

Girl of the Night

by Brittany Vandegraft

There are many out there who can claim that they know the night. Yet, spending one night in the clutches of the shining ones would teach anyone that they truly have much to learn. It was among these true night dwellers' camps that a young spirited child came to be. She was a fair girl of olive skin and raven hair, curled to its roots. Her eyes sparkled emerald yet turned to gold and brown tones depending on her mood. However, it was her voice that gained her notoriety. Alexia Edana loved to sing. From the moment she awoke to find her blue sash, to the time she took off her bells and tambourine, she was always with a song in her mind and heart. And when the fires were lit in the caravans she was the first one there and the last to leave.

Lexi, as she was known, spent her time not only learning her songs, but learning many other tricks of the trade as well. If one knew her well enough, they would also see that she is also skilled in the arts of manipulation, seduction, and intrigue. One of the fortune tellers even saw fit to teach her divination, which led to her learning to draw what she divined. Still, Lexi found her life to be dull if she was not constantly meeting someone new or making a new deal. In fact, once she left that first caravan she never stayed with one for longer than a few months in many years. She jumped from troupe to troupe, absorbing the culture they had come across in their travels until picking a new direction. Dreams of being part of the wind, though, do not last when you cannot fly.

Even the greatest of wanderers becomes ensnared. The young man who captured this lady's heart was called Keagen. He was a gypsy boy, born and free. A member of a troupe called the Travellers, he earned his keep by challenging those they met in travel to fist matches and swindling them for gold. At first, Lexi was rather put off by him. What could any man possibly have to offer her in the ways of the heart? Love was not real- it was manufactured and calculated by her laugh or her eyes until men would do anything she asked for a mere brush of her lips. Keagen was different.

The Travellers were teaching Lexi many new things - crystal ball, throwing dagger, energy work- as she began to see Keagen as someone different. His mother was her regular mentor so she would see him often. Each time, he would tease her, tickle her, or smother her when he was sweaty from a match. Yet there she would be at his tent at night, bandaging his bloody knuckles when he refused the healers or stitching a shirt he'd ripped countless times. Keagen had tied her heart to his before she even realized the way she smiled at the mention of his name or her pulse quickened when he picked up a drum to accompany a song. By the time she realized it, it was too late. The raven-haired girl had become a woman, and that simple gypsy boy had shown her the way. Fate would not find them waking in the tent each morning together, though.

Due to business Lexi knew she had to make it seem as though her heart and body were for sale. She and Keagen had to keep their love a secret and suddenly all of those lessons in intrigue and shadow dancing became much more real. It was one thing to control or fool a stranger. It was much another to try it on

the few people you trusted, particularly when they were more skilled in those ways than you. This lesson became very clear to her, though, when she stumbled upon Keagen and a bar wench after a tavern performance. Lexi tried to rationalize it, but ultimately had to face the facts. My how the mighty had fallen; Lexi was being used. The seductress had ignored all of the signs- blinded by love. But that was fine by her. Lexi knew this game better than any other.

Her true manipulation, the very nature that only pain could teach, would never be sharpened on Keagen, however. The next night the wench's family attacked the caravan. Apparently, no one had ever told them of gypsy hospitality, and the item that had gone missing from the girl's hand had turned up in Keagen's tent. To hurt him, Lexi was seized- raped and beaten- but never did her defiant nature break. Still, Keagen and his troupe never claimed her. And the songs in Lexi's heart that night cried out with the deepest mourning as she stumbled among the remains of the troupe to find Keagen's head on a pike next to his mother's.

To this day it is unclear what happened next. The only fact that can be discerned is that she was found- drawn in by a song- at the door of the great Squire Maggie Onishi O'Conner, covered in bruises, mud and crimson. Perhaps it was time to take a break from wandering.

The End