



BLACK CAT

CAT JOHNSON

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BLACK CAT

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Cover art by BEVERLY MAXWELL

Linden Bay Romance, LLC

Palm Harbor, Florida 34684

www.lindenbayromance.com

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Prologue

1,000 years ago

Someone was singing, a woman. Sweet and melodic.

Well, that settled it. He must be in heaven. But then why did his head ache so? His arm, too, now that he thought about it. There shouldn't be pain in heaven. Then his blurred brain realized. He must be in hell. It shouldn't surprise him, really. He was a warrior. Killing was part of his life. And even though it was in the name of his king, killing was killing.

He remembered now the battle that had finally ended his life. The sound of horses' hooves thundering around him, vibrating his skull as he lay helplessly on the cold October ground. The pungent mingled smells of earth, sweat, and fresh blood, his own and that of others, increasing the ever present throbbing in his head. Seeing from his vantage point on the ground other bodies strewn across the field of battle. The slow moving human vultures as they preyed upon the fallen, one by one.

He had tried to push himself up with his one arm that

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wasn't broken, but his chain mail was too heavy and his body too weakened from his injuries. Finally, accepting his fate, he had simply closed his eyes. He'd said a quick prayer as the blessed darkness took over and erased his pain...and his life.

But now the pain was back. He was surely in hell. So be it. If he were in hell, he would just have to learn to live with it, so to speak.

But that still didn't explain the singing.

He pried open one eye. Even just the light of the flickering flame of the fire felt like a knife cutting through his brain. If this pain were to be his fate for eternity, it would be extremely unpleasant, to say the least.

His vision cleared enough for him to take in his surroundings. Apparently hell, for him anyway, was a small cottage filled with many cats and lots of herbs hanging from the ceiling. A woman faced away from him, cooking something in a cauldron over the fire in the hearth.

He frowned. Odd. The priests who preached of hell had mentioned fire and brimstone, but not this deceptively domestic scene. Although, whatever the woman was cooking smelled like it could only have originated in hell. He wrinkled his nose against the foul odor.

She ceased her singing and turned. "Ah, finally he wakes." She came closer and peered at him. One work-roughened hand grasped his chin so she could angle his face toward the light.

He squinted his eyes against the pain in his head. "Tell me my fate, oh mistress of hell." He noted that the neckline of her dress was cut so low he could almost see the tops of her nipples. Hmm? But of course, hell wouldn't be filled with virtuous women, now would it?

"Mistress of hell? That's the thanks I get for saving your miserable life? I knew I should have taken the fat ugly one instead." She seemed to be speaking now to one

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of the cats instead of to him. “The pretty ones are never grateful. Isn’t that right, Sebastian?” She cackled, seemingly amused at her own jest, the meaning of which escaped him.

He tried to see past the agony in his skull to get a better look at her. The only way to describe her was...ageless. She didn’t seem young, but somehow she was not old, either. Definitely, she was not what he would define as beautiful. Far from it. But yet, he found it impossible to look away.

Her eyes appeared as black as her hair and he couldn’t break from their gaze.

Spellbound. That was how he felt.

She ladled some of the foul smelling liquid she had been cooking into a small bone cup and used her breath to cool it. Stronger than she looked, she raised him easily into a sitting position on the bed with one arm and pressed the cup to his lips. He drank in spite of the fact he had no desire to do so.

As he swallowed all of it, the bitter evil brew had the strangest effect upon him. Suddenly, his head no longer ached, and his arm ceased its throbbing, feeling almost as good as it had before he broke it in the battle. He was just thinking that perhaps hell wasn’t going to be so bad when he felt a familiar stirring between his legs. He watched in amazement as the blanket covering his manhood rose. His face grew hot as his hands instinctively moved to hide the source of his embarrassment.

The woman only nodded, looking pleased. “Magic is strong during Samhain. My warrior is stronger than I’d hoped, isn’t he, Sebastian? Perhaps I did pick the right one. And you know I do like them pretty.” She laughed again and pulled the blanket from him, exposing his nakedness. “Time to thank me for saving your life, warrior.”

He watched in horror, unable to move as she raised her skirts and straddled him. “I’m not dead?” he managed

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to croak as her one hand grabbed him and began stroking him intimately, almost lovingly.

“Dead? No. You are not dead. But you are mine for as long as I wish it. So please me well and live to see another day, warrior.” She turned to the cat again, “Isn’t that right, Sebastian?”

The cat turned and walked away, but the warrior could have sworn he saw a look of human sympathy in its feline eyes.

He lay helpless, as if in a dream world. And though his mind whispered that something was wrong, his cock beneath her touch screamed for satisfaction far more loudly.

His mind and his body warred until something snapped within him, something strong enough to fight the effects of whatever was in what she had given him to drink. Finding strength he didn’t think he had, he flung the woman off of him and jumped to his feet. She landed on the floor with fire shooting from her eyes. She rose slowly, mumbling words in a language he didn’t understand.

Her chant grew louder and stronger until it seemed to vibrate the walls of the cottage. Clay pots fell off shelves while the cats scattered for shelter. Then a pain tore through him the likes of nothing he had ever felt before and he heard a blood curdling scream rip through the air. He realized the scream was his own as he fell and writhed on the floor.

Then, just as suddenly as it had come, the pain was gone and he could stand again. He rose on four fur-covered feet and stood, eye-to-eye, with Sebastian.

Chapter One

Present Day

“What have you been doing to yourself, Belinda? Girl, you’ve got more knots in your shoulders than are listed in the Boy Scout handbook.”

Belinda lay face down on the masseuse table as Gene worked on a particularly painful muscle. “I haven’t done anything to myself.”

“Well, knots like these don’t come around all by themselves. There’s something going on with you. Did you stop using two pillows and only sleep with one, the way I told you last time you were here?”

“Yes,” she mumbled into the head support that was shaped disturbingly like a toilet seat.

“And have you started alternating which shoulder you carry your purse?”

“Um. Yeah.” Boy, she was a bad liar. She didn’t even believe herself!

“Liar.” Apparently, neither did Gene. But since he was the top masseuse at one of the top spas on the east

coast, she should probably listen to what he had to say. Or at least feel guilty when she didn't.

"OK. No, I didn't. But I just can't switch, it's more than habit. My bag falls off my shoulder if I try to put it on the other side. But I did empty out everything that wasn't absolutely necessary and now it's much lighter. I swear." Why did she feel like she was ten years old and had been called into the principal's office?

"Alright. That's better than nothing I suppose. So how long are you girls out for this year?"

"Four days this year. I remember when we first started this all girls spa trip ten years ago. It used to be a single 'day of beauty', now it takes four days. I figure in another few years, it will grow to be a 'week of plastic surgery' instead."

He laughed. "You girls all look great."

"Thank you, and your tip just got bigger." She laughed, too. It was good to be away. It was the second day into the trip with her two best friends and she was just starting to relax. Sometimes unwinding took awhile, she supposed.

Gene gave her a pat on the back. "You're done. But you know, I think you are carrying your stress in your shoulders. Try to relax more when you get home. That may help."

Jeez. Maybe her boyfriend Max was right when he complained she was too uptight and no fun anymore. Even Gene could see it, and he only saw her once a year. "Thanks Gene. See you next year."

Alone, she donned her robe and rubber spa shoes and shuffled her way past the treatment rooms and to the steam room. If anything was certain in life, it was that her friends could be found either in the steam room or at the bar. But since it was still early, she was betting on the steam room.

She hung her robe on a hook outside, wrapped a towel around herself and braved the blast of steam that hit

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her in the face when she opened the door. She could just make out two forms on the benches inside and hear her friends' voices. "Hey, girls."

"Hey, Belinda. How was your massage?" Donna's voice came through the haze.

"Fabulous, as usual. Although Gene yelled at me for carrying my stress in my shoulders." Belinda lay down next to them and closed her eyes, breathing in deeply the eucalyptus-scented vapor.

"He yelled at me for carrying my purse on my shoulder," Grace added from the upper bench.

"Yeah, I got that, too. I talked my way out of it. But any man with hands like that is worth the lectures," Belinda admitted with a sigh.

"You got that right," Donna agreed. "Too bad Gene is married. You know, one of us should marry a masseuse. It would be a worthy addition to our group."

"It's going to have to be one of you two. I've already got a boyfriend." Although Belinda had to admit, Max didn't have hands like Gene. Not that she would know. Any rubbing that went on in their relationship seemed to be *her* massaging *him*. Hmm. She'd have to see about that when she got back.

"I'll get right on that for you. Don't ever say I'm not willing to take one for the team." Grace laughed.

"And we appreciate that." Belinda stretched with a yawn. It didn't get much better than this. "So, what were you talking about when I came in?"

"Grace bought a book on witchcraft in the gift shop upstairs and is trying to figure out how best to use it. I think she should do a spell to get rich so we can buy a beach house with the money and all share it." Donna grabbed her bottle of water and drank.

"But I think I want to put a curse on my ex-boyfriend so that all of his hair falls out and his new girlfriend gets fat," Grace informed her wickedly while wiping her face on the corner of her towel.

“And I think a curse so that his penis falls off would be better. So anyway, we just haven’t figured out yet if she wants to be a good witch or a bad witch,” Donna summed up.

“I vote for bad,” Grace added.

Belinda shook her head. “I don’t know about that. I’m a firm believer in karma and that anything you do, good or bad, comes back to you threefold. So even though I don’t believe in witchcraft, as fun as it would be if it did exist and we could get a beach house, I still wouldn’t push my luck.”

“Oh, I definitely believe in karma.” Donna agreed. “Remember last year when Grace wouldn’t let me sing with her at karaoke and then that weirdo with the ‘Kill Everyone’ tattoo came up and shared the microphone with her? Karma.”

“You’re right, that was the quickest payback I’ve ever seen!” Belinda laughed.

“Oh, shut up, both of you,” Grace griped, just as a giant burst of spray came out of the steam jets and hit her smack in the face. “Ow! That’s hot.”

Belinda watched in shock, then broke out laughing. “Karma again.”

“Yup!” Donna agreed, and then asked, “Is it time to go to the bar yet? My contact lenses are starting to melt onto my eyes.”

“Well, as long as karma doesn’t mind, I could use a drink,” Grace said, sounding pissy.

It was barely eleven in the morning. She somehow always came back from these spa trips heavier, hung-over and exhausted, but Belinda wouldn’t miss it for the world. She agreed. “I guess it’s five o’clock somewhere. Let’s go.”

They changed out of their robes and, looking far from beautiful after the time spent in the steam room, went upstairs to the bar and ordered three mimosas.

As the bartender poured champagne and orange juice

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into three fluted glasses, Belinda turned on her cell phone and checked for messages. There weren't any, but since she was with her two best friends, that wasn't too strange. She had thought that Max might call, though.

"I better call Max and check in. I haven't talked to him since we first got here." It was Saturday, so he should be home in her condo. He had moved in with her six months ago when he lost his job and was looking for a new one. And since his new job involved selling software, he traveled a lot, so it just seemed silly for him to get another apartment when he was away so much. Besides, living together was one step closer to getting married, wasn't it? And Belinda didn't believe in that old adage about the free milk and the cow anyway.

She was about to start dialing when she looked up and saw her friends exchange looks. "What?"

Donna shrugged. "It's just that we don't think you should have to check in with Max."

"I don't have to, I want to."

Grace dug through the bowl of bar snacks, picking out all the peanuts. "He doesn't call you for days when he's away on business. And then you sit there all worried about him. You should let him stew for a while and see what it feels like."

She rolled her eyes and put her phone back in her bag. "Fine. I won't call." At least, not in front of them, anyway.

Besides, she was sure that everything was just fine. Max was probably just sitting home watching TV. And if he wasn't home, he might be out running. That's what he was doing all those times he wasn't in when she called his hotel rooms late at night when he was away on business. Sometimes he got insomnia and it helped if he went out. That's all.

She had nothing to worry about. She and Max were just fine. Yup, just fine. And that nagging feeling she always had when they were apart was just her being

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insecure and crazy, just like Max said it was.
She took a large swallow of her mimosa.

Chapter Two

Belinda opened the door to her condo and dragged in her suitcase. It seemed much heavier and fuller than when she had left. Well, she had done a bit of shopping while away. Her spa trip was only once a year, after all.

She looked around, surprised at how quiet it was. It was late Monday evening and Max should be home from work by now. She closed the door behind her and wandered around, thinking maybe she would find a note from him. What she did find was wet towels, dirty laundry, crumbs and Sunday's newspaper strewn on the floor, but no note.

Her obsessive-compulsive nature battled over whether to unpack first or clean up. She opted for the cleaning and whizzed around like a maniac to get the place in decent shape before Max got home from work. Then she threw together a quick dinner, which she left on the burner on low to keep warm, and lit some candles. Since Max still wasn't home, she was relieved that she had time to unpack and do the laundry, too.

She was so busy, she didn't even notice until she

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finally sat down for a break exactly how late it had gotten. It was nearly ten! Now she started to worry. What if he was in an accident or something? No one would know to call her. She dialed his cell phone and got no answer. Frowning, she began to pace. What should she do now? She was about to get out the phonebook and start calling local emergency rooms when she heard his key in the door.

“Hi. I’m so glad you’re home. I was worried.” She ran to him and hugged him.

He shook his head and rolled his eyes. “I don’t know why you worry. You know I’m always working.”

“I know. It’s just I couldn’t get you on your cell phone.”

He shrugged. “It’s on, you must have dialed wrong.”

She frowned. She didn’t think so. Whatever. “I made dinner. It’s on the stove.”

“I ate. Thanks. I’m tired. I’m going right to bed.” He kissed her on the forehead and headed for the bedroom.

She wasn’t sure if she liked him better before, when he was unemployed and cranky but home all the time. Or now, employed and cranky but working all the time. She went into the kitchen, put the food away in the fridge, blew out the candles and crawled into bed beside him.

She snuggled against his back. “I missed you.”

“Missed you, too,” he mumbled from his pillow.

“Do you want to...you know?” she hinted, running her hand around his waist.

“Now? It’s too late. Tomorrow.” He gently gave her hand a squeeze then pushed it away.

She rolled over and punched her pillow into shape. The most touching she’d gotten in recent memory was from the masseuse, and that fact was pretty sad. She apparently didn’t have to worry about Max not wanting to buy the cow because he was getting the milk for free, since he didn’t even seem to want the free milk in the first place.

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“Oh, by the way, I leave tomorrow for a trade show in Denver. I’ll be gone until Wednesday,” his voice came sleepily through the dark.

And there went tomorrow night’s milk, down the drain. “OK.” She sighed. “The laundry is done, so you have clean socks and underwear.”

“Thanks, babe. You’re the best.” Then he started snoring.

He hurt...again. Why was he always waking up in strange places and in pain? This time, however, was by far the worst. Not the pain, but the cause for it. He leaned down and licked the area in question. It tasted like alcohol. Damn them!

By some miracle, he had survived a millennium, but now he wasn’t sure he wanted to live another day. He remembered being captured a few days ago. Then being stretched out on the operating table before the world went black. Oh, the do-gooders had a lovely word for it—neutered. Why didn’t they call it what it really was—castration! Damn them and damn the witch that did this to him. At least she was dead.

He had watched her cottage burn to the ground with her in it. With Sebastian’s help, it had been easy enough to dump a sleeping herb into her broth pot one night. Then all they had to do was pull a burning stick from the hearth as she slept. They had been sure to get the other cats, who actually were cats, out before the blaze consumed the cottage and the sleeping witch with it. He had hoped that her death would reverse whatever spell she had put on them both. But it hadn’t.

Sebastian chose to stay and try to find his family. Living as a cat amidst your own family was not a future he himself had wanted to explore. Especially since it seemed he was not only a cat, but also immortal. Poor Sebastian would have to watch his family die as he lived

on forever.

That was not for him. Instead, he had bounced from city to city. A cat could eat well in a city and pick up quite a bit of interesting information. It was by listening inside a pub at a seaside village that he learned of the New World that had been discovered. A new world had sounded exactly right for his new life, and he hopped on the first ship bound for there. Cats were always welcome on ships back then. And as long as you had acquired a taste for rat, everything was fine.

And so here he was, in the New World, in a cage, and without his balls.

He had accepted the fact long ago that he was no longer a man, but this! This was unacceptable. If he must live for eternity as a cat, he would at least like to do it intact, he thought, peering through the bars of the cage angrily. With the quick slap of one paw, he overturned the bowl of food next to him. Did they really think he could eat at a time like this?

He was still pouting when a pair of legs worthy of Playboy Magazine stopped right in front of his cage. He had learned a lot in his years as a cat. People left the most interesting things under their beds, including some very titillating magazines. These particular legs made him feel his recent loss even more keenly.

He supposed he could at least try to be happy in his neutered condition if a woman with legs like hers adopted him. It would be far better than going home with one of those old ladies who collected cats. He'd lived with some of them in the past. Most of them were crazy as loons and their houses smelled. But this one, he could live forever just watching her towel off after a shower. Mmm, mmm. And judging by her expensive looking leather shoes, she would definitely have more than just basic cable. He'd acquired a taste for cable TV over the last couple of decades. Ooo, maybe she'd have satellite TV! Even better.

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But during his musings about his new life, she had started to coo at some kitten in one of the cages up above him. Being neutered was bad enough, but he would not lose his new woman, too. In an act of pure desperation, he reached out a paw and swatted her leg.

Spinning around in a happy dance when she bent to peer at him, he watched a fall of long reddish-brown hair swing over her one shoulder. He purred loudly and rubbed his face against the bars of the cage, trying to look as cute as possible. She smiled and her green eyes lit up.

“Hello, there. Aren’t you handsome.” She stuck a finger between two metal bars and rubbed the side of his face. She was good at rubbing and got just the right spot. He didn’t even have to pretend to purr now.

Then she stood up and walked away. He reached out again and swiped, but missed her leg. Pressing his face up against the cage, he tried to see where she was going. His head and his hopes fell as she went out the door and let it slam shut behind her.

Belinda walked to the front desk of the shelter and tried to quiet the voice in her head. Max didn’t like cats. It was a big responsibility owning a pet. If she adopted a cat, it would be alone all day while she was at work.

But then she thought of all the nights and weekends she was home alone while Max was away. Wouldn’t a warm fuzzy body snuggled up in her lap make her feel better? It wasn’t exactly a substitute for sex, but since she hadn’t been getting a whole lot of that lately, she was grasping at anything right now.

And that last cat she had looked at, she just felt a connection to him. He’d actually reached right out and picked her, rather than her picking him.

The volunteer behind the desk looked up from her papers and smiled. “Can I help you?”

Belinda smiled back, her decision made. “Yes. There’s a big black cat in the bottom cage. I’d like to adopt him, please.”

Chapter Three

“Hey, you want to come over tonight and hang out?” Belinda filled the cat bowl with food and water while cradling the phone on one shoulder.

“Um. Is Max home?” Donna asked hesitantly.

“No.” Belinda sighed. It was extremely trying that her friends didn’t like her boyfriend. “He’s away at a trade show...again. But there is a new man in my life whom I’d like you to meet.”

She smiled down at the black cat as he somehow managed to purr and eat at the same time.

“Really? Who?!” Donna sounded much too excited.

“Relax, it’s just a cat I adopted. But I think I love him already. He’s so sweet.” As if on cue, he left his food bowl and came to rub against her legs again. Belinda hadn’t had someone’s undivided attention in a very long time. It was nice, even if it was only a cat.

“I’d love to come over and meet him. I’ll call Grace and pick up a bottle of wine.”

“Great, and I’ve got a pot of sauce on the stove and fresh pasta from the market down the street.” Belinda

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stepped over the cat to give the sauce a quick stir.

Belinda ran a vacuum over the carpet, swished a brush quickly under the rim of the toilet and had just lit some candles and set the table when the doorbell rang.

Her friends descended upon her apartment bearing wine and fresh filled cannolis. No wonder they had been friends forever, Belinda thought as she sat down to share a meal with the people she felt most relaxed with. They enjoyed the same things.

Amidst a whirlwind of talking, laughing, drinking and eating, the man turned cat sat beneath the coffee table and just observed. It was times like this that made him realize the difference between men and women. Three men would eat and drink together, yes, but without all of this chatter. It was enough to give a person, or even a cat, a headache.

Sure, in the old days, he had enjoyed sitting around a fire and sharing manly companionship. Sometimes they told tales of battle or even raunchy stories about women they'd bedded. Even more recently he'd enjoyed hiding in a pub, watching a game of sport on the TV. Sometimes the men would raise their voices in a cheer, if a specific play warranted it. But never did they all speak at the same time, and so quickly and loudly too.

How did these women even listen to each other when they never shut up long enough? It was just like that talk show that one of his past owners loved, the one where these women sat around a table and just yelled at each other for an hour every morning. He had despised that hour.

He was just pondering his hatred of that particular show and hoping this new owner was not a fan when he heard himself being referred to.

"What is Max going to say about the cat?" the one with dark curly hair named Grace asked, looking at him with distinct distaste. Ahhh, not a cat lover, he could see that already.

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His woman shrugged. "He has nothing to say about it. It's still my place, Max just happens to be living here right now. Besides, he's away so much for work, he really can't complain. He won't be here enough for the cat to bother him, and I want the company while I'm alone."

He'd seen evidence of a man around, things like neckties and rather large shoes on the floor of the closet. He had wondered where this man was, and tried not to feel jealous that his woman was with someone else.

If he could have laughed at himself at that thought, he would have. After a thousand years, you think he would have stopped coveting female flesh, especially after his 'neutering'. At that memory, he bent to lick himself again. The area was healing nicely, but it was still shaved and bald and ridiculous looking. It angered him every time he thought about it.

"He is a beauty. The cat, I mean. I've never seen eyes so blue on a domestic shorthaired black cat before. You usually only find that eye color in a Siamese. So what are you going to name him?" the other woman asked. Donna, he thought her name was, the one with shorter straight hair who kept refilling everyone's wine glass. Obviously, *she* knew her cats and had a keen appreciation for quality when she saw it.

His woman shrugged. "I don't know yet. Nothing seems to fit him. I've taken to calling him Black Cat for now." He glanced up and saw her look over at him and smile. Embarrassed at being caught in his particularly compromising position, he quickly stopped licking himself.

Cat-hating Grace raised an eyebrow. "I'm more interested about the comment that Max is just living here in your place for now. What about the 'moving in together is one step closer to marriage' theory of yours?"

His woman took a deep breath in and let it out slowly. He watched her shapely breasts rise and fall, then brought his gaze back to her eyes, as green as cats' eyes. "I've

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been rethinking that.”

“The theory, or Max?” discriminating Donna asked.

His woman rolled her eyes. “Listen, both of you. I know you never liked him. And don’t get all cocky, because I’m not admitting that you’re right. It’s just that I don’t like myself when I’m with him. I’m insecure and uncertain. Uptight. Everything he accuses me of being. But that’s not really me.”

Grace threw her hands up in the air. “Exactly! That’s what we’ve been saying all along.” Perhaps he would consider giving Grace another chance, given she was on his side in getting rid of this man in his woman’s life.

Donna nodded. “It’s not that we don’t like him. Well, OK, we don’t like him, but it’s because you are different since you’ve been with him. I don’t think he’s the right guy for you.”

His woman nodded and looked sad as she stared into her wine glass. He walked over and jumped into her lap, circled once, then lay down, purring. He looked up and saw her smile as she stroked him. He closed his eyes and imagined her stroking his human form.

“At least I have you, huh, Black Cat,” she leaned down and whispered to him. Her voice and breath in his ear made him shudder. Damn that witch to hell.

Grace jumped up and grabbed her purse, which was big enough for two cats to live in with room to spare. “Well, now that we’ve decided to get rid of Max, let’s consult my spell book and see what we should curse him with.”

His woman laughed and sent a vibration through him as he lay in her lap. “You’re carrying that witch book around with you now?”

Grace pulled the book from the big bag. “No. I just brought it here tonight because you *witches* are my coven. So let’s see what we’ve got in here.”

“Good! I’ll put up the pot of coffee and get the cannoli while you figure out how to get me the money for

that beach house and make Max's penis fall off." Donna got up.

"Thanks, Donna. I've got my hands, or rather my lap, full at the moment. And I don't want Max's penis to fall off. I just want to find a man who loves me just the way I am and doesn't make me feel inadequate. Is that too much to ask?" She leaned down and whispered the last sentence to him. He raised his head and rubbed her chin with the side of his face.

"No problem," Donna called back from the kitchen over the sound of the water running in the sink. "But I'd reconsider the penis thing if I were you."

He liked the sound of Max's penis falling off, too, particularly after what those cat ladies had just done to him. Misery loves company, as they say. Although, witchcraft had put him in this position and he wasn't comfortable being around it again. Particularly since the book of spells was currently in Grace the cat-hater's hands.

They continued to read the spell book over coffee and dessert, and he realized he had nothing to worry about. They were just a bunch of slightly tipsy women fantasizing about being rich, finding love and cursing the men in their lives. For once he felt safer being a cat rather than a man. It seemed that over the years, women had become more assertive and hated men more with every passing century. It had all started way back when women got the vote during the last century and had steadily gone downhill from there.

He curled up in his woman's lap, content for the first time in a long while. As he drifted off to sleep, he inhaled the distinctly female human scent of her. Visions of his human form and her naked one coursed through his brain and he had a feeling his dreams tonight wouldn't be about mice.

Chapter Four

“What the fuck...!”

Belinda awoke with a start and heard Max’s voice in the dark, followed by a cat’s hiss.

“Belinda! Did you get a damn cat?” He stomped into the bedroom and flipped on the light, blinding her.

She blinked at him. “Yes. You didn’t step on him and hurt him, did you?”

“Him? What about me? I nearly tripped and broke my neck in the dark!”

“I can see you’re fine.” She bent to look under the bed for the cat. “He must be frightened to death. Poor thing. Here, Black Cat. Psss, psss, psss.”

“Black cat? You’re in advertising and that’s the best you can do? Real creative, Belinda.” He snorted and went into the bathroom.

Belinda scowled, his comment grating on her nerves. There was something very wrong that she was far happier lately when Max was away. And when he was home, he always somehow managed to make her feel like shit. Talking with her friends tonight about Max just seemed to

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solidify the nagging feeling of discontent that had been residing in the back of her brain for awhile now.

She plopped down next to the bed on the carpet. A realization had just hit her. In the past, when Max was away, she was obsessed with the fact that he was around other women, including his assistant who traveled with him all the time. The insecurity and jealousy had nearly consumed her. But this trip, she hadn't even thought about it. She was just relaxed and relieved that he was gone. What did that mean? Was she getting stronger, or did she just not care about him anymore?

Hmmm. She leaned against the bed and the cat came around the corner. Padding up to her, he jumped up to put both paws on her shoulder and butt his head against her chin. She laughed, grabbed him and pulled him into her lap. "Perhaps I've fallen in love with you instead, my handsome Black Cat." She whispered it softly but the truth, the fact that she didn't think she loved Max anymore, sounded loudly in her head.

Max emerged from the bathroom and frowned down at her and the cat. "Don't think that thing is sleeping in bed with us!"

She bit her tongue to prevent herself from saying what she really wanted to, that she would far rather sleep with the cat than him. Instead, she just kissed the cat on the head and placed him gently on a throw she'd put on a chair for him in the living room.

Max pulled back the covers and slid underneath, patting the bed next to him. She raised a brow. She recognized that look in his eye. Was he kidding? Time for payback. She got into bed, flipped off the light and rolled away from him. "Good night."

She felt him snuggle up against her back. Felt his erection pressing into her. Felt his hand start to snake up her leg. "Now? It's too late. I'm tired. Sorry." Then she reached down and gave his hand a squeeze and pushed it away.

Black Cat

In the next room, a very satisfied cat listened carefully, smiled, then fell asleep.

The next morning, after a sound sleep, he licked his paw and rubbed it against one ear while half-heartedly listening to the news program the Max-man had on the television.

He was sure to keep himself hidden under the dining room table since the Max-man was home alone with him. There was no love lost there, on either side. Although he had to admit, he enjoyed tripping him the night before when he arrived home so late. Since he had smelled alcohol on the man's breath the moment he had walked in the door, upsetting him had been ridiculously easy.

He was especially happy he had done it after he saw how rudely the man treated his woman. And he meant *his* woman, *not* the Max-man's woman. He wasn't going to accept this relationship easily. He remembered how his woman had refused the man sex. That had been classic. He knew his woman had spunk.

Max-man was currently unpacking his suitcase. His woman had already left for work, but this man seemed to set his own hours and hadn't made a move to leave yet even though it was late in the morning.

When the cell phone rang, Max-man answered it. The cat had to pause in his cleaning to listen when he said, "I'll be into work as soon as I can... No, Belinda will get suspicious if I have to work late again tonight. Relax. We leave for another trip in only two days. You'll just have to wait until then, you insatiable nympho... No, I'm not going to break up with her. Are you going to leave your husband?... Then stop pushing me."

The cat's eyes opened wide. He knew it! That bastard was cheating on his woman. Now, if only he could prove it to her. What a perfect way to get him out of her life permanently. He had to do something, because the thought of his woman being with this man made the bile rise in his throat.

Cat Johnson

When the Max-man finally left to go to his job and his whore, the cat wasted no time. He'd find proof if it killed him. He pawed through the dirty laundry on the floor, sniffing for perfume and looking for lipstick. That's how men who cheated sometimes got caught on those soap operas. He found nothing. He must do his cheating naked.

The suitcase was still open and on the floor, so he settled himself inside it and started to paw through the pockets. And there, right in the side pocket that he nearly overlooked, was the overwhelming scent of a female human. He tugged at the zipper with his teeth and his claws until finally it opened enough for him to slip one nail in and pull out a lace pair of obviously worn panties. Ah, ha!

The Max-man didn't seem like the sentimental type, but his whore did seem like the vindictive sort. The cat would just bet she slipped these panties into the side pocket, hoping that his woman would find them so she could have the Max-man all to herself.

Well, he would make sure she got her wish. He left them just as they were, half in and half out of the pocket in the open suitcase on the floor. All he had to do now was wait for Belinda to get home from work in a few hours and find the evidence. He glanced at the clock. He would just curl up right inside this comfy piece of luggage for a nice little nap until she did.

Belinda walked in the door to the sound of the ringing phone. She ran for it and grabbed it just in time before the machine picked up. "Hello."

"Hey. Grace and I want to do something tonight. It's Halloween and we're missing our youth and feeling like we need to do something to celebrate. Something that involves scary movies and lots of chocolate."

Belinda laughed, out of breath from her sprint for the

Black Cat

phone. "I'd love to, but Max just got home late last night and I kind of feel like I have to spend some time with him."

She could practically hear the face Donna was making on the other end of the line. "OK. But if you change your mind, we'll be at my place."

"Alright. Thanks." She hung up and dropped her bag on the counter. All she wanted to do right now was take off her shoes, which were killing her, and change into something comfy.

Walking into the bedroom, she had to smile when she spied her black cat curled up in an adorable circle in Max's suitcase. "Hey, you." She bent to pet him. "You better not let Max see you in there."

Then her gaze hit on a small scrap of lace in the side pocket. Frowning, she reached out to take it. What *it* was hit her like a full force body blow.

"Oh my god."

The cat put a paw on her leg. She pushed it away and stood up. "Not now, Black Cat." Her heart was pounding, her head spinning. She was holding some other woman's underwear in her hand, unable to move or even think.

Then her brain snapped into action. He would deny it. She knew him too well now. He would probably say they were hers and she was crazy for forgetting she put them in his bag. Everything was always somehow her fault, even though he was the cheating bastard.

She shook her head. She had to find more proof. But whatever she found, cell phone bills, lipstick, love notes, it wouldn't matter. He would somehow explain it away and deny it. Then, she realized, it didn't matter. This was her place. And as of now, he was out of it. She started to fling his stuff in his suitcase, thinking how convenient of him to leave it on the floor and open for her. And when the suitcase was full, she would move on to putting his stuff in garbage bags, that seemed fitting.

She paused in her flinging just long enough to make

Cat Johnson

two phone calls. Call number one was to the locksmith to have her deadbolt changed. Call number two was to Donna's house. She got the machine.

“Hey, I'm coming tonight and I've thought of something very Halloween-ish for us to do. Just make sure Grace brings her spell book.” As she hung up the phone, she glanced out the window at the huge orb of a full moon just appearing on the horizon. She was feeling very much like a witch at the moment and she was definitely in the mood to be bad.

Chapter Five

“I can’t believe he was cheating on you! I always knew he was an ass, but I never dreamed...” Donna poured her a big mug full of hot cider spiked with rum. She handed it to Belinda. “Here, you need this.”

“All men suck,” Grace proclaimed, unwrapping another piece of chocolate.

“You got that right,” Donna agreed.

Belinda was as up for a male bashing session as they were, but it somehow didn’t seem very satisfying tonight. And she was really on edge waiting for her cell phone to ring. It was only a matter of time before Max came home and found not only all his belongings in the hall, but also that his key no longer worked.

God, she hoped he didn’t go crazy, kick down the door and hurt the cat or something. Then she remembered. This was Max she was talking about. He would never risk scuffing his shoes, and she doubted he could kick down a door even if he wanted to. She looked up to find both her friends watching her.

“You OK?” Donna asked.

Cat Johnson

She forced a smile. "Yeah, I'm fine."

"Well, I know what will cheer you up." Grace got up and pulled the spell book out of her bag. "I even picked up colored candles, incense and herbs to enhance the spells."

Belinda had to smile. Grace was really getting into this, she thought as she watched her sprinkle the table with dried rosemary.

Donna rubbed her hands together. "OK. Me first." She closed her eyes and said, "I wish I had enough money to buy a beach house. Oh, and tax free."

Grace shook her head. "We're not wishing on a falling star, or blowing out a birthday candle. You have to do it the right way."

Belinda agreed. "Yeah. Don't be so silly, Donna!"

Grace shot her a nasty look because of her sarcasm and opened the book. "Here. I found a spell to attract money in the book. First I have to light the green candle. Next, you have to envision the money coming to you. Now, chant this, 'Money, money, come to me. I deserve prosperity!'"

Donna did as she was told, then sat there expectantly. "Well?"

"It takes time. Jeez. What do you want? Instant gratification? And you have to help a little bit, too. Did you buy a lottery ticket yet for this week's drawing?"

Donna scowled. "No."

"Well, don't you think you should?" Grace raised an eyebrow.

Donna rolled her eyes. "Yes. OK. Now it's Belinda's turn. What do you want to do? I'll help you chant if it will make Max's penis fall off faster."

Belinda smiled. "I don't want that to happen. Although, if he suddenly developed erectile dysfunction disorder, it would serve him right."

"There's no spell for that in the book, but I don't see why we can't write our own. Ooo, I've got it! How about,

Black Cat

‘What you reap is what you sow. Let Max’s penis refuse to grow!’” Grace rhymed, looking extremely pleased with herself.

“I like it!” Donna cried. “Or how about this one. ‘For what he has done to thee, let him receive it back, times three.’ That way it’s up to karma or the Goddess or whoever to decide what happens to him.”

“Hmm. Not bad. You guys are good at this. But I don’t care what happens to Max, as long as he stays out of my life. I just want to be happy and eventually find a decent guy.” Belinda took another sip of cinnamon and rum-laced cider.

“Well, for a love spell we have to light the red candle. Actually, it’s pink for love and red for lust and passion, but they were out of pink. So red is close enough, I guess.” Grace scrambled to change to the appropriate color for the spell.

Belinda considered. “Lust and passion are good, too. OK, how about, ‘By the moon and by the sun, let me find he who is the one. May he be loyal and may he be true, this is my desire, I ask this of you’.” She finished the rhyme and looked up to see what Donna and Grace thought.

Grace screwed up her face and turned to Donna. “She always has to outdo us. Have you noticed that?”

Donna shrugged. “Yeah, but she’s good at it. What can I say?”

Belinda rolled her eyes. “It’s not a competition.”

“Whatever. Anyway. My turn. My boss has been a total bitch to me, so I’m going to curse her.” Grace blew out the red candle and lit a black one. “Black must be good for curses, right?”

“I don’t know! This is your thing, honey.” Donna shook her head.

“Well, it can’t hurt. OK, here it goes. ‘Vengeance is mine, your reign is through, let all of your meanness, return to you. Lose your job and cry boo hoo hoo’.”

Cat Johnson

“That was like some sick warped version of a Dr. Seuss rhyme,” Donna said to Grace.

Grace hunched. “You’re just jealous.”

Belinda smiled. “OK. No fighting. What do we do now?”

“Eat more chocolate?” Donna suggested.

“Chocolate later. Now, we cleanse our lives by writing down whatever we want to rid ourselves of on a piece of paper and burning it. Do you have a cauldron or something?” Grace asked Donna.

Donna snorted out a laugh. “Sorry, my cauldron is out being repaired by the wizard. Will a fondue pot do?”

That comment elicited more faces from Grace, but they ended up all in a circle around the fondue pot with burning pieces of computer printer paper in their hands.

“I rid myself of my boss.”

“I rid myself of Max.”

“I rid myself of not having enough money for a beach house.”

They collectively threw the papers into the fondue pot and watched them burn. And then watched the fire alarm lights in the apartment begin to flash as the sound deafened them.

“Uh, oh.” Donna flung her cider into the pot to douse the flames, but apparently rum mixed with cider wasn’t good for fighting fires and the flames shot higher.

Belinda ran to the kitchen and soaked a dishtowel in water. She threw it over the pot. By the time the firemen were banging on the door, the fire was out, although the smoke remained.

Donna ran to open the door as Belinda and Grace peeked under the towel to make sure the fire was really out. But their attention was definitely no longer on the pot when they heard Donna say, “Well, hello there!”

Belinda looked up to find two of the cutest firemen she had ever seen, suited up in full fire fighting gear, pushing their way passed Donna and into the apartment.

Black Cat

She held up her hand to stop them. "It's out. Everything is fine."

At that, one hunk used his radio to call down to the truck to tell them the fire was out as Grace pushed her way forward, her hand extended to the other hunk. "Thank you so much for coming. Let me introduce myself. I'm Grace. That's Donna and this is Belinda. And you are?"

Belinda elbowed her and mumbled. "This isn't a cocktail party."

He smiled at them. "I'm Antonio and that's Troy." Then he looked down at the table where candles, incense, herbs, a spell book, chocolate, mugs of cider and a bottle of rum surrounded the still smoking and scorched fondue pot. "What exactly happened in here?"

Donna rushed forward. "We were cleansing."

The one introduced as Troy, who had *O'Donnell* written on his jacket, waved the smoke away and took a look into the pot. "Looks like it didn't work."

"Yeah. Sorry we brought you all the way here for nothing," Belinda began when Donna interrupted her.

"Yes, it would be a shame to waste a trip. Would you like something to drink?"

Troy looked at her like she had offered to have his first born. With widened eyes, he blurted, "I'm getting married."

The other one laughed at his fellow firefighter's reaction until he realized that the attention had now turned to him. He held up both hands in defense. "Practically engaged. But thanks anyway. We, uh, gotta get going."

"Maybe another time. Thanks for coming!" Donna called out the door after their hastily retreating figures, and then sighed. "We should have gone down to the truck to thank the rest of them personally."

"Good idea. Do you think we can get down there before they leave?" Grace agreed, rummaging through her purse and applying the lipstick she'd found.

Cat Johnson

Belinda just laughed. “You guys are crazy. And it’s late. I think I’m going to get going. It’s making me very nervous that Max hasn’t called in a huff yet.”

Donna hugged her at the door. “You be careful and call us if you need anything.”

“Here, take my pepper spray just in case.” Grace dug through her purse some more and handed it to her.

Belinda took it, doubting she would need it against Max, but you never knew. Better safe than sorry.

But when she arrived at her door later, she realized she wouldn’t need it because Max had never come home. She found his stuff still in the hall and a message on the machine inside telling her he was working late and might not make it back at all that night.

Yeah, sure. She knew what he was *working* on and it wasn’t work. At least she wouldn’t have to deal with him tonight. And it was with that thought in her mind that she fell into a deep dream-filled sleep.

Chapter Six

The man turned cat often dreamed. And when he did, it was almost always of his life before the witch had cursed him. The battles in which he had fought. The women he had bedded. His family. His childhood. More recently, in the time since his woman had taken him home, he dreamed of her. What it would be like to touch her with human hands. How her breasts would tighten and pucker under his mouth. How tight and warm she would feel surrounding him. And how she would cry out when he brought her to climax, over and over again.

Sometimes in his dreams he'd place her on her hands and knees and take her from behind. Other times she would sit above him and ride him like a wild horse. Once he even dreamed they had showered together and made love in the hot steam of the bathroom. He wondered what a shower would feel like against human skin. Certainly like nothing he had ever experienced as a man a thousand years ago, back in the days of bathing in cold streams between battles.

But this dream, this was the most vivid dream he had

ever experienced as man or beast. He could have sworn he was awake, but he couldn't be. He couldn't be awake, because he was a man, and he lay next to his woman, on her large bed with the fluffy covering.

The Max-man was not there, probably would never be there again. He had seen to that. And since the Max-man was no more, he had jumped up onto the bed and snuggled next to his woman's breast. Breathing in her scent, he fell sound asleep.

And then, in his dream, he woke. And being a man, in his dream, he took his hand and stroked her face, brushing away a stray strand of her silken hair. Her face felt warm beneath his touch and he craved a kiss. He touched his mouth to hers, softly. He felt her breath as it caught in her throat, and her eyes opened. Her hand came up to touch his face, then tangled in his hair as she pulled his mouth down again to meet hers.

He kissed her deeper, letting his tongue explore her mouth. She tasted of mint for some reason. Perhaps that was what those commercials for toothpaste meant when they said 'minty fresh'. Hmmm. This truly was a vivid dream and he intended on enjoying every moment of it.

He let his hand wander down to her breast and felt the weight of it in his hand. She responded to his touch by pulling off her nightshirt, allowing him full access to her warm, naked body. He was briefly torn between taking her now, in case he awoke, and prolonging this ecstasy for as long as possible.

He decided fairly quickly on the latter and let his hand search hidden, forbidden places. She moaned and allowed him access to wherever he chose to go, and he chose to go many, many places.

She spread her legs for him as he lowered his head and tasted her. His fingers filled her. He heard her breath quicken, felt her muscles tighten around his fingers. His dreams had never been this real, he thought as her orgasm quickened within her. He felt every hair in his head as she

Black Cat

tugged at it with both hands to pull his mouth closer to her as she cried out.

When she calmed and finally released her hold on his head, he let his tongue explore further to find the puckered entrance lower. Perhaps next dream, he'd take her there. He considered what that would be like as he let his finger dip inside. She tightened, then relaxed for him.

He loved how she trusted him completely to not hurt her. He took that trust very seriously, even in his dreams, and made sure his touch was gentle as he pushed deeper and her body accepted him. He'd pretty much acknowledged that this was just one hell of a dream and didn't think too much about the fact that he could feel each and every band of muscle within her as he breached them with his finger. All he cared was that it was extremely nice, dream or not.

But right now he wanted to be buried hilt deep within her and thrusting, so he crawled back up her body. Kissing his way as he went, he raised himself above her.

His cock ached for her, and he let said appendage find its own way between her legs, sliding easily into her. He loved it that she was ready for him. In his dreams, she was always ready for him, but never had he felt so completely her warmth or so vividly smelled her scent. Not like this.

She sighed as he raised her legs and sank deeper. He closed his eyes and held himself there. God, he never wanted this dream to end. But it would, they all did eventually. And before that happened, he fully intended on taking his own gratification.

With that in mind, he drove himself home over and over until she cried out again in pleasure. Her fingers raked down his back, and he felt each and every scratch she left behind. Finally exploding within her, he thought again, this was one hell of a dream.

Cat Johnson

She awoke in her king-sized bed tangled in the sheets and feeling extremely satisfied...and actually, a bit sore. God, she had had one hell of a dream. It must have been a combination of the rum, the thoughts of love spells and those two hunky fireman. Although, the man starring in her dream last night didn't look like either one of them. This one was a strong, dark haired man with the hard body and muscles of a warrior.

She'd have to tell Grace that her red candle caused extremely vivid sex dreams. She remembered tangling her hands in his long hair, seeing those piercing blue eyes bore into hers as he loved her.

She rolled from her side to her back and smacked into a warm hard body. "Sorry, Black Cat," she mumbled.

"No problem." A deep man's voice answered her. Her eyes opened wide. That was not Max's voice. And that was definitely not Black Cat. A scream ripped from her throat, followed by many more.

The man leapt from the bed. Looking down at himself, his face showed as much shock as she felt as he said, "What in the bloody hell...?"

She did take a moment to consider his odd accent as she scrambled from the bed and sprinted for the door, still screaming.

He finally sprang to action. He grabbed her around the waist and covered her mouth with one very large, strong hand. "Hush, woman! I can't think with all your screaming." He breathed in deep and spoke again. "How the hell did this happen?"

Heart pounding out of her chest, she watched him look over at the rumpled bed that still smelled of sex. He shook his head, still holding her tightly, and whispered, "It wasn't a dream."

She was nearing the point of hyperventilation when he turned his attention back to her. "Please don't be frightened. I would never hurt you." He glanced back at the bed again. "And as for that. I would never have done

Black Cat

that either. I thought it was just a dream. An exceptionally good dream.”

She tried to ask a question, which came out only as a mumble from behind his hand.

He slowly uncovered her mouth, but kept his hand close by. She didn't scream again. Instead, she asked, “Who are you? How did you get in here?”

He laughed wryly. “My name is Lar. And as for how I got here, you wouldn't believe me if I told you.”

The phone rang, startling her. He continued to hold her tightly through the five long rings until the machine picked up.

Belinda heard her own voice recite the outgoing message. Then, following the beep, she heard Donna's voice.

“Oh my god! Belinda, you will never believe this. I got into work this morning, and found out that I won five hundred dollars in the baby pool. Everyone put in twenty bucks and then guessed what day the receptionist's baby would be born. I said midnight on Halloween, and I won! I think that money spell we did last night actually worked! I'm going out right now to buy a lottery ticket. I'll try you at work. Bye.”

Belinda wasn't actually convinced that Donna winning the baby pool proved their spell had worked. Although, she had wished for love over a red passion candle and was currently being held by a naked man who had been quite passionate.

Her heart still pounded with fear, but he made no move to hurt her. But he also had not told her how he got in.

Then the phone rang again. She looked longingly at it. If only he would release his grip enough so she could break free and grab it to yell for help.

Then she heard Grace's voice. “Belinda. Call Donna or me, we're worried about you. Those stupid spells we did last night actually worked! I got into work this

Cat Johnson

morning to find my boss cleaning out her desk and crying. She got fired! And you were right. Karma is punishing me for cursing her. They just gave me her entire workload. I'm probably going to be here all night trying to just sort through it. I'll try your cell phone. Just call us!"

Belinda took another look at the man. Lar. Wow. Had she actually conjured him?

She looked into those blue eyes again, and there was something very familiar there. Oh, no. She recognized those eyes. She looked around the room. Her black cat was nowhere to be seen. She swallowed hard, her legs feeling weak. Good thing this muscle man was holding her or she probably would have crumpled to the floor.

Taking in a deep breath, she released it slowly then said, "Tell me how you got here. I think there is a good chance I will believe you."

He smiled sadly. "I got here when you brought me home with you. I was, I am, your black cat."

She closed her eyes and digested this information. She had turned her beloved Black Cat into this man before her. What the hell was she going to do now? Unexpectedly, tears filled her eyes and spilled over onto her cheeks.

He wiped them gently from her face. "Don't weep, my lady."

My lady. Not only had she conjured herself an incredibly hot sex machine of a man, she'd made him from another century! She'd have to stop reading those historical romances.

"I'm sorry. It's stupid, it's just, I miss my Black Cat." She wiped at her own eyes.

He shook his head. "Your black cat is right here." He stroked her hair from her face and kissed her forehead gently. "I'm right here."

Damn it. Why did the perfect man have to be magical? Of course she couldn't keep him. How would she explain him? He didn't even have a social security

Black Cat

number! She'd have to turn him back.

A loud banging on the door and the sound of Max's angry voice interrupted her thoughts and regrets.

The man, Lar, looked angry at the sound and growled, "Max-man." He released her and strode, gloriously naked, out of the bedroom and right to the front door.

Belinda threw on a robe and scrambled after him. She watched as he flipped the locks and flung open the door.

The look on Max's face would have been funny if the situation weren't so dire. He practically sputtered. "Wwwhat the hell?" Max peered at her around the wall of naked muscled man in front of him. "You're whoring around...with him?"

Lar's eyes flashed with anger as he lifted Max by the collar and smashed him against the doorframe. "You will never speak to my woman like that again. You will never speak to her at all, ever again. You have insulted her and belittled her for the last time. Take your things, go to your nympho-whore and never return. Do you understand me?"

She watched Max's eyes bulge as he nodded.

"Good." Lar dropped him none too gently to his feet, gave him one careless shove back into the hall, and then shut the door in his face.

Belinda stood, open-mouthed and practically melting. She never thought she liked the caveman type. She was wrong.

Lar took a calming breath and turned away from the door and the sounds of the fool Max-man struggling with his baggage in the hallway. He walked back to his woman. "I apologize for his rudeness."

She was practically quivering. It was the shock, he knew. It was too much for her to handle all at once. He pulled her into his arms and held her gently. He heard her mumble against his chest. "I don't want to turn you back into a cat. But how can I keep you?"

He pulled back and looked down at her pained

Cat Johnson

expression. Lar knew his woman thought she and her friends had somehow conjured him with their ridiculous gift shop novelty spell book. But since waking to find himself changed back, he had pieced together what had more likely happened.

The battle that injured him took place exactly one thousand years ago, just before Samhain, what modern people called Halloween. And although the words the witch used to curse him were unfamiliar to him at the time, he remembered them exactly. He'd never forget them. He'd picked up enough knowledge over his long life to recognize now that she'd cursed him in Latin.

As soon as he could, he would find a Latin dictionary and look up the words the witch had spoken. He bet he would find she had destined him to be a cat for only one thousand years. *Only*. Ha! He thought briefly of Sebastian, hopeful that he, too, had been turned back.

But at the moment, his woman needed all of his attention. Her eyes glistened with unshed tears.

"What's wrong, my love?"

"I'm frightened."

"Surely not of me?" That thought cut him like a knife.

She shook her head. "No. I'm afraid of losing you." And that thought pleased him above all else.

He ran his hand up and down her back. "I have a lot to explain to you, my love. But take comfort in this thought. I am with you now, and I will never leave you. I knew the moment I first saw you standing before my cage that my future lie with you." He bent to softly kiss her trembling lips. "You stole my heart then, and I gladly let you."

She reached up and pulled his mouth down to hers again. When she finally broke away, he said, "I know you loved your black cat. Can you also love the man?"

"Yes." She shook her head and laughed. "It's crazy, I know. But yes."

He smiled and leaned down, intent on claiming his

Black Cat

woman as his own once again.

She blocked his kiss with one raised finger against his lips. “Um, maybe now is the time for your explanation.”

He nodded. He would explain, but he would make it quick. His cock was already bobbing with desire for her. “One thousand years ago, a vengeful witch turned me into a cat. I have lived that way until last night, when the spell expired. So you see, *you* didn’t turn me into a man. I always was one.”

She ran her hands up and down the muscles of his arms. “And what did you do when you were a man a thousand years ago?”

“I wielded a sword for a living. And did it quite well, if I do say so.”

She pressed closer against him, smiled and raised a brow. “You still do.”

He felt his face grow hot but couldn’t help but smile. Modern women were shameless, and he loved it. He scooped her up and as he carried her to the bedroom, he actually thought fondly of the witch whom had set him on this path a millennium ago.

Sometimes a curse turned out to be a blessing, if you just gave it enough time.

The End

About the Author:

It all started in first grade when Cat Johnson won the essay contest at Hawthorne Elementary School and got to ride in the Chief of Police's car in the Memorial Day Parade...and the rest, as they say, is history. As an adult, Cat generally tries to stay out of police cars and is thrilled to be writing for a living. She has been published under a different name in the Young Adult genre, but Linden Bay is the first to release her romances.

On a personal note, Cat has one horse, too many cats, one dog, parakeets, fish, and a husband, and is not sure which of those gives her the most grief. Needless to say, she is very busy most days on her little 18th century farm in New York State. She plays the harp professionally and stresses that this does not mean she plays well. A past bartender, marketing manager, and Junior League president, Cat's life is quite the dichotomy, and on any given day she is just as likely to be in formal eveningwear as in mucking clothes covered in manure. Cat hates the telephone but loves email, and is looking forward to hearing from you.

cat.johnson@lindenbayromance.com

Also by Cat Johnson:

- Trilogy No. 102: Opposites Attract
- Trilogy No. 103: Red Hot & Blue
- Trilogy No. 105: Smalltown, U.S.A.
- Trilogy No. 106: Nice & Naughty
- Trilogy No. 107: True Blue
- Trilogy No. 108: Just Desserts
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