... "Him? I thought they were after Renaldo!" After all, I did offer that to Red as a reason to let me stay. That I thought Julian was after him, and definitely was after me...

Dermott shakes his head. He then reveals that the one behind it was Caine, of course. And that of course Dermott wants to help him avoid this assassination attempt.

“And why should I believe you want to help me?” Dalt replies to Dermott...

“Because if I leave here I’m as good as dead. Caine’ll kill me. At least if we protect each other we’ll be okay.”

Dalt seems to believe this readily enough. It’s plausible, mainly because it is true. Not that I can acknowledge that. I just sit in surprised silence. Luckily for me, Dalt hasn’t looked at the piece of paper yet.

Throughout this revelation, a servant has laid lunch, and departed. Tuesday? Probably. But at least she had the sense not to act with Dermott in the room.

A moment later, a letter arrives for Dermott. He seems quite surprised, but pleasantly so. Apparently Tuesday wishes to speak with him immediately regarding her marriage to a fellow named Despil? I am confused, but apparently Tuesday is the current regent or queen of Chaos as well as an heir of Kashfa. And this note sends Dermott scurrying out.

True or not, it seems Tuesday is determined to act now. As the maid re-enters to clear the table I take a breath to engage Dalt in conversation. I haven’t said why I wished to join him today yet, and I know he has turned his attention to me now. In truth I did have this much planned.

It’s quite elegant in its simplicity. I plan to tell him the truth about my son. To ask him for advice. I doubt, given Dalt’s history, that he will have any sympathy, but at least the tale itself may capture his attention long enough.

I don’t even get started however, when it all goes down. The ‘maid’ brushes Dalt’s arm with some sort of device in her sleeve, and he jerks as if hit by lightning. His arm hangs limp, but he is far from incapacitated. He leaps up, and slams his chair into the ‘maid’.

Things suddenly devolve into an all-out brawl, and I can see that Tuesday is in real trouble. Any mortal, I’m sure, would already be dead. Dalt is terribly strong. Nearly as strong as the Admiral by the looks of him. I slide from my seat carefully, trying to get out of the way. I can’t decide just yet if I should intervene. If I do, and the attempt fails, the entire mission is blown. But if I can tip the balance...

As furniture and dinner knives fly, I step back again. I see him throw Tuesday against the wall, and decide perhaps I must intervene. But then the ‘maid’ I thought was Tuesday changes. Not into the shape of the assassin, but into Caine! I am stunned and suddenly fearful. Have we screwed up so badly already that the boss himself has decided to intervene?

Dalt seems a bit surprised himself, but it doesn’t slow him down. More knives come out, but Dalt doesn’t falter. He backs Caine against a wall, and grabs him around the neck, with his supposedly incapacitated arm. They both seem oblivious to my presence.

Now is the opportune moment. My boss is being throttled to death by my attempted target. And my name is on the piece of paper Dermott passed to Dalt. If I don’t act now, I’m doomed anyway, regardless of the outcome.

I pull forth my bodice dagger, and move as quickly as I can. The poisoned blade finds his kidney without impediment. And Dalt once again twitches as if shocked.

After what seems like an eternity, his body begins to go limp. Unfortunately, at just that moment, Dermott returns. He

walks in bold as brass, and sees Dalt slump down. He is immediately wreathed in black flames as he gives an angry shout. Caine throws a knife at Dermott and moves to engage him. Well, Dermott brought his fate on himself.

As for me, all I can think of is to get the body out of here, and myself as well, as quickly as possible. As Dalt falls against me, I feel something cold in his belt pouch. Trumps! I don’t have any worthy of note, so I yank these free. I barely look at them, just cutting the deck to a random card. It shows a lakeside, somewhere I don’t recognize. Good enough. There I go, Dalt’s body in my arms.

When I arrive I quickly assess. No one is about; the place seems fairly remote. I then check Dalt. Some part of me expects him to spring up at any moment, and throttle me. But he is truly dead. A small relief.

Now what? I come to the conclusion I have some grisly work yet to do. I’ve learned that most of the family is wizards of some sort or other, so I can’t trust that the dead will stay dead, unless I take some drastic measures.

“What does it matter to ya,
When you’ve got a job to do you gotta do it well,
You gotta give the other fellow hell!”

- *Live & Let Die*

Paul McCartney & Wings

25 May 1566

It is done. I have disposed of Dalt as thoroughly as possible, and none shall ever know where. From that place I Trumped to, I moved quite a ways into Shadow. Dragging the corpse was quite a pain in the ass, but there was nothing for it. I acquired a small boat then, and piled him in it. The lakeshore became a bay, then open sea. I relocated my main operation to a deserted tropical island.

I beheaded him, and cut out his heart, in the manner of the Maya. I won’t have him brought back to life. His body I cut into pieces, and set out to sea, scattering it to sharks in a dozen Shadows. No body to resurrect.

His heart I cooked and ate. I don’t know what possessed me to do it, but I did. Perhaps some old superstition that one could gain the victim’s strength in such a way. Who knows, maybe its true? Magic is real enough out here. But at least I knew for certain that there was a part that could not be fished from the water and reassembled like Osiris.

That left his head, and his belongings. I supposed that Caine might want proof that Dalt was truly and finally dead, as my departure with his body was rather sudden. And I wished there to be no doubt. His belongings were really no proof, as they could be forged, or stolen. His head was good; no doubt there. But carrying around a severed head is a bit too obvious for my tastes.

But then I remembered the headhunters of Papua New Guinea. And so I shrunk his head.

Finally I cleaned up, packed, and set out to rendezvous with *Fleur Mare*. I disposed of Dalt’s belongings to the sea, other than his Trump deck, his medallion, and of course, his shrunken head. His Trumps seemed a useful enough addition to my own few. His head was proof for the boss. And his medallion...

Well, in younger days I might have considered it a trophy. But now... I wasn't so sure. I felt I had to keep it, but whether it was out of guilt or pride, I couldn't tell. Neither seemed a wise motive. But I couldn't bring myself to pitch it away.

And so I rejoined my crew, and set out back towards Amber.

"Those heathens you hang with down by the sea...
...if you're gonna dine with them cannibals
Sooner or later, darling, you're gonna get eaten"

- *Cannibal's Hymn*
Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds

27 May 1566

I stowed Dalt's medallion in a hidden compartment in my quarters. I still can't bring myself to get rid of the thing. His head is in my desk drawer, awaiting my rendezvous with the Boss. Caine's dagger is back in my belt; if he uses it to scry me, so be it. Let him know I'm heading back.

"For the last time he felt the light
And gave up his last fight
Oh baby don't it make you feel so bad
Dark clouds are over the street
After what I read, I can hardly feel my heart...
My heart beat"

- *Morning Final*
Blue Öyster Cult

29 May 1566

Amber harbor was a welcome sight. I let the crew go about their business dispensing with cargo from their time abroad while I go check in on things. Leo is apparently back in Amber, trying to avoid notice. Of Frederick and Melanie I hear nothing. Nor anything of Tuesday.

Not that I expected to hear of Tuesday. I'm sure she made her own most prompt departure. But I know all too well that we'll have to face the boss, probably sooner rather than later. And it never helps to try and avoid a problem.

Having no way of getting hold of Caine myself directly, I simply settle myself back into my quarters in the castle and wait. I'm sure he'll contact me, eventually. I decide to wash up and change. Been on shipboard, and before that out in the wilds, for a few weeks.

Brushing out my hair in the mirror, I notice that the dye has faded. But oddly enough, the grey hasn't started showing through. When I wash, I go ahead and scrub out the dye, and consider what color to make it next. Another glance in the mirror, however, ends that speculation. My hair is as rich and black as it was when I was twenty. No grey? What the hell? Must be something about Amber... I suppose I'll leave it for now.

After that, I review my situation. Dermott's Trump is still cold, so I presume he's still alive. And thusly he's gonna want to kill me. And hey... Do I have a Trump of Caine now? I sift through Dalt's Trump Deck. What d'ya know? I do.

So I try to call the Boss. I feel that odd mental stretch settle into place.

Catarena's Journal #2 – Agents of Fortune

"Catarena." Caine actually seems the slightest bit surprised.

I give him a nod. "Job's done."

"Excellent. I presume you have proof?"

"Yes."

He nods.

"Where and when?" I may as well get this over with.

"Bloody Bill's, lunchtime?"

"Fine."

"And did any of your companions die?"

"No."

"Did any others take part?"

I consider for a moment. "Sorta."

He raises an eyebrow. "Well, this ought to be an interesting story."

I shrug, and break the contact.

When I show up, it's still early, so I take the familiar corner table. I order a bottle of Bayle's Piss. It amuses me, and isn't bad after all. And I wait. Before long a disheveled Tuesday wanders down from the rooms above. She looks like hell, and smells worse. I can't credit her with the sort of bender it would take to do that to a person, but the evidence seems quite plain...

"Hey."

"You need a bath."

"Yeah. So, did we get him?"

"Yup... Where were you?"

"I was the maid."

"Caine was the maid."

"That was me."

"It was?"

She giggles a bit. And then she does a quick shift, mirroring my face, before she returns to herself.

"I see."

"You really thought that was Caine?"

"Yeah." I ruffle my hair sheepishly.

"Anyway, we got him, right?"

"Yes. If you were there, don't you remember?"

"The memory is a bit fuzzy."

I shrug.

"So should we head down to Rebma?"

"Na." I shake my head. "Boss is coming here. Assuming that was him I spoke to and not you."

"I don't think it was me. When's he supposed to arrive?"

"Anytime now. So, wait and see."

Sure enough, Caine swaggers in a few minutes later. He joins our table without a word.

He looks at Tuesday. "Well, you've had a *very* good time, by the looks of things."

"I don't honestly remember."

"Those are the best." He turns to me. "You have it?"

I slide a small leather pouch across the table to him with a nod.

"Been to the South Sea Islands, I see?" he comments, regarding the contents.

"It seemed less obvious."

"Creative. I like it. So the two of you took care of things?"

I nod.

"Did Dermott betray you as anticipated?"

"Yup."

“And the rest?”

“The stooges ran about like chickens with their heads cut off.”

“They... were at least good for a distraction,” confirms Tuesday.

“Frederick managed to get himself eliminated from the game. Got himself shot,” I add.

“Possibly the smarted thing he could have done, given the circumstances,” Caine chuckles.

“I’m fairly sure he thought he would be arrested, but he seems to have forgotten whom he’s pissed off where.” I snort.

“He never was the brightest bulb. But the two of you have earned yourselves a bit of a vacation, I think.” Caine then passes a scroll to Tuesday.

She unrolls it and starts to read. “Adoption papers?”

“Yes, I’ve arranged for you to be formally adopted by the Royal Family of Amber.”

“Why would I want that?”

Caine rolls his eyes. “Well, as Random’s adopted daughter, *he* would be the one to decide whom you marry... Unless you *want* to marry Despil?”

“Uhm, no. I’ll take it.” Tuesday quickly stows the papers.

I snicker. “Heir to *three* kingdoms now?”

“Hardly. Martin has the privilege of being heir to Amber.” Caine dismisses the idea flippantly.

I just shrug. Tuesday seems both flustered and relieved. I suppose I can’t blame her. Being cornered into a political marriage is one of the hallmarks of being in Hell in my eyes too.

Caine then turns his dark eyes to me. “I have no such particular reward for you...”

I just shrug. “Something will come up eventually.” *Just don’t send me to kill my son.* I think it silently, as close as perhaps I’ve ever come to a prayer.

He nods. It seems accepted that I’ll call in a favor at some point. And so we tuck into lunch. Tuesday soon leaves to clean up. And I am left with ‘uncle’ Caine. Surprisingly, he doesn’t immediately depart, as he has from past meetings. Another couple bottles appear at the table.

He doesn’t say anything, but merely regards me for a while. As the drinks are poured he has an air of satisfaction. His attitude isn’t one that hints at another assignment, which eases me; it seems he’s serious about letting us have our vacation.

I realize after a time that it’s more like the air of a fellow on shore leave after a campaign. I suppose it isn’t so easy for me to recognize, since I rarely fraternized with my own men. It seemed to dampen their spirits to have their captain, and a woman to boot, hanging with them. The only times I felt that camaraderie was with fellow captains, which was rare enough. But this wasn’t quite that.

Eventually, when it became obvious that whatever he was waiting for wasn’t going to happen here, he pulls himself out of his chair, and nods to the door. The gesture is unexpected; I am invited to follow.

My surprise is quickly redoubled. Its obvious he’s headed for another bar. I recognize a man looking for a party when I see one. What I can’t anticipate was whom he chooses to party with. A quick couple of Trump calls brings first Admiral Gérard, and then Julian to join us. Julian?

The three of them have an easy way together, and it suddenly clicked. These three were brothers. Full-blooded brothers. I’d come across it in my recent reading, but I hadn’t thought of it before.

Why I was being included in their party I don’t know, but I’m not going to complain. None of them seem to mind my presence, and none of them have any air about them that would make me suspect they were gonna hit on me. But then, being ‘uncles’ that’s for the best. I like a good party as much as anyone. The four of us settle into another bar.

“So, what’s the occasion?” Gérard asks.

“Indeed?” Julian raises an eyebrow.

Caine just slides a familiar pouch across the table.

“Well, well.” Julian smirks as he sees its contents.

“And how did this come about?” Gérard inquires.

“Ask her,” is Caine’s bland reply.

Eyebrows raise, and even dour Julian grins. “Really.”

Caine nods. I shrug, and down a shot.

“Definitely an occasion.” Gérard toasts.

Time drifts by, and the four of us drift as well, from bar to bar, for a while. I can tell we are getting further and further from Amber proper, but I don’t much care. The company is surprisingly pleasant. They don’t actually ask anything at all about Dalt’s demise. It seems understood that it is a thing that will never be spoken of. But that somehow, I’ve passed some unspoken test.

I get a feeling I haven’t had in years; that these three have somehow taken me under their wing. I am reminded of all those years ago, when I first went out to sea. When the older sailors would ‘show me around’. Of course, back then I disguised myself as a boy... Now, it just didn’t seem to matter.

We dice, we play cards, and we drink quite a lot. I lose more often than I win, but that’s alright. In time even Julian becomes somewhat gregarious. The jokes fly, mostly at my expense. I’m the ‘kid’, in the company of my elders. But I don’t care. I can laugh too.

I find myself eventually itching for a lay, but in present company disinclined to follow up on the feeling. After a while I catch myself staring at a piece of ass that wanders into the bar, and shake my head, turning my attention to our card game again.

“Now I know that our Cat isn’t shy,” chuckles Gérard. Of all of us, he seems the least tipsy, though he’s downed as much as any of us.

“I suppose our game is more interesting?” queries Julian. He’s got a drunken look to him, but he’s not retiring for the evening yet, I can tell.

Ah well, they noticed my notice. I just shrug it off. At least they don’t have some strange double standard. “Meh.” I know I’m in my cups by now, and a strangely perverse humor possesses me. “Surrounded by such *paragons* of manly virtue, nothing else can quite compete.” I say it with a sneer.

Caine gives a guffaw. Like me, I can tell he’s feeling the alcohol, but he isn’t as far gone as Julian. “Not shy. Just spooked ever since she got knocked up by her cousin.” He says it in a falsely confidential whisper everyone at the table can hear with perfect clarity.

The sudden silence that descends on the table threatens to kill the good mood we’d been enjoying until now. The booze sits like a brick in my stomach. But then Caine gives a hiccup,

and I toss back another shot, determined to ignore him. The other two chuckle weakly, as if it is all a joke.

He's right though, I think to myself. I haven't taken a man to my bed since then.

After a few more hours the card game concludes, Caine wanders off with a wench, and Gérard too attaches himself to a woman. I head to the bar for another bottle, only to find a thoroughly sloshed Julian at my elbow.

He regards me oddly, with those blue eyes of his. "Don't fret about it, Cat."

I just stare dumbly at him.

"No *shadow* man could get you with a child. It takes stronger blood than that. Scratch your itch... we all do." He takes my shoulder and practically shoves me in the direction of a gaggle of fellows recently settled at the bar. And with that he departs.

"I took off for a weekend last month
Just to try and recall the whole year.
All of the faces and all of the places,
wonderin' where they all disappeared.
I didn't ponder the question too long;
I was hungry and went out for a bite.
Ran into a chum with a bottle of rum,
and we wound up drinkin' all night."

- *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes*
Jimmy Buffett