

# To Augur the Future

a *Carnival Row* fanfic

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for *lunabee34*

OUTSIDE, THE SUN was shining. Bees were flying from flower to flower, the birds were singing and the fresh new green on the trees looked lush and tempting. Young Piety LeCornus was not outside, unfortunately, no matter how much she wished she was. Her mother had other ideas, and Piety hadn't been able to convince her. Maybe she could have managed it if she hadn't ruined one of her better dresses last week, when she'd fallen into a puddle. Piety hadn't cared much for the light blue silk and her father had shrugged it off with his customary indifference, but her mother had been furious.

"Piety," she had told her that evening. "One day, you will be a young lady, one of the finest in all of Mesogea. You are nine now. It is high time you learned what that meant."

For the past week, she had met tutor after tutor. One for embroidery, another to teach her how to dance. One for the harp and one for manners. And that was in addition to the tutors she shared with her brothers, who kept snickering at how much she had to learn. Today, she was to meet the last, the one her mother had been cagiest about. A month ago, she would have been curious, but now all Piety could do was scowl at the window and listen to her brothers' distant peals of laughter.

"Lady Piety, it is time," one of the servants called, and with a huff she stood up and turned her back to the window.

Down in the drawing room, Piety's mother stood with the queerest looking woman the little girl had ever seen. Her hair was white, there were strange lines painted on her face and her large headdress was adorned with pearls and feathers. For a moment, Piety just stared.

"Come here, Piety," her mother said, and Piety obeyed. It wasn't as if she had another choice; Piety's mother didn't suffer disobedience any more than she did

filthy dresses. She wished she had another choice, though. The woman looked more like a scary witch the longer Piety looked at her. That impression didn't change when Piety came to a halt before her mother and the woman, and the woman smiled.

"This is Aoife Tsigani," her mother explained with a wave. "She has served my family since my grandmother's day. When my mother was a young girl, she taught her, and when I was a young girl, she taught me. And now she will teach you."

"Teach me what?" Piety asked before she could stop herself. Her mother frowned at her impudence, but the woman just smiled.

"Secrets, little Piety," the woman said. "Things your other tutors don't know and have never heard of. Things they fear. Things that will be more useful to you than embroidery and pretty manners, when the time comes."

A shiver ran down Piety's spine. She wanted to know more, but now it was time for her to wait patiently as her mother and the woman talked over the particulars of their arrangement. Piety was to visit the woman for one afternoon a week. And when the woman turned to leave, Piety saw the white, veiny dragonfly wings on her back. Aoife Tsigani was a fae, and Piety had more questions than she knew what to do with. Asking her mother was never an option.



As it turned out, asking Aoife was very much an option. She was patient where Piety's mother was not, and would take time out of her day every Gullsdag to answer any and all questions that Piety had, no matter how stupid they seemed. Piety would leave for Aoife's shop after lunch and a driver would take her to the little critch quarter east of the city centre that was full of colourful little shops and men with hooves instead of feet. Piety had never seen anything like it, and her brothers would ask her question after question whenever she returned from her sojourns, but since they had been so mean about her having so many tutors, and since Aoife was just teaching her, not them, Piety took pleasure in refusing to answer all of them. This was her secret, and she loved keeping it.

"Are you a witch?" she asked Aoife the first time Piety sat in the back of her little shop full of herbs and mummified chicken feet and odds and ends, sipping on rosehip tea.

Aoife hummed in thought. "That depends on what a witch is, I think."

“The Martyr teaches us that witches are women who use the powers of evil to their advantage and who curse those they don’t like,” Piety recited.

“Ah, but what are the powers of evil, little Piety? Have your tutors taught you that?”

Piety frowned and studied her tea while Aoife snipped the heads off dried flowers and put them into a bowl.

“Well, they’re just evil, I think. They are against the light of God and the Martyr,” she finally said.

“That is a very simplistic way of viewing things, isn’t it? Very black and white, with some grey in the middle at best. In truth, the world is made of colours. There are white and black and red and yellow. There are things that are evil and things that don’t follow your God’s plan, and those two things are not the same.”

“So you *are* a witch,” Piety concluded.

Aoife laughed. “What I am is a haruspex, child. You could call me witch, and plenty of fae do, but we have different ideas of how the world works. There are things that are light and things that are dark, just as there are things that are good and things that are evil. But not all light things are good, and not all dark things are evil. And a haruspex uses magic, darker magic, I admit, to see the future and change the present. We are not good, but we are not evil either.”

“Will you teach me magic? Is that why I am here?”

“That will depend, my child, on whether you have the aptitude for it. Your grandmother did. Your mother did not.”

That didn’t surprise Piety in the least. She barely remembered her grandmother, but she had been more fun in that short span of time than her mother had been Piety’s entire life. Still, the haruspex didn’t teach her magic for weeks. Instead, she told Piety about the future and prophecies and that even the most powerful of witches could only do so much; that even witches were bound by the rules of gods and men. Piety only half-listened to those lectures, dreaming instead of the day when she could turn her brothers’ hair blue.



Piety watched from behind the counter as the haruspex carefully opened the gut of a hare with her small, curved ceremonial knife. On the other side of the counter stood a middle-aged fae that was probably older than Piety’s grandmother

had ever been and rubbed his hands. He had asked his question, and Aoife was looking for the answer in the intestines of his sacrifice. Piety tried to follow her movements and thoughts, but she had no patience for divination, no matter how hard she tried. It rankled her to be as untalented as her mother. She could tell the small and large intestine apart, and there were the pancreas and the stomach, but what secrets they held in regards to the future was a mystery to her. And then there was the liver. The repository of secrets. Piety could read those sometimes, not that dogs and cats had many of those. Ravens were easier, but it was a frustratingly inexact science. “An art,” the haruspex had corrected her when Piety had mentioned it.

“The answer is yes,” Aoife finally concluded. “You should invest in your friend’s business.”

The middle-aged fae nodded in gratitude and put a few copper coins on the counter before he unfolded the unwieldy box he had brought with him. Piety watched as he produced a camera and looked at her tutor in question.

“Part of his payment,” Aoife told her. “I wanted to have a little memento of our time together.”

Piety shrugged. She stood still as best she could when the fae took a photo of them, and patiently waited until he was gone to ask the question she’d been wanting to ask all afternoon.

“Why are you teaching me but not my brothers, Aoife?”

The haruspex raised an eyebrow and chuckled. The slight movement made the fringes of her headdress dance.

“I was wondering when you’d ask me that question.”

“So, what is the answer?”

Aoife went back to the counter and proceeded to gut the hare, then went on to skin it. “How much have your tutors taught you about my kind?”

“Not a lot,” Piety admitted. “They say you’re heathens and heretics.”

“Naturally. But I have taught you that the truth is never that simple. Your world is ruled by men, my dear. And men feel threatened by what they do not understand, and even more by women that hold power. And my world is ruled by women. We have queens and priestesses and haruspexes. It is women who hold the secrets of life and death. Why would I teach your brothers? One day they will be men who shun the arts of women.”

“So they can’t learn what I’m learning?”

“Who knows?” Aoife replied with a shrug. “What I do know is that they won’t. Now tell me, could you see anything in the hare’s gut?”

Piety shook her head.

“Not even on the small intestine?”

Piety shook her head again.

The haruspex sighed. “A dead end, then. But there are other things I can teach you. Having no talent for prophecy doesn’t mean you have no magical talents whatsoever.”



“Why does this spell need salt and seeds?” Piety asked her mentor. Aoife looked at the book the girl was studying. The annotations weren’t in any of the languages of men, but most of the meaning was conveyed through illustrations.

“Have you studied the others as well?”

Piety nodded.

“And you didn’t notice a pattern?”

Piety frowned. Salt was a very common component to spells. Seeds were rarer. More often than not, spells called for blood or flesh. But this was a fertility spell. The seeds made sense, she supposed.

“I know why it needs seeds. But why salt?”

“One of the basic principles of magic, dear. There is power in the joining of unlike things.”

“But salt is a condiment, just like caraway.”

Aoife chuckled. “This is about something more fundamental than what humans do with it. Seeds represent life. And salt represents that which does not live. When joined, they do not cancel each other out, but instead, the salt enhances the power of the seed.”

Piety nodded, and started studying the recipes at the beginning of the book again. Now that she knew what to look for, she noticed the pattern, but as she pondered the original principle, she thought about what other things this principle of magic might apply to. Man and woman, night and day – like an eclipse – man and fae.

“So half-bloods are powerful?” she asked, having trouble wrapping her mind

around that. Half-bloods weren't fae. They weren't men. And both peoples considered them to be part of the other.

Aoife nodded, and smiled when she saw Piety's disbelieving eyes.

"Maybe not in the ways you imagine, child. But there is power in the joining of unlike things. Few half-bloods live for long, the joining not being complete, but those that do, yes, there is power in them and their blood."

Piety still couldn't quite believe it, but she believed in Aoife. If she said that half-bloods were powerful, then they were. Even if Piety couldn't understand how.

"Now, let me tell you a story about the joining of unlike things," Aoife began. Piety sat up straight and listened with bated breath to the tales of a creature made for vengeance.



The Burgue was not home yet, but it was the city where Piety chose to make hers. She no longer wanted to stay with her brothers and father, who lived in a world of men. In the Burgue, women had more of a voice than they did in Ava Leone, even if they were still a far cry from the nations of Tirnanoc. But if she wanted to stay, she needed to find a husband. Her father would never condone it otherwise. And he'd never agree to her marrying an ordinary man either. Thus she called for the only person who could help her. Aoife looked the same as always, and she smiled when she saw Piety and hugged her close. It was strange, how such a fae could be closer to her than her own mother.

"You need my advice, my dear?" Aoife asked when Piety led her into the drawing room of her rented home.

"How do you know?"

Aoife sent her an all-knowing smile. Of course. Aoife always knew.

"There are two men," she told her. "Both are promising, and I need to find something that will convince my father to let me marry one of them. I know Mother brought you to him sometimes, and that he listened to you when it was important. I want you to look at both their futures and tell me who I should choose."

Aoife sighed and shook her head slightly. "You know that relying too much on prophecy is a dangerous thing. Do you truly want to choose a husband based on one? You could always do what others do and choose the one you like better."

Piety thought of Ritter. He cut an impressive figure in his suit, and his eyes twinkled whenever he looked at her. But he wasn't as crafty as pudgy Absalom, nor did he like fae. Both were ambitious, and that had been what had drawn Piety to them in the first place, what had made her entertain their attempts at a courtship, but should she really choose the one who looked better, when looks were as fleeting as spring? She shook her head.

"I want to know, Aoife."

"Very well, then," the haruspex said. And together, they went to Mount Carpe, where Piety got her prophecy, the prophecy that would guide her steps for the rest of her life.



A son. The thought wouldn't leave her alone. Absalom had a son. A half-blood. And that made it just that much worse. Who would be the man who would become an even greater man than the Chancellor of The Burgue? Everyone else would say it would be Jonah, of course, even if he didn't share the blood of the man he called father. Jonah had the education, the name and the right blood. The other one was just a half-blood, doomed to live half a life, either hiding himself or being hated by everyone. A man who could never be great. But Piety knew better. She knew there was power in the joining of unlike things, and she knew that Jonah had yet to display even the smallest hint of greatness. He was unlike his father – both of them, in fact – a wastrel with no ambition. Something needed to change. Piety had to do something. But there was little that could be done. She didn't even know the man's name.

It was late one sleepless night while Piety waited to hear the steps of her son on the staircase beyond her bedroom when the idea came to her. A story about darkness that Aoife had told her once, about the darkest magic a haruspex knew. A story about the joining of unlike things, of giving life to dead flesh. She had never told Piety how it was done exactly, but Piety knew enough about magic to have an idea. She would give blood, sweat and pain to birth an abomination few in the Burgue had ever heard of. And she'd make her son into the greatest man there ever was, whether he wanted it or not. She had given too much to give up now.