



I PUT A SPELL ON YOU

...Tess lay in the bathtub, one smooth leg dangling over the rim, the other bent at the knee. The water lapped at her nipples. Those big blue eyes of hers were closed. Her lips parted and her neck arched backward as she moaned, just a little.

His heart drummed in his chest, mouth parched as he tried to swallow, his eyes glued to the image reflected in the mirror. One of her hands rose from the water to pluck at her nipples. His own hand crept down to the bulge in his slacks. He timed his strokes to synchronize with hers. His balls tightened, blood racing to his thickened cock.

She bucked once, twice, lifting out of the tub enough for him to see the glorious wet blonde curls between her legs, her hand parting the slippery folds with deft fingers. He unzipped his pants, pulled out his cock, and rubbed the glistening head, spreading the seeping pre-come over his shaft as a lubricant.

He pistoned himself in his hand, wishing it was her pussy grasping him tight. He'd lick her sweet juice until she begged for him to fuck her. He tried to suppress a groan, balls aching for release. His eyes closed, and he clenched his jaw muscles. No. Not here. He squeezed his rod until it hurt.

She couldn't know he'd invaded her privacy. That he'd seen her pleasuring herself. He forced himself back in his slacks and carefully rezipped.

The sound of splashing broke the sensuous spell...

ALSO BY CASSANDRA CURTIS

Cup Of Fate

I PUT A SPELL ON YOU

BY

CASSANDRA CURTIS

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AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

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*To my sister Vi and my brother-in-law Jess,
you are my ideal readers.
Your continued support sustains my muse.*

*To my sisters Donna and Carol,
I've written a spellbinding hero just for you—cackle, cackle.*

*Dad, your words of encouragement still echo
in my heart and soul. Wish you were here to help me celebrate.*

*And finally, to my Mum,
I still have trouble saying rich witch.
But I'm working on it.*

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Beads of sweat rolled down Sebastian Matthews' wide forehead and over his neck and shoulders. Mornings were more humid here than in Connecticut. Something he hadn't remembered when he'd started his run.

He rounded the corner of Maple and Main, lifted his old U-Conn T-shirt over his head, and wiped his bare chest with the material. A car passed by and honked, the women inside giggling, whistling and waving like mad. Yeah, he still had "it"—that indefinable quality that caused women to turn and stare, or in this case—hoot and honk.

His looks and money could get him any woman he wanted. Except one. A single name crossed his mind...Tess Warner. Combative, opinionated, and shrewish, she had twisted him in knots. Why hadn't she fallen under his spell like the rest of feminine-kind?

All those hot summer days spent at Grandma and Grandpa Richter's as a teenager, watching her over the white picket fence, willing her to

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look his way. Nights so miserable he'd opened his bedroom window and pray for a cool breeze, on his knees, waiting to see if she'd open her window, too. Just so he could look at her—maybe talk to her.

She'd done her best to ignore him—when she wasn't zapping him with her barbed little tongue. Tess starred in each of his youthful, fevered dreams—a mere touch away from reality and nothing he could do about it but suffer. That big, black cat of hers would sit in the window sill, a feline smirk on his furry face. Damn cat always seemed to know what he was thinking. Around Tess, all his thoughts centered south.

He picked up his pace, jogged past the gas station, and glanced at his watch. Warner's Herb and Magick—with the “k”—Shop, should be open. He had hoped to see Tess before now—no, that was a lie. Part of him dreaded seeing her again. Afraid and excited—hell, scared to see her. What if she figured out what he'd done thirteen years ago? The whole family was a pack of witches!

But what if she wasn't angry? What if she'd missed him, too? Realized she had passed up something special with him? Oh man...he wished he could go back and make things right. Maybe Tess or her sister Mia had a potion for that.

Guilt rode him hard. He'd been a lonely, horny teen in love when he stole the recipe for that love spell and cast it. He'd snuck into old man Warner's workroom, found the red notebook with the formula he wanted, and copied it in a furious scribble onto his own pad. Then he'd gathered the necessary herbs from Mrs. Warner's garden on a full moon and cast his first love spell. The potion had worked all right—all the girls in town loved him. Just not the one he wanted—Tess. Somehow the plan to make her love him had backfired. She'd hated him more than ever.

A memory flashed through his mind. The last time he'd seen her, he'd playfully cornered her against his grandparent's shed out back and

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stolen a kiss. Tess had melted in his arms, opened her mouth under his insistent tongue, and returned his passion. But what had started out as teenage hormones and puppy love had threatened to turn more demanding. She'd slapped his face. He'd tried to apologize. Tried to make it up to her, but she'd avoided him.

Each year that passed, his visits to his mother's parents had become fewer, until more than a decade slipped away. His grandparents were gone now, but they'd left him their old, rambling Victorian house, nestled just outside the Catskill Mountains. He'd thought to sell it, but the minute he'd stepped inside the foyer, the weight of family, of history—sheer continuity—embraced him. He could start over, forget corporate law, put up his shingle and be a country lawyer. The idea held a certain appeal.

Then he'd glanced out the kitchen window and seen Tess in her parents' backyard. She bent, pulling the weeds that hid among the savory herbs.

God, he'd missed her. He admired the gently curved ass, hips, and lush breasts—such a sweet handful. All the old feelings rushed back. His heart hammered inside his chest. And that's when the plan began to form in his head.

Three weeks later, he'd moved out of his sterile apartment in New Haven and transported everything he owned to the old house in Meredith Falls.

Sebastian slowed his pace. Enough time had passed. He knew the difference between love and lust now. Time he showed her both! He whistled a happy tune and began—for the first time—to look forward to her reaction rather than fear it. He ran a hand over his bare chest, grinned, and decided to leave his T-shirt off—maybe it would kick-start her libido.

* * *

"I could use some help here, Mia." Tess Warner balanced on her

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tiptoes and tried once more to shove the box back on the top shelf.

“Sorry, didn’t see you struggling there.”

The sisters finished unpacking the crate and stocking the shelves.

“I don’t suppose you’ve seen my ladder?” Tess glanced around.

“Nope. Maybe you should go borrow Sebastian’s.”

“I’d rather eat a cow.”

“That’s pretty bad—you being a vegetarian and all.” Mia bit back a laugh. Tess would only take so much teasing.

“Don’t even think it.” Finished with the new stock, Tess rearranged the potion bottles so that they were back in alphabetical order. “I decided to put the past behind us and go say hello yesterday, but he was too involved staring down *Cheerleader Tina’s* cleavage.”

“Why, if I didn’t know better I’d say you sounded jealous. It’s been over ten years since high school. Tina Talinsky can’t help showing off her new boob job. Heck, even I stared and I’m straight!”

“Har, har. Well, I can’t stand that overblown walking ego. He only masquerades as a human being.”

“Oh, come on. You had a thing for him once—admit it.”

“Never. He may think he’s God’s gift to women, but I asked the Goddess to return the gift.”

“And she did. Right back to you.” Mia smiled at her sister. Tess had gotten a full measure of their great-grandma Elwena’s pixie heritage. Only five foot one in boots, Tess always complained about getting screwed in the gene pool. Short blonde curls covered her head in disarray. Her cornflower blue eyes were large for her heart-shaped face and dainty chin. But it was her slightly canted ears that drew whispers.

“Very funny. I remember those summers—even if you don’t.” Finished with the potion bottles, she started straightening the willow wood besoms in the oak barrel.

“I know he razzed you a lot, but you didn’t see what I saw when he teased you.”

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Tess turned, hand on hip. “And what was that?”

“The bulge in his jeans!” Mia dodged the broom Tess used to swat at her. Both women giggled like schoolgirls.

“Oh, I did more than see it—I felt it, remember?”

“That’s right, the infamous kiss.”

“You’re just jealous.” Tess placed the wood besom back in the barrel.

“I still can’t understand why you slapped him.”

“That’s because you’re a hussy, sister mine.”

“Guilty as charged and loving every minute of it.”

“Does Jake know?” Tess asked, laughing.

A chime rang at the front door. They had a customer.

Mia nodded to Tess and walked to the front of the store and the pastry counter. She doubted their early morning visitor came for the beeswax candles or dragon’s blood. Her jaw dropped open when she realized who it was in their store.

“Oh my...” She trailed off, eyeing the broad expanse of smooth muscles and tanned flesh. If it weren’t for Jake, her new husband, she would be sorely tempted. She envied her sister.

“Mia Warner all grown up and breathtakingly beautiful.”

“Sebastian Matthews. Wondered when you would make it over here. I saw you moving in last week. Welcome back.”

“Thanks. How have you been?”

“Not bad. But the last name isn’t Warner anymore. Got married this May.” She proudly flashed her diamond-encrusted wedding band.

“Congratulations. Who’s the lucky guy? Anyone I’d remember?”

“Nope. My husband bought the old Erikson house last year. Jake is a writer—paranormal thrillers.”

“Don’t tell me, he came in here to do a little witchy research and saw you. Probably forgot to take notes.” Sebastian grinned, glancing around.

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“Looking for someone?”

“Your sister.”

“A wise man would put his shirt back on first.”

“And cover my best asset?”

Mia tilted her head, and checked out his firm little ass.

“Ah, I stand corrected.” He winked at her and started to put on the T-shirt, but a familiar voice stopped him. He looked over the bunched neckline to his left.

Mia smiled—*let the games begin.*

* * *

“I’m sorry, but you need shoes *and* a shirt to be serviced.”

“Is that a promise?” He pulled the shirt over his head, covering his pecs, and rippled abs.

The minute the sentence flew out her mouth, Tess realized someone could mistake her meaning. She flushed as the man twisted her comment into a double entendre and wondered if he’d hold her to her word. A shiver snaked down her spine at the wanton thought. His skin was taut, golden perfection, the muscles rock hard.

When the half-naked customer finished pulling on his T-shirt, she got a good look at his face and swore under her breath. Sebastian Matthews—figures. No one else had the chutzpah to use sexual banter like a weapon and trade blows with her.

“You filled out nice, Tess.”

“Wish I could say the same for you,” she lied. Damn, it wasn’t fair. The cute boy had grown into one hell of a gorgeous man. Sun-streaked brown hair fell in thick waves an inch or two shy of brushing the collar of his T-shirt. On the surface, his dark blue eyes twinkled, reflecting humor. A deeper look revealed mesmerizing secrets and barely restrained sexual hunger. Bedroom eyes.

“Sounds like a challenge, Ms. Warner. Want to play show and tell? I could *show* you how much I’ve grown.”

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“And I could *tell* you to shove it where the sun don’t shine, pretty boy.”

“Hmm...have to think about that one, sweetheart. Didn’t know you were game for that sort of thing.”

Her sister tried to smother her snort of laughter. Warmth crept up her neck and cheeks. She’d love to wipe that smirk off his face. Maybe a little saltpeter... She used to be better at this—taking him down a notch, putting him in his place. He seemed to enjoy embarrassing and shocking her...making her blush.

“Sorry about your grandparents, by the way. They were lovely people.” There—formal, businesslike and polite.

“Yes, unlike me.” He winked at Mia, continuing, “I miss both of them. But we weren’t talking about my grandparents, were we? You changed the subject, Tess. And that’s against the rules.”

“The rules? You actually play by a set of rules, Mr. Matthews?”

His lips curved in a slow, predatory smile. She refused to spar with him anymore today. Time for her to regroup.

“I have to make some calls. It’s been nice, but I have a business to run. I’m sure you understand.” She turned to her sister. “Mia, try to interest Mr. Matthews in purchasing some honeybuns. He needs to bulk up on carbs.” Her lips quirked. “He’s a little scrawny.” Satisfied with her parting shot, she casually walked to the back storeroom, a tiny grin on her face.

* * *

“Ouch.”

“Sorry about that Sebastian. You two always did trade sparks.”

“I’ve missed that, you know—missed her.”

“Then why did you stay away so long?”

“I don’t know...maybe everything got a little intense. Rejection hurts.” He fixed those bedroom eyes of his on Mia. “No more teenage angst. And no more denial. I know what I want now, and I plan to go

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after it.”

“So long as it’s fun and games, fine. She needs to let loose and have a fling, in my opinion. But don’t let her think there’s more to it than that. Don’t hurt her.”

He leaned forward, serious all of a sudden. “What if there is more to it than that?” He ran a hand through his hair. “Look, you have nothing to worry about. The last thing I want is to hurt her.”

“Good. ’Cause I’d hate to explain to the local sheriff why our next door neighbor went to bed a man and woke up a toad. A slimy toad.”

He chuckled, knowing Mia made her point. “Understood.” The Warner family had run their herb and craft gift shop in Meredith Falls since the sixties. There had always been speculation about them, that the store was more than a hippy-dippy tourist trap. He’d kept his mouth shut, afraid Tess and her family would get run out of town if anyone knew the truth.

He noticed the pentacle sticker on the cash register. From the look of things, times had changed. The sisters were *out* of the family broom closet.

“Nice touch.” He pointed to the sticker.

“Tess’ idea. We’ve never been robbed, but it doesn’t hurt to be proactive,” Mia laughed.

Sebastian pictured the cash drawer slamming back on a robber’s hand when he reached inside the till and laughed with her.

“I heard your parents moved to Arizona.” Sebastian admired Mia’s tall, dark beauty and felt nothing but appreciation. No electricity, or magnetic pull—like when he gazed at Tess. Hard to believe they were sisters.

“Dad’s asthma got worse and none of the herbs we grow here would help. Plus the climate there is better for his breathing.”

“Nothing you, your sister or mother could do...you know...magickally?”

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“Some of the potions that would have helped called for rare medicinal herbs. Mom is working with Native American healers—shamans—to heal Dad. She wildcrafts them on the People’s land with their permission.”

“Then Tess lives in your parent’s house all alone?” He didn’t like the sound of that. Sure, Meredith Falls wasn’t New Haven or *The City*, but crimes did occur, even in the smallest of towns.

“She has Pendragon. He watches over her.”

“That old cat of hers? It’s actually still alive? I wouldn’t call that protection.”

“Stopped you a few times, from what I understand.” Mia grinned. Poor Sebastian.

He absently rubbed an imaginary scar on his brow. “Hmm...you know, I’ve been told I need to bulk up. I’ll take all the honeybuns in the case. I think I’ll need the energy in case I have to go a round or two with her demon cat.”

* * *

She did not—*not*—still have a crush on Sebastian Matthews, world class jerk. Tess chewed her lower lip and sat at her tiny desk in the back storage room. She could hear him talking to her sister, but not what they said.

Her eyes blurred, refusing to focus on the ledger and shipping slips. After all these years, why had he chosen to move back? He could have sold the house and made a tidy profit.

She ignored the giddy rush inside her stomach. Mia was laughing now at something he said. Maybe she shouldn’t have left her sister alone with the man. She recalled very well how all the girls at her school used to follow him around every summer. Like stray cats in heat, trying at every turn to brush up against him for attention. Made her sick, watching it all those years ago. Didn’t they have any self-respect?

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A low-throated male chuckle joined her sister's laugh. Grrr...time for reinforcements! She hummed, directed her power, and called to the one male she trusted completely.

*Fur black as night, green eyes—
Leaf bright.
Little dragon—
Come to me.*

A large black cat squeezed through the open jalousie window, and padded silently to her side. His head cocked, as if calculating mathematics and physics, before he leaped onto the desk, scattering papers to the floor. Tess took him into her arms and kissed the top of his silky head.

“Faithful as ever, my sweet dragon cat.”

He rubbed his muzzle against the soft curve of her neck and purred. Tess scratched under his chin and behind his ear. The rumbling purr grew louder.

“Follow Sebastian.” She set him down on the floor and urged him toward the store. The cat looked back at her, winked, and disappeared out the stockroom door.

* * *

Sebastian waved goodbye with his free hand, the other hand busy holding five sacks filled with iced honeybuns. A blur run past his legs as he left. Probably just his imagination.

He stopped in at the firehouse and dropped off two sacks for the people there, then dropped off two more at the sheriff's office. Never hurt to be on good terms with the local authorities. Also gave him a chance to reunite with a couple of his old summer friends.

Instead of tiring him, the walk energized him. He stood on the porch of his house and slid the key into the lock. Before he could turn

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the knob, the door swung wide. He rocked back on the balls of his feet.

His eyes darted to the front parlor, then back to the staircase as he crossed the threshold—and missed seeing the flash of black fur or the slanted green eyes that gleamed from behind the big brass planter.

Everything appeared fine, but it wouldn't hurt to check out the entire house. The remaining bag of honeybuns got tossed onto the kitchen table as Sebastian went room to room. Houses as old as this one were bound to have an odd quirk or two. His inspection turned up nothing, and he soon found himself in his old bedroom.

Sebastian went to the window and opened the blinds, remembering summer nights spent on the wood floor, staring through the same window, spying on Tess.

God, he should be ashamed of himself—but he wasn't. A cock has no conscience, and his hormone-driven tool had wanted only one thing. Hell, it still did. He'd take her any way he could get her.

All he needed was that damn potion. Then he might be able to see where he'd gone wrong all those years ago—and reverse it. "If I were a witch, where would I keep a recipe book full of love spells, charms and potions?"

A whisper of fur brushed the back of his bare legs. Sebastian looked down and rubbed his calves. Weird sensation...almost like a...cat. Despite the morning heat, an eerie chill raised goose bumps along his arms.

The room was empty, save for himself. He went into the bathroom and splashed cold water on his face, thinking. Could the book be in her store? Or worse, in Arizona with her parents?

With Mia watching him earlier, and Tess in the back storeroom, he'd lost any chance of searching for their dad's old journal there. He needed to search the house.

Did it still lie on her dad's old desk in the workroom under the stairs? He checked his wristwatch. Both women would still be at the

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store. Now would be an ideal time to look.

He took a deep breath. It's not breaking and entering, he told himself. It's unlocking and snooping.

Grandma Richter used to watch over the Warners' place and take in their mail when the family went on vacation. She'd kept the spare key in an envelope tucked inside the credenza. Where it still rested. Waiting.

* * *

A silver sickle hung bright against the darkened sky when Tess pulled into her driveway. She had stayed at the store well past closing time in an effort to catch up on inventory and, partly, to avoid going home. Sebastian's upstairs lights were on.

She imagined him lying on that big four poster bed she'd seen the movers carry into the old Victorian home. All those wonderful hard muscles naked—warm and ready for her touch. She shook her head, chasing the images away. He had enough women lusting after his hot body!

She shuffled inside her house, tired and more than a little disgusted with her own preoccupation of the man. A relaxing night at home would cure her of all those silly thoughts about Sebastian. *Or, at least get them out of my system!*

Tess slipped out of her shoes and carried them up the stairs in her hand. High heels were sexy as hell, but painful on pinched toes. Her bed looked so inviting, but the claw tub bath looked better. She adjusted the hot and cold knobs and tossed one of her homemade fizzy bath balls into the running water. Lavender and lily of the valley rose from the steam.

Odd, she thought she heard the sound of footsteps on the staircase...she turned off the water and listened for a minute.

Scratch...scratch...scratch...

Ah, my spy has returned. She walked from the bathroom to her

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bedroom door. Pendragon stood on hind legs, his paws poised, caught in the act, gouging chunks out of the bedroom door. Naughty puss.

“Are you hungry, my sweet dragon cat?” She picked him up and rubbed behind his ear, carrying him in her arms down the staircase. He leapt from her arms and gracefully landed a few steps ahead of her. He raced to the kitchen, eager for his dinner.

Tess fixed her companion a bowl of salmon and turkey pate. “There you go. I hope you can entertain yourself for awhile, ’cause I am one tired woman and I need a good soak.” *Or a good fuck.* The problem with ideas like that—they got her thinking about her tall, muscular, well-endowed neighbor.

The sound of a door closing somewhere upstairs caught her attention. These old houses were so drafty; doors seemed to shut by themselves. Just to be safe, she decided to check the windows and locks.

* * *

A noise at the front of the house startled him. Sebastian banged his head on the low ceiling beam as he turned to look at his watch. Damn, that smarted! He rubbed at the knot forming on his skull. He’d spent the last few hours searching Tess’ cellar, battling huge cobwebs and spiders with an eerie sixth sense and the feeling that he was being watched—all with no luck. The entire downstairs checked out. His only option was to go upstairs—and now Tess had come home.

He waited until he heard the shifting creak on the staircase and the sound of a door above him open, then let himself out of the cellar and into the main hallway. She had retreated to the big bedroom. He imagined her kicking her shoes off and slowly unzipping her slacks. He took a cautious step up the staircase. Then another.

Sebastian soon stood at the top of the stairs. But when he took his foot off that last step, the damn thing creaked loud enough to wake a hibernating bear. The bath faucets immediately turned off. Had she

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heard the sound over the rushing water, or did her tub fill at precisely the wrong moment for him?

A black blur flew past, positioned itself at the door to his right, and began to scratch. Damn! He looked around, tugged on the doorknob to his left, hurried into the room. He closed the door so that only a thin sliver could be seen. The cat turned...and winked directly at him! The bedroom door across the hall opened to reveal a fully clothed Tess.

Her eyes drooped a bit more than usual. Dark circles cast shadows under her lower lids. Her bare feet shuffled forward to pick up her cat. She petted him, talked to him as if it understood her. Pendragon meowed and rumbled a deep purr.

Lucky cat. The animal curled in her arms, his head resting atop the swell of her breasts. And once more looked in his direction and winked.

Damn! Almost as if the beast knew exactly what he was doing! Hell, maybe he did. After all, he belonged to a witch. A very tired witch, from the look of it. He'd love nothing better than to hold her in his arms, kiss her, and carry her to bed. Or to the bath, and wash her delicate back...inch his soapy fingers towards her rosy, peaked breasts. A shudder rocked him. *Focus, Matthews! Find that damn potion and she's yours forever.*

Sebastian decided to check the room and see if the book was there. If he recalled correctly, the upstairs had two bathrooms and four bedrooms. One for each of the sisters, one master bedroom for Mr. and Mrs. Warner, and an extra bedroom for guests. Not that he ever remembered them having many visitors. He tried to open and close each drawer as silently as possible. Nothing. He went to the closet and began a new search. He winced, each scrape of the wire hangers against the metal clothes bar, like a gunshot to the relative silence—at least to his heightened sense of sound.

Only two rooms remained. The master bedroom and the bedroom that used to be Tess'. He opened the door at the end of the hall and

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slipped through, leaving the door slightly ajar. Her window was open a good two inches, creating a draft that sucked the door closed with a *whap*. Damn. A minute later, he heard her footsteps and light curses under her breath. She was coming this way! He tried to crawl under her old bed, but couldn't slide his two hundred pounds under the frame.

With a Herculean effort, he sucked in his six pack abs and slid the rest of the way, out of sight.

* * *

A cool breeze streamed through the window in her old bedroom. She remembered pulling it open earlier that day, to let some fresh air in, but had forgotten to shut it. Her brother-in-law would be irate if he found out she'd left a window unlatched and open all day. Jake took his new status as man of the family seriously and lectured both her and her sister on security and safety. Satisfied nothing else was amiss, she walked back into the master bedroom.

She stripped off her clothes and padded naked into the bathroom. Once again, she turned on the taps and let the heady floral aroma transport her mind. The heat from the water pinkened her skin as she slid into the tub. *Pure bliss!* She rolled a towel, put it between the rim of the tub and the back of her head, and let her eyelids close. Stress slipped from her bones, disappearing into the scented water.

First she lifted her left leg, then her right leg from the tub. She loved the silky way the natural oils in the bath fizzy made the water bead on her calves and roll down the underside of her thighs until they joined the bathwater once more.

Eyes still closed, she poured a little of her homemade body wash in her hand and slowly stroked her skin. She imagined Sebastian on his knees by the tub, his hands laced with her own, directing her movements. His fingers would tweak her nipples, make them ache with need. He'd rinse them with tiny jets of pulsing water, then he'd dip his head and take one of the stiffened peaks in his mouth and suck until it

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grew hard.

A frisson of awareness seized her, and the hair on the back of her neck stood on end. She sat up and the water sloshed, threatened to splash over the rim. She glanced through the open bathroom door but couldn't see anything. *Stop it! Nothing is out there. Give yourself permission to enjoy this moment.*

She sighed, let the tension flow back out of her body, and began the slow climb to orgasm once again, her thoughts shifting. What kind of lover was Sebastian? Fierce, dominant? Did he like to tease his women? She pictured him putting her over his knees and spanking her, just a little. Tess shuddered, and she clenched her thighs.

Perhaps he liked it tender and gentle? His lips were so soft and those deep blue eyes so seductive, she could melt. Was he a sweetly compassionate lover? Yet, she sensed he had a wild streak. Like a beast only she could tame. Tess whimpered, her fantasy building an ache between her legs she could no longer ignore. She touched her clit, circling it with her fingers, pretending it was Sebastian causing the pleasure to spiral inside her.

* * *

Sebastian finished his search with one room left to go. The last thing he wanted was for Tess to catch him. Maybe he'd try to come back tomorrow, when she left for the shop. His hand hesitated on the doorknob. An agonized half-shout/half-moan came from inside. He rushed through the door, not knowing what to expect. The bed lay empty and her clothes were scattered over the edge of a hamper in one corner of the room. Another groan sent him to the open bathroom door. A large mirror, half-fogged from the steam, hung above the sink.

Tess lay in the bathtub, one smooth leg dangling over the rim, the other bent at the knee. The water lapped at her nipples. Those big blue eyes of hers were closed. Her lips parted and her neck arched backward as she moaned, just a little.

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His heart drummed in his chest, mouth parched as he tried to swallow, his eyes glued to the image reflected in the mirror. One of her hands rose from the water to pluck at her nipples. His own hand crept down to the bulge in his slacks. He timed his strokes to synchronize with hers. His balls tightened, blood racing to his thickened cock.

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She couldn't know he'd invaded her privacy. That he'd seen her pleasuring herself. He forced himself back in his slacks and carefully reziped.

The sound of splashing broke the sensuous spell.

Dammit! She was getting out of the tub, wrapping a towel around her breasts. She turned and bent to pull the stopper plug. He hurried from the room, practically tripping down the stairs in his haste. Pendragon sat at the bottom of the staircase, licking his paw, a feline smirk on his whiskered face. The cat stopped mid-motion, looked at the huge hard-on Sebastian sported, and meowed in question.

Hell, he wouldn't put it past the damn thing to attack his prized jewels. He cupped his groin and fled out the front door, feeling like an idiot.

* * *

Tess grabbed a towel to dry off as she stepped from the tub and wrapped it under her arms. She finished in the bathroom, wiping down

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the partially fogged mirror. Strange, but at one point during her bath, she could have sworn she felt Sebastian's presence. Heard a very masculine groan, half-stifled. Nonsense and wishful thinking.

Muffled purring teased the edges of her senses. A flash of black fur darted through the threshold to leap with athletic grace onto the bed.

Pendragon wrapped his tail about him like a cape, staring a hole through the bath towel she had knotted around her breasts, then pretended to clean himself.

She covered the short distance and stroked behind his ears.

"Have you been behaving yourself? Hmm?" she asked, and got up to draw the curtains closed. The towel fell to her feet. She gave it a toss into the hamper. Pendragon jumped from the bed onto her dresser. She slid open a drawer, removed a pair of silk panties. They grazed her legs in a sensuous slide as she pulled them on, the feel of silk against her body a luxurious caress.

She turned to her walk-in closet and withdrew a long, green silk caftan, let the smooth fabric glide over her breasts and hips as she put it on, and cinched her waist with a long sash tie. Her cat sat on a large shoebox lying on the carpeted floor of her closet. He let loose with a plaintive wail.

"What has gotten into you, Pendragon?" She lifted both cat and box, carrying them over to her bed. He jumped from her arms and pawed at the curtains. "No more catnip for you, buddy."

Tess looked down at the dusty old box and lifted the lid. All her journals, even a few of her mom and dad's notebooks rested inside, along with a ruby jeweled potion bottle. She'd forgotten all about this stuff.

The empty bottle had a dark red enameled scrollwork design. Small rubies were inset, gleaming in the light. It had belonged to her great-grandmother, Elwena. When she passed into shadow, the antique potion bottle had become her mother's.

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Before her parents moved to Arizona, she'd given the bottle to her oldest daughter, along with their journals. Of course, since the gifts and knowledge of the Sidhe ran along maternal lines of power, her father's journal was nothing more than his attempt to create a marketable book to sell to the new age tourists who frequented their little herb and potions shop. Something he knew well, since he used to be one of them—until he met a true, bone-fide witch and married her.

Oh, he'd wanted to make it as real as possible, expose millennia old secrets, but her mother convinced him otherwise. In time, he decided not to pursue finishing the book, much to her mother's relief.

Tess skimmed through the journal, tentatively entitled, "Elixirs, Spells and Potions for Love." She giggled at one sure-fire recipe for inducing lust and love in a woman.

Inspire love most enduring in thy chosen female.

Under the power of a full moon, place a sprig of rosemary, the petals of one tea rose, one cup of lavender flowers, and a cup of sweet melissa on an altar made of wood.

Harness the power of the elements and say the name of the female you wish to be yours—thrice, aloud. Gather thy herbs and soak in good-natured oil for three hours, then, using the sprig of rosemary, flail the infused oil upon thy naked body, including thy loins and thy lips. Offer your heart to the one you love with a kiss. If your love is true, she will return your kiss to you.

According to her mom, love potions went against the natural order of things, so they usually didn't work. People still had free will; you couldn't force something like love. Lust, well, there were plenty of

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potions and pills for that on the market now, without resorting to moonlit chants or beating your bare ass with a rosemary flail. Her lips quirked at the thought. Like anyone would actually do that!

The potion bottle was another matter. It fairly reeked of power. She put everything back except great-grandmother's bottle and her dad's potion book. Those she decided to take with her tomorrow to show Mia.

* * *

Sebastian leaned back against the door to his house, his breathing harsh, and his pulse thumping a steady beat. He went into the parlor and threw the key in the drawer of the credenza. What had gotten into him—he must have been insane! She could have caught him. Then what would he say?

“Oh, hi there, Tess. I just thought I'd sneak into your house, do a little snooping, and masturbate while I watch you play in the bathtub.” Geeze.

Worse yet, he still had a hard-on a cat couldn't scratch down. Oh man, bad choice of words. What was with that cat of hers, anyway? It spooked him. Almost like the cat knew everything going on and was amused.

He ran up the steps to his own bedroom, stripped, and jumped in the shower. Shame mingled with lust. By the time he'd replayed the entire bathtub incident in his mind's eye, he'd lost the shame.

His fist gripped his dick, working it with fast strokes. He pressed his forehead against the cool tiles and groaned, closed his eyes, and pictured Tess on her knees in front of him...licking the sensitive underside of his cock, her hands teasing his balls. He'd pull her closer, wrap his fingers in her hair, and guide her head—could almost feel the strong suck of her mouth. Thick jets of his seed splashed the blue tile in front of him in a steady pulse until his cock went limp and his legs grew too shaky to support his weight.

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If thinking about her, watching her, made him come this hard, what would it be like when they finally had sex? He didn't know—but he couldn't wait to find out.

* * *

Tess woke refreshed after a great night's sleep, did her morning yoga, and got ready for her day with a spring in her step. She put the antique potion bottle in her purse, the notebook in her tote bag, and started toward her car, then decided to walk to work instead. It was too pretty outside to drive.

Reaching into her bag, she pulled out her headphones and her digital music player. The walk gave her time to think. What if she took Sebastian up on all his innuendoes? Why not have a fling? She made up her mind to write a pro and con list this morning.

Before she realized it, she stood in front of her shop. Mia usually arrived first, but today Tess had beaten her to the store. She unlocked the door and set her dad's notebook on the table behind the back register, along with the heirloom potion bottle. She tucked away her purse and filled the register from the pouch in her tote bag. Mia would be here soon. She flipped the Closed sign over so that it read Open and filled the electric beverage urns with water. The bell over the door jangled.

Mia carried in three huge plastic boxes filled with pastries. Tess grabbed the top box and set it on the counter.

"Did you make any of those cranberry muffins?"

"Keep your mitts off those muffins! Those are for paying customers."

"I have money."

"Let's see it, then," Mia said, sliding open the glass doors of the cabinet, displaying her pastries on the shelves. She saved the muffins for last, since they had to be wrapped and put on the display tray on top of the counter.

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“I have something cool to show you.”

“You baked something?” Mia laughed.

“No. But I could if I wanted to. Those cookies were a fluke.”

“More like bricks. I chipped a tooth,” Mia teased.

Tess started to come around the counter, so Mia handed her a cranberry muffin. “See, was that so difficult?” Tess snatched the outstretched muffin and went back to the side table to finish making coffee and tea.

The bell jangled once more, and Tess turned to greet their first customer, cranberry muffin crumbs stuck on her lower lip. And stood still. Her eyes drank in every inch of lean, muscled perfection.

“Sebastian! Back for more of my doughnuts?” Mia asked.

“I couldn’t stay away. I’m hooked.”

He looked in her direction and smiled.

Say something! Anything!

“Hi.” *Heck, is that the best you can do?*

“Hi, Tess.”

She couldn’t stop staring. He wore those thigh-hugging jeans, the ones that curved his firm ass like a lover, and a bold red shirt tucked into the waistband, making her long to jerk the fabric out and run her hands underneath, over his warm abdomen, up his chest. The golden highlights in his hair caught her eyes. Her palms itched; her mind recalled the fantasy. In it, she wove her fingers tight in his hair, urging his head forward as she thrust her hips, while his mouth devoured her pussy.

“Hello! Anybody home?” Mia called out.

She snapped out of her heated daydream. Sebastian blinked, as if he, too, had been mesmerized.

“Sorry. I couldn’t sleep last night,” Sebastian admitted.

“Something keeping you up?” A smirk played on Mia’s lips.

“You might say that.”

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“Uhh...coffee. Yes, coffee.” *Get it together, girl!* Why couldn’t she function today? So she fantasized about the guy—big deal. Every woman under the age of sixty in Meredith Falls probably did, too! Hell, maybe the ones over sixty!

“I’d like some of that. Do you have a Styrofoam cup?”

“Sebastian, we don’t use paper or Styrofoam cups. You can have either a soyacup or a ceramic mug. And the coffee is free to customers.” Mia said, then cleared her throat.

Tess opened a side cabinet and pulled out several colorful mugs and the sealed pack of biodegradable soyacups made from soybean plant fiber. She filled a mug with coffee and handed it to him.

He looked at the large cup, grinned, and took a sip of the rich black liquid.

She frowned. What was so damn funny? He set the mug down and told her to watch it for him. As if anyone else was there to drink it. Then she noticed the writing on the mug:

It’s Not The Size of The Wand, But How You Use It!

She didn’t think her face could get redder than his shirt, but she was off to a good start.

“You busy today?” Mia asked him. Tess knew her sister too well. She was up to something, and that something involved Sebastian.

“I thought you had a husband, beautiful?” He reached out to hold her left hand.

“Very funny.” Mia pretended to smack his hand and he jerked it away with a smirk.

“I’m free.” He cast a quick look at her, adding, “And easy, for the right woman.... Thought I’d do a little shopping in your store, though.”

“When did you get into herbs and Crafty stuff?” Tess questioned him, suspicious.

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“Oh, I’ve always had an interest.”

“I don’t recall you ever mentioning it when you lived here before.” She knew she was being antagonistic, but couldn’t help it.

“I didn’t realize then how passionate I’d become about the subject.”

“Passions fizzle. And you’ll go on to the next thing to catch your eye.”

“Very cynical attitude you’ve got there.”

“I learned the hard way,” Tess said, her face scrunched in a scowl.

“Maybe you didn’t give it a fair chance.” Sebastian leaned in, daring her.

“Okay! Time out!” Mia interrupted.

“Sorry.” Damn him, Tess thought, he always churned up her combative streak.

“Why don’t I go take a look around while you finish getting set up?” Sebastian nodded to Tess, winked at Mia, and proceeded to the area where they kept the potion bottles and essential oils.

Mia walked around the counter and muttered in her sister’s ear. “You could try being nice to the man. I promise, it wouldn’t kill you.”

“Why do you keep trying to throw us together? Can’t you see we’re oil and water?”

“More like oil and vinegar. Three guesses which one you are.”

Tess sighed. Mia was right. But it grated on her that everything always went Sebastian’s way.

He never had to fight for anything. Never had to claw his way through college, or sit at home all alone on a Friday night, watching some monster flick ‘cause nobody asked him out.

She blinked and realized her sister was staring at her. “What?”

“Did you and you have a nice chat?”

“Very funny. For your information I plan to make a *do it* list today.”

Mia rolled her eyes. “Well, that sucks all the spontaneity out of life. Or do you mean one of your infamous pro and con lists?”

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“Sure, make jokes. But it helps me decide what to do when I’m confused and don’t have a clue.”

* * *

He heard heated whispering back and forth between the two sisters and wondered if they were talking about him. Mia seemed willing to help him. Maybe it was time to ask her for advice. He picked up a pretty hand mirror, crafted in pewter. As he held it up to look, he saw it—the red potion book! It sat underneath a ruby-toned potion bottle. Was Tess thinking of casting a love spell? Excitement raced through his veins.

His hand tilted the mirror so he could see the women. They were still in the front of the store. He stepped behind the counter and spread open the notebook. It fluttered, as if by magic, to the exact page of the potion he used and the spell he cast. His eyes darted back to the front of the store. He grabbed a pen and, spotting a flyer, ripped it from the wall, turned it over, and began copying down the recipe and the instructions.

He closed the book and placed the potion bottle back on top. Several shelves lined the side of one wall, and on each were a line of hexagon-shaped glass canisters. Sebastian glanced down at the list once more, before he shoved the flyer in his back pocket and called out to Mia and Tess.

He may have called to both women, but it was Mia who offered help.

“Find something you want?” she asked as she approached.

“I need to know something. Are fresh herbs better to use or dried?”

“Depends on what you’re doing. Are you cooking up something, Sebastian?” A wry smile curved her lips.

“Lavender flowers,” he blurted out. Her eyes held power. He imagined all his secrets laid bare, exposed to her seeking mind.

“Makes a nice tea bath. Tess favors lavender.”

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“And Lily of the Valley.” Damn! He hadn’t meant to say that.

“Ah, fragrance of Lily of the Valley. Now, how would you know about that, hmm?”

God, the woman was a witch. He realized what he’d just thought—and almost laughed out loud! His face flushed. Hell yes, she was a witch! Tess, too. *Better get used to it, buddy. If you really want her love, and plan to make her a part of your life, then you have to accept her warts and all...*

Pendragon leapt onto his shoulder, startling him. “Where the hell did you come from?”

“I think he likes you, Sebastian.”

Sharp claws dug into his neck. “Yeah, feels like it. Mind removing him? I think he’s drawn enough blood for now.”

“Naughty puss! Are you teasing Sebastian?” Mia rubbed noses with the cat and set him down on the floor. She took the jar of dried lavender flowers from the shelf.

“If you’re making a potpourri, or herbal bath sachet, then I’d recommend dried herbs.”

“And if I’m making a potion?”

“For internal or external use?”

“External.” He glanced toward the front of the store. Tess kept busy rearranging the pastries.

“She always rearranges things when she’s conflicted or confused.” Mia scooped the narrow purple buds into a measuring cup. “Need more than this?”

“No. A single cup is fine.”

She took a small white sack from under the counter and poured the flower buds inside, careful to label the contents on the outside.

“That it?”

“Uh, no. I need lily of the valley oil, a sprig of rosemary, petals from one tea rose...and a cup of sweet melinda.”

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“Sure about that?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Sounds like somebody is making a love potion.” Mia grinned, adding, “Oh and it’s not sweet melinda. No such creature in the herb family. Was it sweet melissa? Lemon balm?”

“Yes, melissa. That’s it.”

“Okay, we have that. But our rosemary is loose, so that won’t do. Tess may be able to help you, though.” Mia yelled out to her sister.

* * *

Tess heard her name being called and tried to relax. She couldn’t seem to give in to him too easily. Ah hell, she wanted to jump his bones! His adam’s apple bobbed and she smiled—why, he looked nervous! Her smiled widened. About time! For once, she wasn’t the only one acting jumpy.

“Tess, Sebastian here needs some rosemary sprigs for something he’s making. Would you be willing to cut some from your rosemary in the backyard?” Mia asked her sister.

“Umm, sure.”

“Oh and he needs the petals from one tea rose. Don’t we still have those tea roses in the backyard too?”

Tess frowned, the items combined seemed somehow familiar. “Not a problem.”

“Sebastian, hand me that jar of lemon balm and I’ll get your cup.”

“I’ll come by your place later with the cuttings,” Tess offered.

“That’ll be great.” He handed the large hexagon jar to Mia.

She watched him pay for his purchases and leave. A quick glance at her sister’s smile told her she had a secret.

“Okay, spill it.”

“I think he’s making a love potion.”

“Why? I mean he’s the hottest thing to hit Meredith Falls since that meteorite back in ’79. Every woman he meets wants him.”

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"I don't want him."

"You just married Jake, so you don't count."

"Thanks a lot."

"Well, you know what I mean. You're still in the lovey dovey, cow-eyes stage."

"Sounds like a disease...the way you say it, Tess."

"Better than the clap, worse than the flu. Anyway, the point is, why would he need to make a love potion?"

"Come on sis, you can't be this clueless. The guy is crazy about you. He always has been. And you ignored, ridiculed, argued, or slapped him down every time he tried to make a move."

Had she misread his signals?

"How long are you going to let the brats back in school mess with you? Erase those mental tapes. You're an adult now and they were little bitches."

"Look at me, Mia. I have deformed ears. They're pointy." Tess lifted her blonde curls from her ears, exposing the small tips. "I need a booster seat when we go to The Hungry Pilgrim. They called me Shrimpette all throughout middle school."

"Listen—not all guys go for tall chicks. Or tall chicks for tall guys. It's a universal law or something." Mia reached out and tapped her sister's head.

"What's up here is as attractive as what's below. Don't forget that."

"Okay, okay...so, he's making a love potion just for me?"

"I think so."

"Well, he shouldn't bother."

"Why's that?"

"I've been half in love with him since the summer I turned twelve. And now, well...now I think I'm going in all the way."

* * *

Tess replayed the conversion in her mind later as she walked home.

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Could her sister be right? The thought boggled her mind....imagine, Sebastian Matthews in love—with her!

Pendragon sat lazing in the sunny parlor window, his neck stretched like a sun worshiper, soaking in the rays. All he needed was a pair of shades and he'd be one cool cat. Mia had promised to close up shop, so she could snip the clippings from her garden, for Sebastian's potion.

She knew Mia hoped she'd get together with Sebastian tonight and exchange more than recipes. Typical newlywed. She was happily hitched, so she wanted everyone else to be happily committed, too.

Committed. Oh yeah, that sounded about right, she thought. She threw her purse on a chair in the kitchen and opened her back door. The late afternoon sun warmed her little fishpond.

She looked over the fence at Sebastian's house. And spotted a small, carved wooden bench. He must have brought that with him from New Haven, because she didn't think the Richters owned anything remotely Celtic. The carved, center design looked suspiciously like a witch's knot of transformation.

A splash caught her attention and she turned to see Pendragon dipping a paw into the fishpond, blocking the poor creatures no matter which way they tried to swim.

"Naughty boy! Stop teasing."

"Hello."

"Oh!" Tess jumped. "You startled me."

"Was I interrupting something?" Sebastian leaned over the fence.

"Ah...no. Just Pendragon making mischief. He likes to tease the fish."

"Cats like to toy with their prey."

"My Koi better not be food!"

"I'm sure he's sorry."

"He better be." Tess growled as Pendragon licked his claws and winked.

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“See, he’s apologetic. Won’t do it again, will you, old Dragon?”

The big black tomcat hitched his tail and trotted back through the cat flap in the door.

“Here, let me go ahead and get those rosemary clippings for you. How many do you need?”

“Just one long sprig, Tess.”

She thought she heard a pained, male groan as she bent to cut the herb. Did he hurt himself? “You okay over there?”

“Fine, just fine.”

She snipped the rosemary at the woody base, just under the lowest knot, and stood. “Didn’t you tell Mia roses, too?”

“Yes..” he said, clearing his throat. “Petals from a single tea rose.”

This time, she bent over farther than she had to, just to see if his earlier groan and her actions had anything in common. She didn’t need to wait long.

“Oh man...” he muttered.

“You sure you’re okay?”

“Just a tense muscle.”

She cut the rose stem and handed it and the rosemary to Sebastian. “You know, if you need something to ease tight muscles, we make both a salve and a lotion. They’re for sale at the shop. You’d just need someone to rub it in...”

“You offering, sweetheart?” He pressed closer into the fence.

“What do you think?” Lust or love, she’d take it either way.

“I think you and your cat are a lot alike. Except, I’m not the kind of man you should toy with.”

She swallowed down the butterflies in her stomach. His nostrils flared, breathing in her scent. She saw hot desire in those bedroom blue eyes.

“Who said I’m toying?”

“Shame we have this fence between us. Would you be this brave if

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it were gone?”

“Want to corner me against the shed again? Steal a kiss?” Her pulse quickened at the memory. Why had she fought this need for so long?

“I’m not a kid anymore, sweetheart. I have a man’s appetite. I might start with a kiss, but it sure as hell wouldn’t end there.” His eyes gleamed with blue fire.

“I’m not a silly girl anymore. Maybe I wouldn’t want it to end with a kiss.”

“Let’s test this new-found bravery of yours, sweetheart. I’ll leave the front door unlocked.” He reached a hand over the barrier to caress her cheek, running the rosemary over her lips. “Don’t say yes so fast. I want you to understand. You cross my threshold, you belong to me. Anything I want, anything I need—you have to give me. No holding back. For the entire night. Do you understand?”

Her nipples grew taut from his words alone. He asked for free reign—complete submission to his will—and the thought of it made her nervous as much as it made her wet.

Pendragon yowled plaintively from the kitchen window, eyes sparkling.

“I...uh, my cat. I have to feed my cat.” She started toward her house, then looked back over her shoulder. He deserved some kind of answer. “I’ll fix dinner, bring it over, and we’ll see about...well, the other. Okay?”

“My house, my rules. Whether we get around to dinner or not. Think about it, Tess.”

She ran the rest of the way, her lungs short of breath.

* * *

The doorknob turned under her hand. He’d left it unlocked, just like he’d said he would. She stepped inside and placed the containers of food on a table while she locked the door behind her. The light in the dining room drew her gaze. She carried the food into the kitchen and

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set it on the countertop before she peeked at the table settings in the adjacent room.

Tall beeswax tapers lit the area with a soft, warm glow. The scent of honey lingered in the air. Fresh cut lavender and lily of the valley were tied together with a gold ribbon and placed in a delicate, elegant vase as a centerpiece.

She bit her lip. Her culinary skills didn't match those of her sister. The plastic containers she brought held simple fare, nothing suitable for such a lovely, romantic atmosphere.

The hair on the back of her neck tingled. Sebastian. She started to twist around and felt hands casually rest on her hips, and a warm breath caress her nape.

"You're delectable, Tess. I could nibble on you all evening and be a happy man."

"Mmm..." she murmured, as a shiver of delight coursed her body. "Chicken..." she whispered.

He lifted his head. "Did you just call me chicken?"

"Oh—no, no, I brought chicken, well, not the real stuff. It's tofu chicken casserole. And German potato salad."

"Sounds delicious."

"I don't do fancy. I'm not a fabulous cook like Mia. Damn, I forgot to bring a dessert."

"Doesn't matter. I'm sure I can find something to satisfy my sweet tooth." The grin he gave her made her pulse kick.

She watched as he took charge, scooping food onto their plates. He pulled out her chair for her, and poured white wine into her glass.

The meal could be haute cuisine or sawdust and she wouldn't notice. Her eyes were too busy watching Sebastian. He took a bite of her potato salad. His firm lips covered the tines of the fork, slowly pulling back. She sipped at her wine, her thoughts focused on what he would want after dinner.

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* * *

He hated German potato salad. It was the one thing his grandma Richter used to fix that he didn't like. This even tasted like her recipe, sour—like rancid mayonnaise. The fake chicken casserole clumped in the back of this throat. Pressed sawdust and wet noodles tasted better. He grabbed his wineglass and swallowed a healthy portion of the Zinfandel. Tess hadn't been kidding when she said she couldn't cook. He'd assumed she was just humble.

Her eyes gleamed with excitement and anticipation. Her lips were parted as she took a sip of her wine. Hell, they could get take out for the rest of their lives. Or finagle invites to her sister's house for dinner.

"Do you like it?"

"I've never tasted anything like this casserole before." *Thank goodness.*

"Would you like some more," she said, pushing her chair out.

"No!" He half stood. "I mean, no thanks. I'm fine. In fact, I'm full."

"Already?"

"I want to leave room for dessert."

"But I didn't bring dessert—oh."

She blinked, her eyes a little unfocused when he got up and took her wineglass from her hand. He pulled her to her feet and bent to blow out the candles.

"I want you, Tess."

"Me, too." She blushed. "I mean, I want you, Sebastian. I was wondering..."

He smiled, "Yes?"

She pulled a long green silk sash from her jeans' pocket. "I've never been in a four poster bed before."

He took the silk tie from her with clumsy fingers that threatened to drop the precious gift. He pulled her into his arms and bent his head, his mouth parting her lips, tongue dueling with hers for control. She

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slid a hand between the buttons of his shirt and popped one. It flipped end over end and landed in the casserole. Now the dish had some added crunch.

His own hands were sliding under her ass to lift her more fully into his embrace. He whispered in her ear, “Wrap your legs around me, sweetheart.” He lifted her in his arms and carried her from the dining room to the bottom of the staircase, where he set her on her feet. He took her hand and led her up the stairs and into his bedroom.

He turned on the lights and slid his hands under her blouse. They fell backward onto the bed in a tangle of arms and legs. She reached down to stroke his length through the fabric of his pants; the friction raced heat to his groin, hardened his throbbing cock. His mouth clung to hers, his hands pushed the blouse over her head and pitched it onto the dresser. He flipped open the front closure of her bra with a groan and dragged his mouth to the full curved mounds of her creamy breasts.

Tess clutched his neck with one hand and cupped him intimately with the other. He bit and tugged a nipple into his mouth, worrying it into a hard, rosy pebble. Her gasp of pleasure...pure music to his senses. He moved to take the other nipple into his mouth. She raked her nails against the material, unerringly along the distended vein that pulsed his shaft.

This was better than any fantasy, any dream—because it was real. He pushed away from the bed so he could remove his shoes and take off his pants. They soon joined her blouse on the dresser. He let Tess look her fill at his naked body. His own eyes devoured the soft, sweet contours of her feminine form.

She pulled off her bra, threw it at him. Kicked off her tennis shoes, then batting her eyelashes playfully, unzipped her jeans. He grabbed the bottom of her hems and tugged the jeans free, adding them to their ever-growing pile of clothes. He removed his socks, then hers, as his eyes fixed on the last barrier between them. Her panties.

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Sebastian started to slide his fingers under the silky fabric, when the phone rang. “Ignore it.” His fingers grazed her clit, causing a shiver.

On the second ring, he pinched the swollen nub between his thumb and forefinger.

“Ohh, Sebastian.”

He circled her clit, increased the pressure as they heard a third ring. “Come for me, Tess.”

“The phone...?”

“Can take care of itself, sweetheart.”

The answering machine picked up on the fourth ring. “Hey, it’s Mia. Sebastian, I’ve called Tess and she’s not answering. I hope that she’s with you. If she’s there, could you put her on the phone. It’s important. Sorry.”

“Damn.” Sebastian took one look at Tess’ face and knew she wouldn’t continue until after she talked to her sister.

He got up, handed her the cordless phone, and placed a kiss just below her belly button. “Don’t forget where I left off.”

* * *

She watched Sebastian go into the bathroom and shut the door. She lifted the receiver. “Mia. What’s going on? Are Mom and Dad okay?”

“Thought you might be there! Mom and Dad are fine. But I thought you might like to know I just finished looking at the notebook you gave me earlier and well...I guess it doesn’t matter, not if you’re happy. And it sounded like Sebastian is about to make you a very happy woman.”

“Mia, what are you talking about?”

“The potion—recipe—love spell, Sebastian got it from Dad’s book. Listen:

Inspire love most enduring in thy chosen female.

Under the power of a full moon, place a sprig of rosemary,

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the petals of one tea rose, one cup of lavender flowers, and a cup of sweet melissa on an altar made of wood.

Harness the power of the elements and say the name of the female you wish to be yours—thrice, aloud. Gather thy herbs and soak in good-natured oil for three hours, then, using the sprig of rosemary, flail the infused oil upon thy naked body, including thy loins and thy lips. Offer your heart to the one you love with a kiss. If your love is true, she will return your kiss to you.

“What! I can’t believe he’d be such an idiot!”

“Tess?”

“But what an adorable idiot! I’m his chosen female!”

“That would be my guess. Of course—”

“Thanks for telling me. Can you cover for me tomorrow?”

“Sure, but I still don’t think you under—.”

“Great. I’ll let you know how it all turns out,” she promised, pressing the end button.

He opened the door, his body glistening with oil, small red marks lashed his chest, sides and even his thighs. A few marks slashed across his penis. He knelt on the bed, took her wrists in his hands and kissed the pulse...took the length of green silk from the nightstand and crossed her wrists together. And, lifting her arms above her head, wrapped her wrists with the silk—securing them to one of the bedposts.

“Don’t you want to know what my sister wanted?”

“Not particularly. If it had been important, you’d have stopped me from doing this,” he said, his hands sliding down her arms to her breasts.

“Where did all these red marks come from, Sebastian?”

He curled a finger under the thin strip of silk between her legs and

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ripped it, throwing her panties toward the dresser.

“Sebastian?”

“I’ve been dreaming of this a long time, sweetheart. You have no idea how long.”

“Rosemary leaves can be like tiny needles, can’t they.”

“Tess.”

“It’s okay. Please, just kiss me.”

“My pleasure.” Sebastian covered her body with his own, slid his well-oiled frame against her in a seductive glide. He opened her lips with his tongue, his kiss a hot brand. She matched his passion, her mouth hungry for him. She twisted her hips until his thighs opened her legs. Her back arched, tried to get aligned with the rock hard heat pressing into her mons.

“Slow down. I want to enjoy you, savor you, sweetheart. You keep that up, and this will be over before we start.” She watched as he untied her arms, lifted her knees high in the air, and used the extra length of the silk to circle each ankle, then thread back around her wrists, before he once again tied them to the bedpost behind her. She was fully, completely exposed. Her knees level with her nipples and open wide. Totally at his mercy.

He slid a finger down her wet slit. “Look at me, Tess.”

She obeyed, unable to stop the moan that escaped past her parted lips when he licked her honey off his finger. The space between her legs, her only point of reference. He lowered his head, flicked his tongue against her folds, and speared her clit.

A building ache started deep inside. Her thigh muscles quivered, burning as she twisted against the confining silk. Sebastian rained soft kisses along her inner thighs before returning to lap at her clit.

The walls of her pussy shook, and she cried out, her body trembling as she came hard. His fingers once again replaced his lips and tongue...spreading her cream. She watched as he positioned himself

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above her and slid inch by agonizing inch into her tight pussy.

She clenched her muscles, pulling on him, begging him non-verbally not to leave her wet heat. He filled her—so full. Ah, sweet Goddess, so full. He drove down into her with punishing force, groaning with each thrust of his hips. He grabbed her ankles for leverage, adjusted his angle and dug in deeper. Pleasure and pain mingled for a moment, her senses spinning as she came again, a wet trail tracking down her cheeks as she cried. Sebastian untied her, rubbing circulation back into her legs and hands, kissing away the salty tears on her cheeks, her eyelids, and her chin.

“I don’t know why I’m crying. I’m such a mess.”

“No...shhh. Don’t berate yourself.”

“But you didn’t...I mean—you’re still hard.”

“Believe me, I know.”

“I want you to come.” She ran her hand down his length and cupped his sack. Gave his balls a little squeeze. His cock was already slick with her juice, she noted. She pushed him onto his back and straddled him, and slowly, very slowly sank onto his cock. She rode him with a single-minded intensity, everything focused on the place where their bodies were fused together.

She altered her speed, shifted her angle until he was the one begging, moaning for completion. His body arched, bowed in two. He let out a hoarse cry as she milked his climax from him, a satisfied smile on her lips as her muscles shuddered and she came a third time. She collapsed, nothing more than a limp rag doll across his powerful chest and abdomen. Minutes passed before she moved to get up, but he reached to grip her upper arms, holding her in place.

“I need to tell you. I need to let you know...I want you. Not just now, or tomorrow. I want you forever, Tess. I love you.”

“Sebastian—”

“No. Hear me out. I have loved you since I spent my first summer

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here and saw you across that white picket fence. I tried to tell myself it wasn't real, that it was just hormones—lust."

She looked into his sexy eyes, noticed how the skin always crinkled at the corners. He was a person who enjoyed life. Laughed a lot...

"Being here again, seeing you each day. I knew lust played a part in what I felt, but I also knew there was something more. I need you in my life. I love you. Not because of some potion or spell, though." He looked away, shame twisting his face. "Thirteen years ago, I put a spell on you, Tess. It was wrong, but I wanted to make you mine. Make you love me."

"What are you talking about? The potion and love spell from dad's old journal? I know about that. Mia told me on the phone. You saw it yesterday, at the store—didn't you?"

"Yes—no. I'm talking about the last summer I saw you before I left. I saw your dad in the garden, heard him arguing over a potion book with your mother. She picked it up. Threw it onto his workbench in the cellar. He followed her into the house."

He sat up, took her hands in his and kissed them.

"I knew I shouldn't, but I was curious. Everyone suspected your family were witches, but I knew and I kept your secret. And yet, like everyone else, I was curious. I went into the cellar and I opened the potion book, thumbed through the pages—and saw a love potion that might work. Would make you love me. So I took the book, copied the potion down and returned it to the bench in the cellar. I stole herbs from your mother's garden and used them to create the potion."

"I did it. I cast the spell. Except when I cornered you that last day—kissed you—I went a little crazy. You began to kiss me back, then you slapped me and ran away... I thought you hated me. At some point, I got it into my head that I must have screwed up the recipe."

"Ohmigod. You had that list before you walked into our shop?"

"No. I couldn't remember the recipe. While you and your sister

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were at the front of the store, I saw the book, and it opened to the exact same place as thirteen years ago. I copied everything down, including the spell.”

“And beat yourself with a sprig of rosemary all over again. You nut! You really do love me.”

Tess wove her fingers through his hair and gripped his head, pulling him closer. She slid her tongue past his lips and stole his breath. When she pulled her mouth from his, she noticed his lids were lowered into slits, his eyes, fiery with passion.

She thought she heard a very male snort of laughter. She quirked a brow at Sebastian. He lifted her chin for another kiss. She’d tell him the real story behind love potions another day...

* * *

Pendragon clenched the rosemary branch between his teeth as oil dripped from the needle-like leaves. He padded toward the cream-colored, female tabby resting on the stone path. He dropped the herb in front of her paws—and winked.

CASSANDRA CURTIS

Cassandra Curtis started her writing career in grade school. She would illustrate and write colorful stories using magic markers, crayons and sheets from her alphabet tablet, and sell them to other school kids for a penny. While the venture didn't make a lot of fast money, it did mean she could indulge her love of comic books and not spend summers behind a lemonade stand with her sisters.

She spent her formative years traveling the globe with her parents, learning a smattering of languages—usually just enough to get her in trouble. After college, she worked as a reporter and photojournalist at a weekly paper, then a daily, while continuing her love of art. Ms. Curtis now writes fiction full-time.

An avid gardener and wildlife enthusiast, she enjoys the magick found in nature. Her interests include: art, antiques, astronomy, folklore, mythology, genealogy, music, eastern philosophy and collecting magickal artifacts. A member of both the World Romance Writers, and Romance Divas, Ms. Curtis won the 2006 Amber Quill Press Heat Wave Contest with her story *Cup of Fate*. She shares her home with an elderly, opinionated cat named Snowy and a shorthaired, non-domesticated alpha male, “Honey.”

You can learn more about Cassandra by visiting her website:
<http://cassandracurtis.com>

* * *

***Don't miss Cup Of Fate, by Cassandra Curtis,
available from Amber Quill Press, LLC***

Can one woman find true love in tea leaves? Or is it a tempest in a teacup?

Bryn Tuttle lost everything due to her bad taste in men. Now she's starting over fresh. In the misty bluegrass hills of Kentucky, she finds a new job, apartment and friends. When a co-worker invites her yard-sale shopping one weekend, she decides to tag along, never realizing fate has something else in store.

They discover a rare item—a mysterious, antique, fortune-telling teacup. Bryn never suspects that a single sip from the Cup of Fate will change her life, that her future is actually linked to the tea leaves that cling inside. But when she drinks from the cup and next awakens, she soon comprehends that nothing will ever be the same...

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