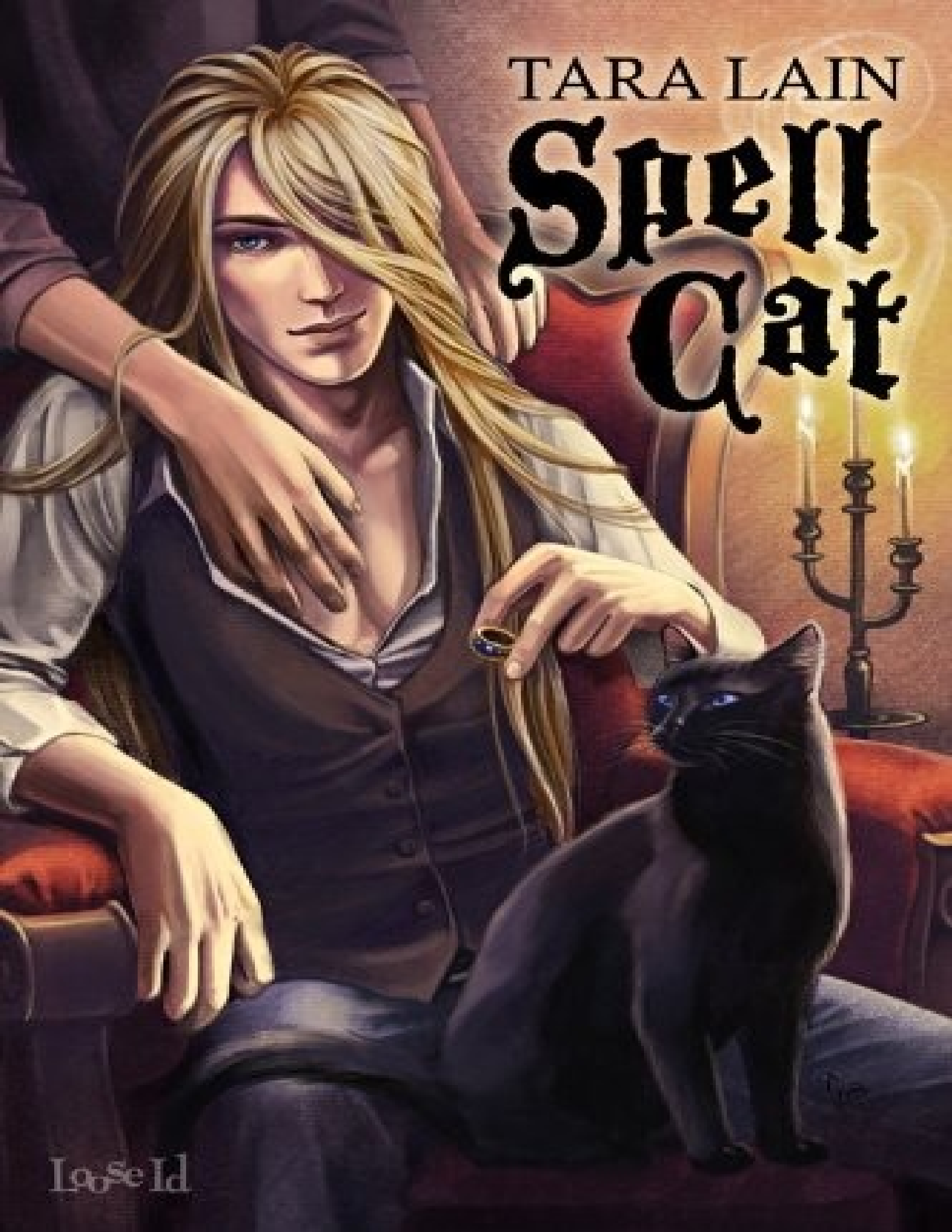
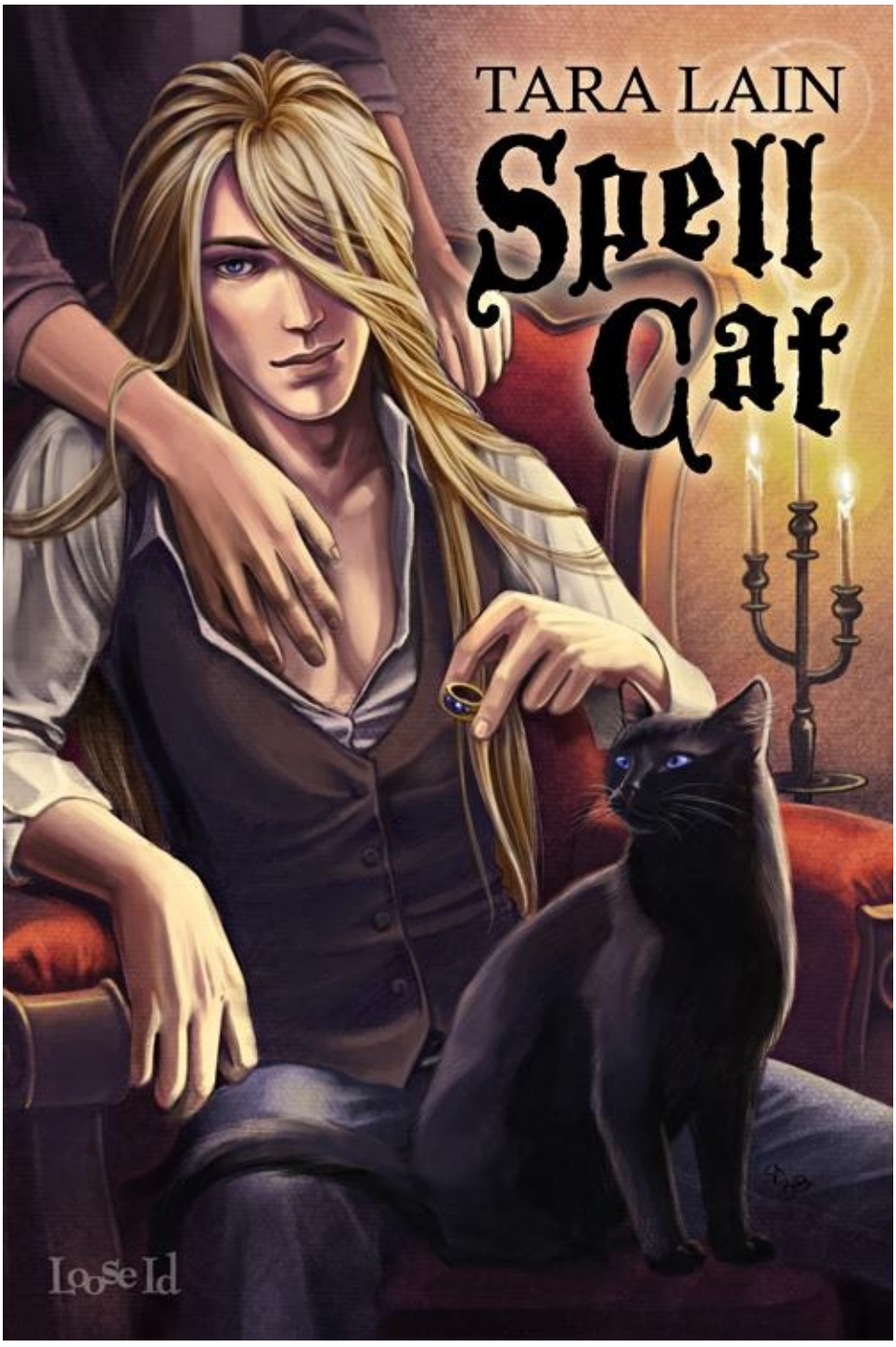

TARA LAIN
Spell Cat
Loose Id





SPELL CAT

The Aloysius Tales

Tara Lain

www.loose-id.com

The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

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Dedication

To everyone who needs a little magic in their life.

Tara Lain

Chapter One

"Witches burned at the stake!" Killian Barth looked out over the eager students who crowded the lecture hall. *Okay, that got their attention*. Nearly one hundred pairs of young, bright eyes stared at his face. He stepped out from behind the lectern and stood beside it. One particularly pretty girl leaned forward in the front row, giving him a hint of cleavage and a big smile. Part of the group they called his "harem." Boy, had she made a mistake.

"No one is certain how many people, mostly female, were murdered during the three-plus centuries of the witch trials that we'll be covering in this course."

"Jeez." The soft voice came from somewhere near the front.

"Jeez, indeed. Sadly, they were all murdered in the name of God." The girl shuddered. Good for her. This might be one of the most popular classes at the

university, but all of his students had different reasons for being here. Some were serious historians; others were looking for titillation or an easy A. Then there were the girls who wanted to marry him or at least fuck him. What had the girl said? Jeez.

Marriage was a particularly sore subject at the moment. *Okay, concentrate*. He flipped his long hair over his shoulder and got a giggle from a couple of the girls.

Professor Killian Barth, sex symbol. What a joke. He input a command on his laptop, and the projector began to flash a series of slides onto the big wall screen behind him.

“While churches have been trying to cover up the actual numbers for centuries, moderate estimates say one hundred thousand individuals were killed in the time between the fourteen hundreds and seventeen hundreds. Women’s groups and modern-day witch covens maintain the number is far higher.” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

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A male voice called out from somewhere in the crowd. “Why would anybody believe someone who claimed they were a witch?”

Killian turned slowly. The kids shifted in their seats. He tried not to smile. The speaker hadn’t gotten the unwritten memo. “Will the person who spoke stand, please?” A tall, handsome boy with dark brown hair stood slowly. He didn’t look anxious to be embarrassed or thrown out of the class. Good, it gave Killian the chance to do his required speech early.

“Mister…?”

The boy shrugged. “Janx. Jimmy Janx.”

“Yes, Mr. Janx. I want you and the entire class to know that I welcome all sincere questions relating to the subject of witchcraft, the history of the witch trials, or related issues. But note that I said ‘sincere.’ I do not teach this class as a joke or to give any of you an ‘easy A.’ If you have done your homework, you should already know that this class is anything but easy and that I expect you to take the death of somewhere between thousands and millions of people very

seriously indeed. Especially since it impacted the entire future of the Western world.” He smiled slightly. No sense in being too hard on the kid. “Now, Mr. Janx, would you like to rephrase your question?”

“Yes, sir. Why would modern-day people still believe in witches? Is there any reason to think such people aren’t crazy?”

Killian smiled. The front row sighed again. “Ah, that is the question. Well done, Mr. Janx.” The bell sounded, and students began gathering their papers. “We will address your question in a future session.”

As the class filed out, Killian turned his back and packed his briefcase. He hated to shut off their enthusiasm, but the thought of his impending dinner with his mother to discuss her marriage agenda drove him crazy. Soon he’d meet Lavender Karonoff, his mother’s choice—no, everyone’s choice—for his bride. Everyone’s choice but his. He sighed. Power was no substitute for love, no matter what anybody said. And he ought to know.

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He needed to get home and prepare.

“I meant no disrespect, sir.”

Killian turned to see Jimmy Janx standing at the foot of the dais. “None taken.”

“I’m really looking forward to this class.”

Killian looked at the boy’s open face and felt his energy. Yes, he was the type.

Probably having strange psychic or out-of-body experiences he couldn’t explain that scared him witless. Many people did. No wonder the young man seemed spooked. “I hope the class is very worthwhile for you, Mr. Janx.”

“Thanks, Professor.” The boy hurried to catch up with his friends. Had to give him points for being willing to address the terrifying teacher. Killian knew his presence could be formidable to someone with psychic sensitivity like this kid.

Okay, home. He packed his laptop into the briefcase, then gathered the fall of hair from his lower back and wrapped it into a queue at his neck. A clip from his jacket pocket held the hair in place. He snatched up his motorcycle helmet from the chair and started toward the door.

Halfway across the room, he stopped. Who was that? Holy fucking gorgeous, as his students would say. Standing in the doorway was the most breathtaking creature he had ever seen. Tall—probably a couple inches over six feet—and slim, with longish, unkempt brown hair and bright eyes that gazed out from behind dark-framed glasses.

Jeans and a long-sleeved shirt. Professor-style for sure.

Killian reached out with his feelings. Smart, almost scary smart, and viscerally passionate. His favorites. Well, they would have been his favorites if he'd been allowed to have such a thing. He swallowed so hard the guy probably heard it from several feet away. Damn. One would really think that somewhere along the line he would have learned to be cool.

The man's shaggy head cocked. "Sorry to bother you, but I'm new here. Can you tell me how to get to the physics building?"

Physics. Not his best subject. But right now he needed mechanics to keep his cock from rising. This man seemed to radiate heat even from several feet away, and it lit a fire in places Killian hardly recognized. Standing here with a rapidly rising hard-on would be embarrassing. "Uh, I, uh, believe it's directly across the street from here." The guy flashed dimples at Killian. "Damn. You're not the first to say that. I'm not usually so bad at directions. Can you tell me which street? I've already been across a couple streets."

"The side street, Templeton."

"Oh." The stranger produced a wide smile. "Wouldn't you know I'd choose every street but that one?" He paused as if he was searching for a new topic. "Quite a group I saw leaving here. What's your subject?"

“Witchcraft.”

The laugh burst out explosively. “You’re joking?” Gorgeous, but rude. “Not even slightly. I teach the history of witchcraft, among other things.”

“Sorry. Guess that was impolite.”

“Yes, I guess it was.”

The guy cocked his head and peered at Killian over the tops of the black rims.

There was a lot of mischief in that handsome face. “Since I’m on a roll with being insulting, I think I’ll go all the way. I hope you won’t think I’m a stalker, but I stood here and watched while your class filed out. You’re about the most gorgeous thing I’ve ever seen. Is there the slightest chance you’re gay?” He ducked and held up his hands as if to deflect a blow, but he never stopped smiling.

Killian arched an eyebrow. A lot of people assumed he was gay because of his long hair and pretty face, but he never confirmed or denied. “Who wants to know?” The paragon thrust out a slim hand. “Blaine Genneau. New professor of quantum physics.” He grinned wickedly. “Gay professor of quantum physics.” 6

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Killian took that hand and got a flash of heat straight to his balls. Like lightning had streaked through the window into his jeans. Extraordinary. He pulled his hand back. Maybe the lightning loosed his tongue. There had to be some reason why the words came out of his mouth. “Killian Barth, professor of history. Gay professor of history.”

He gazed into those eyes. Green. Yes, deep green like ancient Chinese jade. And a carved mouth. Just the type he imagined wrapped around his cock in his daydreams.

But with one big difference. Killian sighed so deeply, it felt like his heart cracked. Yes, this man was gorgeous. Yes, Killian was gay. In truth, he was dying for a real relationship with a partner who both attracted him and fulfilled him, and if he had ever been allowed to discover the type of partner he wanted, he knew Blaine Genneau would have fit every parameter. Every parameter but

one.

He tucked the helmet under his arm. “Good to meet you, Blaine.” He walked past the man and out into the sunshine toward his motorcycle. He couldn’t stay. He couldn’t find out what he’d been missing. Because no matter how perfect this man might be, Killian Barth didn’t do physics professors. In fact, he didn’t do humans. Humans stole his energy and depleted his race, and that wasn’t allowed. Because he was the most powerful male witch in ten generations, and he was expected to reproduce.

* * * *

Jimmy stopped just inside the coffee shop door. He was buzzing. Like somebody had put a little vibrator under his skin. Felt weird. But it happened more and more.

Crap, what was wrong with him? Deep breath. *Get a grip*. He looked around and spied his three friends in a back booth. This wasn’t his favorite coffee place. There was another one a few blocks from here where he always felt more at home, but his friends picked this one four out of five times. They said the other one was lame and reeked of professor smell. Shit, he didn’t care.

Walking over to the booth, he tossed his backpack into the pile with his friends’

and pushed onto the bench seat beside Sammy. “Hey, bro.” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

Sammy adjusted his skinny ass on the seat, bumped Jimmy’s fist, and returned to a lively discussion of the new babe who had occupied a prominent front-row seat in Witchcraft today.

Were these idiots really arguing over whether the girl was, indeed, a double D or merely a single? Time for a new subject. “That Professor Barth is totally intense, isn’t he?”

Alvish looked annoyed. Jimmy knew he had no interest of any kind beyond girls.

“I think he’s weird.”

Chen hit the side of Alvish’s head, just missing the big ear that had turned his name from Alvin to Alvish. “You think everybody minus a rack the size of Kansas is weird.” He looked at Jimmy. “Yeah, he is intense, but kind of interesting, don’t you think? Sure seems to know his stuff.”

Alvish shrugged. “Anybody who’d specialize in teaching witchcraft is weird. I rest my case.”

Jimmy frowned. Sometimes the dude bugged him. “You’re taking the course; isn’t that weird?”

“Hell, no. I take it to bag the babes in the front row when they find out their beloved, beautiful weirdo teacher is gay as a bag of jelly beans.”

“Who the fuck told you that?”

“Nobody had to. Give me a break. Waist-length hair. Pretty as a damned picture.

Not married.”

“How do you know that, Alvish?”

“No ring.”

Chen shrugged. “My father doesn’t wear a wedding ring. But I gotta confess, I think the guy probably is gay.”

Jimmy poured some iced tea from a pitcher on the table. “You’re just jealous of the fact that all the gorgeous women pass out over him.” 8

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Chen grinned. “Not all of us can be as lucky with the ladies as you, Janx.” Alvish thrust out his slightly receding chin. “How do we even know Janx’s so-called girlfriend exists, huh? None of us has ever seen her except from a distance.

Maybe that chick was just his cousin or somebody.” Sammy reached over and

smacked Alvish's head hard this time. Out of the group, those two had the rockiest relationship. "Because Jimmy doesn't lie, that's why, asshole."

Alvish shrugged. "Just sayin'."

Jimmy shrugged. He didn't really want to talk about it. "Cut it out, you two. My girlfriend is real." He sighed and sipped some more tea. "But none of you may ever get to see her."

Alvish brayed, "See. Told ya."

Sammy turned a shoulder to the big-eared antagonist and looked at Jimmy. "How come, bro?"

"Because her father hates my bony ass. He doesn't want her seeing me at all." His chest hurt just saying it. Jesus, half the crappy time he wanted to die, and the other half he could kill somebody.

"But you said you thought she was the one."

That twisted the knife. "Yeah."

Alvish leaned forward on the table. "So which is it? Is she 'the one' or not? As if there was just one anyway."

Try not to hit him. "Yes, asshole, she is the one, and I would do anything and be anything to have her, and I may have to give up everything in my life to do it, but I intend to make her mine no matter what her frigging father says. Would you like to find some other ways to be totally obnoxious, or is that absolutely clear?" Alvish stared at him with huge brown eyes. "Crystal."

* * * *

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Killian leaned against the wall of the shower stall. He loved his vintage bathroom with its subway tile floor and pedestal sink. The shower was the one modern indulgence in the room. All four shower heads focused on his

overheated body. He needed to get dressed for his dinner with his mother, but higher priorities called. That lightning still sizzled through him, and it had to be released. He'd positioned his body so that one of the heads pounded its spray directly on his hard cock. Gods, it felt good.

Some Master Witch he was. Couldn't even find a good partner to do this for him.

He leaned his head against the cool tiles of the wall and closed his eyes. A partner.

Someone to love and to wipe out his loneliness. A partner he could appreciate and respect and have sex with. Oh yes, regular sex would be wonderful. In a big bed, with crisp white sheets, and a breeze blowing in from a window. He would snuggle into his partner's arms and look up into his green eyes. Killian flexed his fingers. He could feel that shaggy brown hair—damn! His eyelids flipped open. Stop. Enough with the human. Focus on the business at hand. He grinned. Exactly in hand.

A bit of lube in the hand, please. Heat filled his forehead, and slick fluid appeared in his hand from what he thought of as the "great lube bottle in the sky." Oh, yes. He reached down and started stroking. The foreskin was sensitive, and he loved the feeling of pulling it back as he pumped. Slow, and one hand over the other. The motion he liked best.

With just a thought, he made the water spray begin a pulsing rhythm. He opened his hands at the top of the upward stroke to let the water pulse onto the sensitive head.

Yes, yes. Oh, Powers, he needed to come. He was going to come—soon, yes, soon. His hips jerked, and his hands flew faster and faster as he felt the juice pulsing in his balls.

Come on. Come on. He needed this. If he couldn't find a good man, at least he could get himself off. *Come on, damn it!* Why couldn't he come?

He squeezed his eyes shut. A good fantasy. That was what he needed. Something that really did it for him. Oh gods! Yes, yes! Hot semen began to pulse out of his cock as hard as the shower spray beat down. Jet after jet of cum hit the shower wall. He should 10

control himself. But he couldn’t. His body shook, and heat flowed through every cell.

He leaned against the wall again, gasping for breath. Gods, what was wrong with him?

In the vast wide world of witchery, the only thing that did it for him was a clear image of the human physics professor sucking his cock.

Chapter Two

“Yes, Nicholas, I understand the significance precisely.” Evangeline Barth straightened her pearls and waved away the cook who had been consulting on dinner.

Nicholas got on her last nerve, as the young people liked to say, but he was powerful.

Witches whispered that he had resources far beyond those he showed on the surface.

And he was the new head of the council. That would make her directly related to the Council Master through the marriage of her son, the Witch Master, to Nicolas’s daughter, the likely successor to Evangeline’s own position as Witch Mistress, the most powerful female witch in the community.

“Your son is a strange one, Evangeline. His job in the human community, his insistence upon living like some kind of pauper, to say nothing of his sexual proclivities. It’s unnatural.”

Heat flashed in her cheeks. How dare he? “Be that as it may, he is massively powerful.”

“Power is of little use to us if he won’t use it and we can’t control it.” She

smiled. “That is the nature of power, now, isn’t it?”

“Do not sound so self-satisfied with your creation, Evangeline. You have much to lose.”

“I’ll keep that in mind.” Her teeth hurt from clenching them. “So is Lavender completely on board with this plan?”

The slightest pause on his end gave her a rush of satisfaction. He cleared his throat. “She will do as I say.”

“So in other words, she isn’t cooperative?”

“She will do as I say.”

She smiled and adjusted her pearls an inch to the left. “Yes, Nicholas, I’m sure she will.”

* * * *

“Killian, my darling, I know I don’t need to remind you of the fact that, as the most powerful male witch in generations and one of the few who have ever met or exceeded the capabilities of the females”—she patted her hair—“you have responsibilities to our race and our craft.”

“Yes, mommy dearest.”

He watched his mother lean back in the pure white dining chair. That upholstery was so pristine that only a witch who knew she could clean it with the flick of her fingers would dare sit drinking red wine in it. Her beautiful, smooth forehead wrinkled ever so slightly. “You know I do not enjoy sarcasm.” He leaned on the large mahogany table. All this space for just the two of them.

“And you know I don’t enjoy being told I must sacrifice whatever chance I have at happiness for the benefit of some imaginary future generations.” She flicked a graceful hand. “You are for all intents and purposes a king among our kind,

Killian, and kings bear responsibilities.” He snorted. “Nonsense. The unruly mass of supernaturals we affectionately call witchery no more recognize me as a king than”—he pointed at the tea cart—“that teapot can fly…without assistance from you or me, that is. They like me, yes, but king?

Nonsense.”

Her dark blue eyes narrowed. “Ah, but they could come to see you as such when you assure more power for our kind against the increasing threat of the human hordes.” What the hell was she up to? “What increasing threat?” She leaned back. “Even you must see that the rise of religious fanaticism all over the world could easily bring us back to tribunals and witch burnings.” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

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“I see no such thing, but even if it did come to that, the humans would just murder one another as they did in the earlier centuries. They hardly ever caught one of us really.”

She frowned. “Well, I suppose you would know, though why you insist on that idiotic teaching profession I will never understand.” He sighed. “We’ve covered this a few thousand times.”

“Yes, yes. Empathy, the masses, the great unwashed.” She rose grandly. “Let’s take our coffee in the living room, shall we?”

Killian followed her from the “cozy” table for sixteen, through the grand arch into the “family” living room, which was far smaller than the formal living room. A few hundred people could hang out in there. Witches were rich as a race, and the Barths, as the most powerful, were also among the richest. His mother favored grand statements.

Not his taste. But he’d always kind of liked this family room. It was almost comfortable with its deep floral-patterned fabric chairs and love seats. Love. Funny. There had never been a wealth of that. Everyone around him was a lot more focused on power.

His mother gestured to the space. “On Saturday, we’ll have an early gathering of the select few here and then welcome the community in the formal living room

at seven for cocktails and dinner. And, of course, the announcement of your betrothal." Gods, just the word made his stomach turn. But though he fought it, the truth was she had him by the short and skinny. Something was killing his race. Apparently, he was the only one who could stop it.

She looked at him. His mother was a tiny ball of witch power, barely over five feet tall. His father must have been tall, since Killian topped Evangeline by a full foot. "You will help with the party, won't you, darling?"

He knew that meant two things. Since his taste and sense of style and order exceeded that of even their most talented staff, he was expected to be certain that their party was chic but still elegant and the absolute talk of the witches' community. It also meant he would adjust, polish, space, heat, cool, and otherwise perfect the setting and 14

the food using his fine motor powers that few witches could master. Sure, most could handle lighting some candles, starting a fire, or even a little transfiguration now and again, but moving fine crystal a quarter inch to the right without a crack was a subtlety few possessed.

He collapsed into one of the reasonably forgiving chairs. Gods forbid anyone should get too comfortable. "Of course I'll help."

"And you'll make me proud of you?"

This had only one meaning. "You mean by being civil to Lavender Karonoff, thereby not pissing off her powerful father and coven." She sat opposite him. "I mean by being *charming* to Lavender and her very powerful family, or she will likely turn you into a mouse." He laughed. "You really think she's that good, huh?"

"Reported by all my sources to be the most powerful female witch of the younger generation."

He leaned back in his chair farther. Throwing his power around was really contrary to his nature, but sometimes… "That doesn't mean she's more powerful than I am." He gazed at his mother over his steepled fingers. "You aren't." She shot him a killing glance. "And that's precisely why a union between you is so

important. Your offspring will engender a new level of power in future witchery, undoing the impact of the witch/human unions, and assuring the continuation of our kind over many more centuries."

It sounded like catechism. "And the fact that no woman of any kind has ever given me a boner doesn't interfere with your plans at all?" She half rose from her seat. "Killian Barth, do not be vulgar!" He leaned forward as she resettled. "Mother, as you have known since I was seven, I am gay. Women do not excite me."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

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By the time he stopped laughing, tears were staining the floral upholstery. He gasped. "Sorry, honestly I am. Hell, I wish I could just donate my sperm like humans do."

"You know that won't work for witch males. And there is no need to discuss such things at dinner."

He nodded. Witch sperm died outside the magic body, and that was just fact. Shit.

"Yes, Mother."

She shook her head. "Gods, you remind me of your father." Not that again. She always tossed that at him when she was least pleased with him. Strange. His father's sperm had produced this so-called great witch, but in the times she talked about him, it was always with disdain.

She sat on the edge of her seat, arms crossed. "Do you or do you not want your betrothal gift?"

If refusing the present would get him out of the marriage, he'd do it in a red-hot second. In fact, he didn't want any gift from his mother these days. But she was his mother and the only creature who he could claim cared about him one iota. Gods, that made him sad. "Of course I want the gift. I've been looking forward

to it.”

“Very well.” She rose, all queenly, and left the room. Killian went over to the side table where the maid had laid out the coffee and refilled his cup, adding cream and a dash of cinnamon. He preferred tea, but his mother always served coffee. He sipped.

What in hell was he going to do? He wasn’t a king, but he sure as hell was a sacrificial lamb. The whole of witchery—at least the reasonably civilized portion—counted on him to up the ante on power. A lot of generations of intermarriage with humans had diluted the power of witchdom until now families sometimes gave birth to children with no powers at all. They all knew that. The Witch Council preached it, and he’d learned it in witch school as a child. Personally, he didn’t think that was such a tragedy.

He liked humans—many of them. If he could solve his race’s problem by surrendering 16

his power to them and becoming human himself, he’d likely do it. But no. Instead, he had to stick his cock into Lavender Karonoff.

He sat on the love seat with his coffee and sipped. Many of his community, most in fact, knew his sexual preferences, but they didn’t give a fuck—literally. Witches were long-term thinkers, and his bloodlines would infect the whole next generation with additional magic. Gods, he wished he knew a way out that wouldn’t destroy his race.

His lusting after that human was a perfect indication that he was on the edge. The lack of love and the plain old lack of sex in his life were getting to him. He was losing control, and in a witch as powerful as he, that could be dangerous. He sighed. Lot of good that power ever did him.

“Ahem.”

He turned to find his mother, looking quite excited actually, holding a small animal carrier. *What the fuck?* She held it out to him. “This is for you.” He took the carrier. What in hell had she done? “Does it bite, or should I open it?” Again, the forehead wrinkle. “I doubt that it bites, but I’m not entirely sure. It just

arrived before dinner, and I haven't opened the cage."

"Good grief, Mother, that was two hours ago." He put the carrier on the couch and sat beside it. He looked inside. All he could see were two brilliant blue eyes, as bright as his own, but these eyes were slightly crossed. Nothing else was visible. "Hello there." The creature blinked.

Slowly he opened the door.

Didn't want to scare the beast.

"Do be careful, Killian."

Looking inside, he could just make out an outline of a sinuous body. "It's a cat. A black cat. How amazingly clichéd of you, Mother."

"It's not a cat. It's—"

"Looks like a cat to me. Is it a female or a…" At which point there emerged—no, *strutted* was the word—there strutted from the cage a long, lean cat so black it absorbed light. Swinging from its narrow posterior was a set of balls so impressive they would have done justice to a mountain lion. Killian laughed. "Oh, never mind." Evangeline moved a couple steps closer, still unsure. "I'm telling you, it only looks like a cat. It is, I have it on the best authority, one of the world's most powerful familiars."

The cat sniffed around a bit and then sat, literally crossed one forepaw over the other, and stared at Killian.

"What authority?"

"Ozmandiasin. You know he is generally trustworthy. Plus, he knows it's for you, and he would not disappoint you. He is fond of you." Killian didn't mention that the old lech was fond of Killian's cock and tried incessantly to get in his pants, but it was true that Ozmandiasin could be trusted. "Why are the cat's eyes blue? I thought only Siamese cats had blue eyes."

“I asked Ozmandiasin the same thing when he delivered him.”

“So what did he say?”

“He said Aloysius likes blue eyes.”

“Al-lo-wish-us? Who’s that?”

She pointed. “The cat. I mean the familiar. His name is Aloysius.”

“Whoever picked such a name?”

“I suppose he did.” She perched anxiously across from the love seat on which Killian and the cat sat.

“Well, Mother dear, he is, I’m sure, a perfectly lovely cat—uh, familiar. But I have no need of him.” Besides, he wasn’t anxious to have a sinuous, semi-Siamese sneak stooging for his mother while living under his roof and eating his —what the hell did he eat?

Suddenly, in one leap, the cat sprang and landed on Killian’s shoulder. Except for the balls part, the magical feline wasn’t large, so it managed to drape itself quite comfortably like a breathing fur collar around Killian’s neck. “Hey, c’mon. You don’t need to be up there.” He reached for the cat and felt very sharp fangs resting quite gently but firmly against the fleshy part of his hand. When he tried to tighten his grip on Aloysius, the fangs pushed harder. When Killian released, the fangs got more delicate.

His mother smiled. “There, he’s yours already. And you’ll be very glad. Aloysius both magnifies and manifests power. Cast any spell, and see if it isn’t true.” Hell, he might as well humor her. Killian waved a finger idly at the unlit lamp in the corner. It clicked on. He shrugged. “How is that better?” He heard a soft little growl, felt a massive shiver through his spine, and every light in the room clicked first on and then off, leaving him staring at radiant blue eyes and not much else. “Oh hell, all right. I believe you.” The lights clicked back on, and Aloysius proceeded to take an elaborate tongue bath.

“You see, Mommy knows best. I’m told you’ll get maximum power if you pet Aloysius when casting a spell or allow him to lick the object of the spell. This last is supposed to be practically foolproof.”

“What the fu—uh, whatever am I going to do with a cat?” She finally relaxed enough to sip her coffee. “Well, if you’d live here, as any sane witch would choose to do, you’d have people to feed and care for him. As it is, you’ll just have to do it yourself.”

He looked at the feline, whose head was curved around and practically tucked under his chin. “What the hell. Okay, Al, let’s go.” Since the cat wasn’t budging from around his neck, Killian got up, hugged his mother, and pulled on his jacket against the early spring chill, all with a fur necklace. He grabbed the carrier, heard a soft growl by The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

his ear, and set it down. *Okay… Cat three, Killian nothing*. “Thank you, Mother. I’m sure I’ll find him very, uh, useful.”

Evangeline trailed him to the foyer of the house where a maid waited to open the door, looking slightly startled at his new accessory. He kissed his mother on the cheek.

“So I guess I’ll see you Saturday.”

“No guessing about it, young witch. It will be a grand occasion. I’m already discussing details of the wedding with Nicholas Karonoff.” He sighed. Better not to argue. Wrapping his jacket and fur cat a bit tighter around him, he stepped out into the early spring chill and headed for the car. His mother’s house—his house actually—sat on a grand street in New York. He preferred the bohemian flavor of the neighborhoods near the college, but still, all these trees coming into leaf, shimmering in the streetlights, made the place look like fairyland.

He glanced down at Al, whose head rested on the shoulder of his jacket. “Good thing I brought the car, cat, or you’d be demonstrating your flying skills on the back of my motorcycle.” He opened the door of the electric sports car and slid in. The cat didn’t slip an inch. “Don’t think this car is an indication of my lifestyle. I just happen to be a fool for the occasional technological toy. You’ll find the rest of my accoutrements pretty sparse.”

“Merwaow.”

Killian wasn’t sure what that meant, but he didn’t comment. “So, what do you eat? Shall I stop and get you some kitty kibbles?” *Hisss.*

Oookay, that meaning was pretty clear. “I’ve got some canned salmon. Will that do?” He swore the damned cat smiled.

Driving into SoHo, where his apartment was, even the hum of the little car couldn’t keep his mind from the sorry state of his life. The stupid cat purred in his ear.

“Glad you’ve got something to purr about.” Powers that be, the whole universe was 20

closing in. He wanted a life. Every cell ached to be loved. He yearned for someone like… No. He just wanted someone to love him. And he was signing away that chance on a marriage license. It would be great to be noble, but—face it—he wasn’t. He was no Witch Master. Why couldn’t he have been born human? What kind of prankster gods gave him more power than any other witch? He felt like the lead performer in a giant cosmic joke.

He pulled into the very expensive parking garage—his other indulgence—got out, and locked the car in its stall beside the motorcycle. He walked the block to the old brownstone, the top floor of which he called home. The mail was boring. *Okay, cat, check out your new digs*. He opened the apartment door.

Aloysius leaped off his shoulder, hit the floor with a soft thud, and began exploring. *Make yourself at home*. He closed the door. “I know. I told you, it’s not much.” Of course, it was perfectly decorated, though in flea market finds and amusing hand-me-downs from friends. So what? It interested him to see what he could do, living without any of the resources to which he had title. No one understood it. Maybe he didn’t either.

He walked into the small bedroom and took off his coat and shoes, stripped off the semigood clothes he’d worn to his mother’s, and pulled on a pair of drawstring sweatpants and a comfy sweater. The cat followed on his heels into the kitchen. “Okay, I know I promised.” Aloysius watched carefully as Killian

opened a can of salmon and dumped it in a dish. He started to put the dish on the floor and got one paw crossed over the other and a patient stare. “Oh hell.” He set the dish on the counter. Al hopped up and dug in.

Killian sat on the little chair by the breakfast table. He’d remodeled this kitchen with his own hands, scrounging used subway tile and pieces of granite. He’d only used magic when he couldn’t lift an object or make two pieces fit. And he’d spent a bit extra on the appliances. “So what do you think?” The cat kept eating.

Killian leaned his head against the wall. “What am I going to do, Al? Everyone expects me to do this marriage. I guess it really could mean a lot to my people. My people… Well, you know what I mean. But gods, producing kids with a woman! I don’t swing that way.” He got up and walked down the short hall back into his bedroom.

When he looked down, Al was right there.

Killian sat on the edge of the bed. “If you’re supposed to be my familiar, I guess you better know that your witch is a fag. And not a very good one. Can’t really do the job for witchery, but I’m no better at doing the job for myself.” He fell back on the blue bedcover, a bedcover that had hardly seen anyone on it but Killian since he’d gotten it.

The cat jumped up and looked at him as if he understood. Okay, he was losing it. But he had to talk to somebody.

“I haven’t ever had a serious relationship. When I was young, my mother managed to scare off any boyfriends I could find, and she wouldn’t let me anywhere near human boys. I guess she was just protecting me, but still, no boyfriends for me.

And now, I just get users who think I’m some kind of road to the top of witchery. I hate it so much.” Damn. His eyes blurred. “You’re going to think I’m some kind of witchy wuss.”

The cat walked over and licked his hand. The sandpaper surface tickled his

thumb. That did it. When had he last felt even a tiny lick done with true affection? His mother loved him in her way, but she was a Master Witch and cared far more for power and scheming than she ever had for love. She couldn't understand why he didn't value the same things. She had carefully selected his father for his good breeding potential, and she'd sent him on his way as soon as she'd shown signs of being pregnant. She'd gotten just what she wanted. The most powerful witch in the world, or at least one of them. Well, no. He guessed she hadn't wanted a flaming gay witch who would give his last spell to be held by a lover who truly cared for him.

Tears began to drip from his eyes. *Hell, what's the use?* He might as well cry. A moan escaped him, and he rolled into a fetal ball. "Oh, Al, I'm so lonely. So very, very lonely." He cried until he slept from exhaustion.

ALOYSIUS STARED AT the lean body and the long dark gold hair. He slipped under the man's arm so he could lie close to his chest and hear his heartbeat.

Chapter Three

"What is your cat's name, Dr. Barth?"

Killian looked from the pretty, young front-row dweller over to a very self-satisfied feline sitting on the instructor's desk at the front of his classroom and washing his face. Yes, said feline had refused to be left behind. Killian had been frantic from having overslept when he'd strapped on his helmet and headed for the motorcycle. Al had trotted behind. Then the damned cat jumped onto his back, wrapped into his fur necklace position, and hooked a paw into the helmet strap. Never so much as yowled all the way to the class. Now he seemed enthralled by the class and the topic.

"Aloysius."

“Aloe what?”

“Aloysius. I call him Al, but he doesn’t seem to like it much.” The girl cooed. “Well, of course not. He’s far too aristocratic to be called Al. I’ll call him Mr. Wishes.”

He laughed. “Yes, Miss Archer. Mr. Wishes is a very good name.” If she only knew how good.

A voice called from the middle row of seats. “Aren’t cats associated with witchcraft?”

Killian flipped his hair over his shoulder. “Yes, though mostly through superstition.” He smiled. “There is one example of how witches’ cats killed hundreds of thousands of people, however.”

“You’re kidding?” That from the same voice.

The eager faces stared at him. Kids loved mayhem; that was for sure. “Yes. You see, the witch hysteria caused many ignorant people to kill cats, thinking they were associated with witchcraft. The lack of cats allowed the rat population to multiply, and we all know what the rats caused, now, don’t we?” He narrowed his eyes at the young humans. No one answered. “Come, come. Rats are known carriers of disease, and the principal disease of the period was…”

“Plague.” The word was whispered by a different voice; he thought by Jimmy Janx.

“Yes, plague. There are experts who believe that the killing of cats helped to cause and spread the bubonic plague. Amazing, the price of ignorance, isn’t it?”

“Dr. Barth?”

He nodded at the young woman in row seven. Bright and inquisitive.

“Sir, do you think we’re ignorant to be interested in witches?” Ah, bright indeed.

“Clearly, Miss Roberts, since I teach the course, I must not think the study of witches is ignorant.”

“Yes, sir, but you’re a historian. We’re kind of looky-loos, getting off on the whole witch thing.”

He laughed. “Well said! I respect sincere inquiry into all subjects. But I also know, as you suggested, that some of you, and some who have already chosen to leave the class, came in order to laugh or feel superior or get a little superstitious chill while garnering a much-needed history requirement.” The students laughed. “But while you are here, you are mine, and I will try to instill in you the value of the search for truth.

Not truth as we’re told it is or should be, not truth as we want it to be, or as our parents or clergyman or teachers tell us it must be, but the truth as it resonates in our own souls.” He could talk the talk. Oh, when would he walk the walk?

“Wow.” That voice he thought was Janx again.

“How many of you have been to Washington, DC?”

Many hands rose.

“Been to the Jefferson Memorial?”

Still a lot of hands.

“What is carved around the inside of the dome?”

Only one hand remained raised. “Mr. Janx.”

The boy stood. “‘I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.’”

The lecture hall stilled. Pins could have dropped. The bell rang, but no one moved.

“Thank you, Mr. Janx. Shall we all strive to join Tom in that conviction?” He waved a hand, dismissing them. “You know your reading for next week, everyone. Have a good weekend.”

He knew all their weekends would be better than his.

Turning toward the whiteboard, he packed his briefcase and tied up his hair. Al’s furriness landed on his shoulder. He reached up idly and scratched. “Let’s go figure out what in the hell to do about this fucking party, Al.”

“Mrawr.”

“What?” Al didn’t make much noise, so the comment was notable.

“Mrawr.”

Killian looked up and froze. There he was. Leaning in the doorframe of the lecture hall. The delicious, edible, sassy, enchanting, gay…impossible, untouchable, human physics professor.

The luscious man—Blaine, wasn’t it?—pushed away from the door and walked toward Killian. He smiled. “That, my friend, was quite a lecture.”

“You were listening?”

“Yep. Even more amazingly, so were they. But pass them over to me, and I’ll teach them what a bit of unvarnished truth looks like.” 26

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Killian smiled. The man was infectious. “There are more things twixt heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your quantum physics.” Blaine stopped in front of Killian and cocked his head. The brown hair fell in front of his eyes, and he flipped it back with his hand. “And who have we here?” He reached out toward Aloysius.

Killian flinched back. Damn, the man could lose a hand trying to pet Al. “Sorry, don’t think you should—”

Blaine just kept coming until his hand connected with the silky coat. “Naw, cats

like me, and I like cats."

The second Blaine's hand connected with Al's chin, the damned cat began to vibrate and press into the caress. A disgusting display of mutual admiration. Blaine cooed, and Al purred while rubbing himself against Blaine's hand luxuriously. Then the impossible happened. The damned physics professor picked up Aloysius, turned him over in his arms, and began to tickle his tummy. Well, damn. That cat could have turned the man into a toad for less. Instead, big balls jangling, Aloysius, powerful familiar, turned himself into a fur rug, trying to get closer to Blaine. The damned cat was clearly gay.

No fair. Why did Al get to rub all over this human, and Killian didn't? Didn't humans rob familiars of their powers too? Just watching the little lovefest made Killian hot. His skin prickled. Gods, if he could just press into Blaine's hand like that. *If only he'd rub* my *belly*. He desperately wanted to cuddle into Blaine's neck and…damn!

Those weren't his thoughts. It was his connection to the familiar. Had to be.

He grabbed Al out of Blaine's arms. He got a wide, green-eyed stare from Blaine.

"Sorry, gotta go."

"Oh really? I wanted to take you to lunch, or coffee at least." Aloysius, the rat cat, squirmed in Killian's arms, trying to get back to Blaine. "No, I have to help with a party. Really have to go."

The beautiful professor reached out a hand. Killian shied, trying to turn his head, but he couldn't stop that hand because he had his arms full of the damned wiggling cat.

Blaine just kept coming until he touched Killian's cheek. A brand. A hot brand. Sweet hot. The fingers traveled down his cheek, featherlight, to his neck, then back up to his lips. The first touch against his mouth turned him to a still flame. Sweet gods. The fingertip ran back and forth over his bottom lip, back and forth.

Tickling, soothing, seducing. Al had become perfectly quiet. *Now* he didn't complain! The cat slithered up Killian's neck. Blaine stepped closer.

Oh, Powers, when had someone connected his bottom lip directly to his cock? His jeans strained against an erection so hard, he could have used it for a wand—if witches actually needed such things. Witches had to breathe. He couldn't remember how. He only wanted to feel that touch. Back and forth. Gentle. Hot as hell.

Blaine leaned in, still caressing Killian's lip. Had to stop him. Didn't want to stop him. The beautiful face came closer. Killian felt breath on his lips. Cinnamon, vanilla.

And then, ever so slowly, Blaine replaced his finger with his tongue. Soft and wet, a form of nutrition Killian hadn't had in so long. Ever.

He didn't even try to resist. His lips opened. Sweet gods, his tongue met its match.

Its reason for being. Sweet, hot. In one fast grab, Blaine wrapped an arm around Killian and hauled him against his hard, lean body. Sweet Powers! Killian's hard cock met Blaine's like two long-separated lovers. Their wood rubbed together. The bonfire could have lit New York. Blaine's hands grasped Killian's ass, forcing him even closer.

Killian's body rode hard against Blaine's. Heat coursed up his spine like a molten river.

Needed more. Had to have more.

Purrrr. Purrr. Aloysius sounded like a moan in his ear. He didn't need any encouragement. He thrust his tongue even farther into Blaine's mouth, his body so on fire, he wanted to lie down here and take it up the ass. Oh yes, please. How fast could he get his clothes off?

A bell sounded. He froze. Kids' voices. Gods, what was he doing? He'd lost his

flaming mind. Keep it up, and he'd lose his powers for real, to say nothing of his job. He ripped himself away from Blaine. The green eyes looked shocked but still heavy-lidded.

Killian wanted to grab him back and keep kissing. No, damn. He had to get away. Had to save himself.

He scooped up his briefcase and ran from the lecture hall, not caring if Aloysius was able to hold on or not. He was insane. This was a fucking *man*. This could not, would not, happen. He might not be able to get it up for a female witch, but he wouldn't dilute his power—that belonged to his people—by giving his energy away to some human. Even if he wanted to. Even if he was a poor excuse for a Witch Master, he was their only hope.

He raced to the side parking space where he kept the sleek Japanese motorcycle.

When he got there, he reached up and grabbed Al forcefully, dragging him from his shoulders and dangling him in front of him in space. They'd see who turned whom into a toad. "What was that back there? You gay for fucking humans, cat? Don't you understand what he could do to me?"

"Merwaooow."

That cat knew exactly what Blaine could do to him, and it had nothing to do with saving witchery. "Damn it!"

A couple students passed by. He must look crazy, yelling at a cat. He threw Al over his shoulder and sat on the edge of the motorcycle. A germ of an idea kept playing in his mind. It had to work. He was simply too vulnerable because he didn't have a partner that appealed to him.

His hands tightened on the grips. He had to make himself immune to the human physics professors of the world. He looked at Al. "I've had it. I am going to find someone to fuck. A witch who is reasonably appropriate, assuming anything male is appropriate to the witches' community. Before they tie me up to some fucking female, at least I can fuck something with a cock."

“Merwaowr.”

Yes. He couldn’t believe he had said it either.

* * * *

Across the street, a camera shutter clicked several times in succession. The cameraman watched the blond tuck his long hair into his helmet and throw a cat, for fuck’s sake, over his shoulder. Then he took off on that motorcycle…like a cat out of hell. Jonesy chuckled at his own joke.

He’d started to pull out his phone when he noticed a man come out of the building and watch the motorcyclist’s retreating back. The new guy ran a hand through his hair and then turned and walked away, looking damned upset. *Hmm. Wonder what that was about*. He grabbed the cell and dialed.

The deep voice answered. “What is it?”

Shit. This guy gave him the stutters. “Yes, Mr. Karonoff, it’s Jonesy. The guy, uh, man you have me following just did the strangest thing yet.”

“What?”

“Well, he’s running around with a cat attached to him.”

“A cat?”

“And he appears to be talking to the damned, uh, darned beast.”

“Interesting.”

“Yes, and when he came out of his building and drove away, I saw another man come out and look after him. The guy seemed really upset, but I don’t know why.

Actually, the blond guy with the hair and the cat seemed pretty wigged out too.” He giggled. “Crazy enough to shake his cat.”

“Just keep watching, Mr. Jones, and don’t let anything escape you. Is that clear? A lot depends on this.”

He swallowed hard. “Yes, sir. I’m on it big-time.” 30

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“See that you are.” The line went dead.

Jonesy pushed End just to make sure the guy wasn’t still on the line. “And have a good evening to you too. You’re doing such a fine job, Mr. Jones. Keep up the good work, Mr. Jones. Shit.”

He got in his car and checked the address where he knew he’d likely find the cat man sometime soon. He grinned. He had to see what the cat man do. Laughing at his own pun, he drove off.

* * * *

Blaine pushed into the physics building and walked back to his office. Neat, tidy, and tiny. He went in and closed the door firmly. No students. He usually enjoyed them, but he needed a couple of minutes.

He picked up a glass sculpture of the globe and fell into his high-backed desk chair. He rotated the smooth glass ball. It always helped him think. What was he up to?

Why was he chasing after this weird history professor? Yes, weird. Hair, cat, motorcycle, witchcraft. Case rests. But so pretty. Was that it? Just because the guy was uniquely beautiful?

Blaine wasn’t usually all about looks. Hell, he loved to stare at the pretty boys as much as the next guy, but that wasn’t the criteria for a relationship or even a date. He liked smart men. Of course, the Barth guy qualified there in a big way, from what Blaine could tell. That was some lecture today. Blaine loved men with open, inquiring minds who liked to explore new ideas. But witchcraft? C’mon. He grinned. Yeah, he could be a little stuck in his ways sometimes, so he loved being challenged. It kept him fresh. God knew, that history professor was challenging. In fact, the guy kept running away. And Blaine was chasing. Not usually his style.

He leaned back in his chair and stuck his feet on the desk. He was no Greek god, but he’d been out and proud for a long time and usually could find guys who

liked him and wanted to be with him. No chasing required. He sighed. So why wasn't he partnered? What did he want that he hadn't found?

That was too big a question. Topic at hand. Why Killian Barth? Hmm, same question. What did this mysterious guy have that made Blaine chase, while he ignored perfectly good men who wanted him? He sat up and put down the globe. Mysterious guy. Yes. Mystery. Blaine was a quantum physicist, for crap's sake. He loved exploring the mysteries of the universe. Unlocking the unknown was a rush with no equal. No equal except a kiss from Killian Barth.

God, when their lips touched, it was like lightning in a bottle. He hadn't gone into the classroom with the intention of kissing the history professor. He'd told himself he just wanted lunch. But seeing those cornflower blue eyes watch as he petted that black-as-midnight cat had been like peeking into one of those French movies they wouldn't let him see as a kid. Sexy, but with meaning just beyond reach. A mystery he had to unlock.

He sighed. Apparently, Barth didn't want to unlock Blaine's mystery. If he was sensible, he'd give it the hell up. But why did he have the feeling that somehow they should be together?

He grinned. Yeah, his mother always said he might be smart, but he didn't have a nickel's worth of sense.

Chapter Four

Killian walked into the Ashes to Ashes Club dressed entirely in black, including the fur collar. Well, if you didn't include a small dash of cross-eyed blue. He hoped he looked smashing—hair polished and shining down his back, a little touch of guyliner, and even some black fingernail polish. Diamonds in both ears and in the pinch of his nostril. He wished Blaine could see him. He wished to hell he could stop thinking about Blaine.

Yeah, eleven p.m., and the gang was all here. Loud music and writhing bodies on the dance floor, mixed appropriately with the flashing laser-type lights that were, of course, produced by a witch's command, but that was invisible to the unsuspecting humans who occasionally wandered in. Sadly, it wasn't a gay club. As in humankind, gay witches only accounted for ten percent of their population, and considering the small size of the community, that wasn't enough individuals to justify a club. In fact, this was the only witches' club approaching a singles' scene, but there should be some pickings.

The hostess knew who he was and found him a table with great deference and a little flirtation. He would have preferred anonymity, but that was hard to come by for the Witch Master. He sat and asked for a cosmopolitan. Girlie, yes, but then he wasn't exactly advertising his alpha-male status tonight. A couple of people he knew came over and chatted. Nice, but not his goal. He didn't invite them to sit, and they wouldn't presume to do so without his invitation.

He sipped and inspected the dance crowd—all male/female couples, but that didn't necessarily mean anything. He turned toward the bar. Hmm, a couple of interesting candidates. Willy Fleishman, or Willy Flash, as he was known. Bisexual, The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

Killian had heard, but discreet. Good. Though a bit stocky and hairy for Killian's preference. And no shaggy brown hair or beautiful cheekbones. Oh hells. He wasn't looking for a life partner here, just a good fuck, and Willy had big feet, which might speak well for his dick. Killian shifted in his chair as his ass tightened in longing.

"May I sit down?"

Killian looked up into a genuinely exquisite face, so perfect he almost wanted to scratch it to see if it was real. Smooth, dark brown hair was slicked back from a carved oval face of creamy white, with eyes that appeared to be dark brown, though in the flashing lights, it was hard to tell. Most amazingly, the witch was a stranger. "I don't believe I know you, Mister…"

"I'm Moran Inglesby, cousin to Aramin Inglesby of your community. I am visiting from Europe."

“I see.” Gorgeous. From out of town. Probably gay, since he’d made the first move. Could be perfect. Strange that he felt a little sad. “Please sit down, Moran.” The man settled and placed a half-full wineglass in front of him on the oval table.

“Unusual neckwear you have there.”

Killian smiled. “Aloysius and I are inseparable…at his insistence.” Moran laughed. Musical and slightly phony. But no one was really comfortable in these getting-to-know-you situations. He sipped his wine. “I’m surprised to see witchery’s most eligible bachelor by himself.”

Killian sighed. Might as well be obvious. “Maybe I was waiting for you.” The man leaned in. “I certainly hope so.” His fingers touched Killian’s. “May I buy you another drink?”

Killian pointed at his still nearly full glass. “I’m fine, thank you.”

“Are you looking for companionship, Witch Master?” Might as well get to the point. “Yes, I am.”

“What do you like?”

Killian glanced into the pretty dark eyes. “I suppose I’m not much different from other homosexual males.”

“Do you want to be tied up, gagged, blindfolded?” Killian frowned. Why would the man start there? “That hardly seems like a starting place.”

The man grinned. “I always believe in proceeding to the bottom line.”

“Those things don’t sound so enjoyable when you know you can remove the bonds at a thought.”

Moran shrugged gracefully. “I suppose, but sometimes a little play is fun. Do you like to play, Killian?”

Maybe not. At least not Moran's way. But he had to give this a shot. The party was tomorrow, and there wasn't a big field of gay players. Moran was attractive—at least physically. "I'm usually up for a little play."

"Would you like to come to my hotel?"

A low growl vibrated against his ear. He reached up and chucked Al under the chin. He cocked his head at Moran. If Killian was planning to get fucked tonight, he didn't really have time for subtlety, but he might have enjoyed at least a pretense of the romantic. "Very well. This place is a little noisy for talking. I would like the chance to get to know you."

Moran stared at him a moment. Was he grasping that Killian did not want to be thought a sure thing? Or was he thinking this whole enterprise might not be worth his time? Of course, both could be true. "Yes, let's go…talk."

"I'll take my own car."

"But I can—"

"Merwaoooow."

Moran's eyes widened. Al must have on his ferocious glare. The cat sure didn't seem to like the guy. But hell, Killian wasn't going to marry him. He shuddered at the *M* word.

They left the club, and after a short drive in which Aloysius gave him a view of his fuzzy back, they got to the small, chic hotel Moran had specified. Killian left his keys with the valet and gave very specific instructions about how to handle the electric sports car. He really was cracked on that little vehicle.

Moran waited for him outside the door of the hotel. When Killian approached, Moran reached out with a scarf, straight for Aloysius. *Hisssss*. Al's ears flattened, and Moran jumped back. Good thing his reflexes were good, or he'd have teeth in his hand right now.

Moran held his hand like it had been bitten. “They’ll never let you inside if they see a cat.”

Killian laughed. “I assure you, there will be no problems with Aloysius entering the hotel.” They walked inside. Killian gently petted Al’s head. *You’re invisible, aren’t you, boy?* With that little invisibility spell, they sailed through the lobby, greeted only by smiles of welcome from the staff.

They rode the fast elevator. Moran reached for Killian, but he sidestepped and laughed. *Don’t get too sure of yourself, witch*. They walked to Moran’s room on the twenty-first floor. Moran slipped the key card into the door and opened it for Killian, then flipped on the lights. The room was large, modern, and had a beautiful view of the city. Killian moved over to the window to admire it and heard the door close behind him. A moment later, he felt hands on his shoulders. He started to pull away, and Moran tightened his grip.

Killian turned his head. “Hang on. I think you promised me a drink and some conversation.”

Moran frowned sharply, then quickly recovered with a smile. “Of course. Make yourself comfortable.” He leered and glanced in the direction of the king-size bed with its turned-down coverlet.

Oh, come on. Killian sat in one of the comfortable barrel chairs by the window.

Okay, he wanted sex, but he just wasn’t a fall-into-bed kind of guy. Well, except maybe for the occasional human physics professor. He’d certainly been willing to take it up against the wall earlier today. He sighed.

Moran walked over from the minibar with a glass containing half an inch of amber liquid. Killian looked up at him. “What’s this?”

“Whiskey. You said you wanted a drink.”

Ass. “Mr. Inglesby, I drink champagne or the occasional cosmopolitan, as you would know if you had asked me.” He frowned at the glass and set it on the

coffee table in front of him. “Certainly not whiskey, neat.”

Moran’s arm circled him from behind. “There are so many more fun things to do than drink.”

That sounded promising. Killian leaned back in the chair and let his head fall against the cushion. A kiss would be nice.

What? Moran’s hands had slid down the chair back and grasped his wrists. “What the fuck…?” He could feel handcuffs cutting into his wrists. “What do you think you’re doing?”

Moran laughed. “It’s time to stop dancing around and get on with it. You said you liked to play; let’s play.”

“Perhaps we have different definitions of play.” He tugged against the cuffs, and Moran laughed.

He pulled again, harder this time. “You’ve spelled them.”

“Well, it wouldn’t be any fun otherwise.” Moran stepped in front of Killian.

Damn, his arms were uncomfortable pulled behind his back, but he didn’t want to completely discourage the witch. There might be some fun if he just waited.

“I’m not without my own resources, Witch Master. I plan to give you what you need. Lots of it.” Moran began to pull the belt from his slim black trousers. Hmm.

Killian held still. Maybe things were on the right track. He said he wanted sex…

Mrrrrr. Al growled in his ear. Killian looked up. Moran had folded his belt into a strap. What the blazing hell? He calmed his voice. “What exactly do you think you’re doing?”

The pretty face grimaced. “I’m going to give you what we both need.” He raised

the strap above his head. Fuck. *Mrrrrrrrr*. The growl decibel increased. Killian focused.

Guess again, you ass.

Moran flew backward like a scarecrow in a windstorm. *Wap!* The strap ripped from his hands, hit the wall, and cracked the mirror in the entry. The handcuffs simply dropped from Killian's wrists. No fuss. He rubbed his wrists.

"What the bloody hell…?"

He flicked his fingers toward Moran. *For good measure, asshole*. The handcuffs flew through the air and hit the man on the head. "I wanted sex, you idiot, not some masochistic torture." He rubbed his wrists. "Let's go home, Al." He wrapped his cat more comfortably around his shoulders and headed for the door.

"Wait. I'm sorry. I just misunderstood."

Killian looked back at Moran, who was lying in a heap against the other chair, with the handcuffs at his feet. Killian raised his hand, and the belt rose, flew through the air, and wrapped around Moran's wrist. "There are a lot of things you don't understand, Mr. Inglesby. Like what would have happened to you if I had really been pissed." Many an errant witch and human had benefited from Killian's generally amiable nature. This fool was getting off scot-free.

He turned sharply and left the hotel room behind. He petted the furry head as he walked to the elevator. Dear gods, what was wrong with him? The only partner he 38

could attract was a flaming human who would leave Killian in cinders. He thought of those lips, that tongue in his mouth, the flare of electricity up his spine. Cinders sounded pretty good right now. "Don't seem to be having any luck with men, Al. Guess I better take my chances with a female."

Chapter Five

“They make a lovely couple.” Evangeline Barth smiled at the picture of Killian’s fairness next to the brunette beauty of Lavender Karonoff, standing amid the dinner guests about to enter the dining room.

“If we overlook certain obvious discrepancies.”

Damn the man. Nicholas Karonoff towered over her, his white hair and bushy white eyebrows making an imposing picture. He had conceived of this betrothal and now cast aspersions on it. The bastard. “If you wish to call off the marriage, I’m sure neither of the young people will object, Nicholas.” She was bluffing, and he knew it.

The marriage had as much benefit to her as to him and the rest of the council.

He scowled. “We’ve come too far. People are convinced of the importance of this union in undoing the damage done by human and witch intermarriage. We can’t go back.”

“Then stop acting like I disappointed you in some way by birthing the greatest male witch of all time.”

“Hardly that long, and what good is his power if he won’t use it? He’s a wimp, your son.”

Yes, he was, and she knew why. She shrugged. “Let’s hope for all our sakes he stays that way.” She slipped her arm through his. “Shall we go in to dinner?”

* * * *

Even he could see that Lavender Karonoff was as pretty as a witch could be. Tall and willowy, probably five feet nine, dark-haired, with huge, deep pansy blue eyes and pale golden skin. He didn’t have to be het to see that she was gorgeous. She also 40

seemed as nice as she was pretty. Why couldn’t he just like girls? That would make this whole thing so damned simple.

They sat side by side at the head table, receiving the endless congratulations and well wishes of over one hundred witches. Gods, these witches had no romance in their souls. He never got to talk to Lavender. If he had liked women, this event would never have gotten them together. And he couldn't be angry with her. It was no more her fault than it was his.

Killian glanced down the table. His mother sat next to him on his right, and next to Lavender on her left sat her father, Nicholas Karonoff, a tall, lean, white-haired witch with handsome features and the aura of certainty possessed by men who are seldom crossed. It was true. As the head of the council, he had huge control over all of them, even Killian.

Other members of their respective clans fanned out on either side, enjoying the status of being so close to the seats of power, as well as wallowing in Evangeline's excellent champagne. After the seventeenth toast with that champagne, however, Killian finally turned his attention to his now betrothed. "Would you like to go for a walk?"

She smiled gratefully. "Love to, thanks." She had no Russian accent. More British and American. Probably the schooling. He raised a hand to the person about to stand for another toast. "Excuse us, please, Master Maronovsky. Lavender and I both need a little air." He smiled just suggestively enough to give the women a chance to roll their eyes knowingly as he and Lavender rose. She was wearing the color for which she was named. A deep, rich purple-blue, like the flowers. She really was lovely.

As they walked away from the table toward the solarium, Aloysius leaped from the chair to which he'd been exiled onto his usual spot on Killian's shoulders. Lavender squeaked a little and then laughed. "He's charming. What's he called?"

"Aloysius. But I call him Al."

"Hello, Al." She reached out. Killian held his breath, but the mercurial familiar seemed to like girls too, because he purred and rubbed against her hand like a good feline.

Killian opened the solarium door, and the two of them walked inside with Al perched atop. Killian took a deep breath. Warm, moist, full of oxygen. Refreshing. He offered Lavender his arm, and they walked on the pathway through the dense plants.

Aloysius's purr was soothing.

"Do you make your home in Moscow, Lavender?"

She smiled and stooped to smell some exotic flower. Killian liked flowers, and she reminded him of one. Something quietly beautiful, but with a touch of sass. "Oh my, no, I actually live right here in New York. I'm in law school at the university. Most of our party came from Russia, St. Petersburg mostly. But daddy has homes in several cities, and I prefer this one. He spends much of his time here too, as you know." He gave her about a million points for that. He adored this city. The life and vibrancy. "But why have they made such an elaborate ritual of our meeting? We could have stopped in for coffee or had drinks, for Power's sake. I teach where you go to school."

She gave him a small smile. "Partly witchly love of protocol, I think, and partly me being a witch."

"Excuse me?"

She sighed and walked a few steps to a bench set along the gravel path. They were hidden from the guests, but could still hear if anyone came in the solarium door. She waved a graceful hand at the bench. "Do you mind?"

"Want to sit?" He raised his eyebrows. "I thought you might not care to ever sit again after that endless ritual inside."

She sat on one end of the bench, leaving space for him if he wanted to join her.

"It's not the sitting. I just need to focus for a minute." 42

"Sure." She intrigued him.

Aloysius, the unpredictable, made a leap from Killian's shoulder into Lavender's

lap. She squeaked again, then laughed and began to pet the inky fur as she stared at the path. She looked up at him. “I didn’t want to meet you.” Well, hell. For a flash, he felt wounded. But that was both ironic and ridiculous.

He laughed.

She looked surprised. “Is that funny?”

“Not the fact of it, only my reaction. Demonstrating the total idiocy of masculine ego, I was offended for a moment by the fact that you didn’t want to meet me, when, of course, you had no reason to want to meet a witch whom you are being forced to marry, and I didn’t want to meet you either.” He held up his hands. “Oh, not the reality of you. In fact, you’re delightful. But the concept of a female that I am being forced to marry is very distasteful to me for many reasons.”

“One of them being that you’re homosexual?” She kept petting.

He smiled. “Am I that obvious?”

She cocked her head. “I think if I didn’t already know, I might suspect. Your amazing, effeminate beauty, your impeccable taste and manners…” She shrugged.

“Sometimes things are stereotypes because they’re true. But I was told by a number of people that you’re gay. It’s quite well known in the community, as I’m sure you’re aware.” He nodded, and she smiled sadly again. “I will say that I would find you very attractive regardless of your sexuality, if things were different.”

“You mean if you weren’t being forced to marry me?” Her sigh might have cracked some ribs. “No, I mean if I wasn’t in love with someone else.”

That got him to sit. He put a hand on her arm. Okay, neither of them was really crazy to be touched. He pulled the hand back. “I’m so sorry. I had no idea. I’ve been feeling sorry for myself because I’m being forced to marry when I’ve never been in love, The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

and here you are being forced out of the arms of someone you do love.” He rose

and paced a few feet. “Is it someone I know? I realize you and I have to figure out a way to have children…” He stopped and shook his head. “No offense, Lavender, but that’s not going to be a slam dunk, as they say. I really am gay.” Another headshake got him back on topic. “Anyway, after we’ve taken one for the team—sorry, I have no idea where these sports metaphors are coming from; I hate sports—anyway, you and he can, you know, be together. Trust me, I won’t mind. If I had someone special, I’d ask the same of you, but I don’t. Anyway, I could talk to him—”

She held up a hand, silencing him. “You’re even kinder than they said. But no, it’s not possible.”

“If he’s in Russia, we can bring him here. It’s not a problem to—”

“No, Killian, it’s just not possible.”

He threw up his hands. “What? You don’t believe in sex out of wedlock when you’re cheating on the gay witch you’ve been forced to marry?”

“No, I don’t believe in sex with humans.”

“With humans? But, he’s not… Oh shit. Excuse me.”

“No, that’s a very good description.” She dropped her face into her slim hands, which didn’t seem strong enough to hold the weight. Aloysius rubbed against her arm.

Killian sat beside her again. “You’re in love with a human male?” She nodded her head “yes,” but didn’t raise it.

He sat beside her again. “Wow. That’s an awful situation.” She raised her head, and he could see tears in the big pansy eyes as she looked sideways at him. “You’re not condemning me for being three times a fool?”

“Our people are in the fix they’re in because humans are so damned hard to resist.

Why should we be any different than the rest of them, just because we’re more powerful?”

“We?”

Quick girl, she hadn’t missed that. “Yes, I have an attraction to a human male as well. But nothing so serious as yours.” Aloysius bit his hand. “Ow. Damn it, Al!”

“Maybe I ruffled his fur.”

Killian rubbed the sore spot, looking daggers at the cat. “No, the beast happens to be cracked on the subject of this human I know. I thought the cat was gay for human men until he met you. Pretty clear he likes girls too. Damned bisexual familiar.” She petted the silky black fur. “I can imagine how powerful he is.”

“You can’t feel his power?”

She shook her head. “No, it’s a blind spot in my abilities. I have trouble reading the power of another witch. I couldn’t even sense my own until your mother told me I was more powerful than most other supernaturals.”

“Interesting.” Strange that a witch so powerful would have such a big blind spot.

He wondered if his mother knew. “Well, Aloysius here is very powerful, but don’t tell him I said so.” He laughed.

She smiled a little. “You’re lucky to have him.”

“Don’t have him. We just hang out together.”

She sighed. “And I guess you and I get to hang out together too, don’t we?” He smiled at her sweet face. “Speaking for myself, things could be a lot worse than having to spend my life with you.”

“You are truly kind, but I’m afraid things are worse.” Al’s head came up at the same time Killian asked, “What do you mean?”

“My father loves me very much, but he really wants this marriage to happen.”

He leaned back on one arm to keep from punching the bench. “My mother does too, and it appears they will get their wish.”

She shifted on the seat, and Aloysius leaped back to Killian’s shoulder. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable, Al.” She reached out, and the cat accepted her chuck under the chin. “It’s more than that, Killian. You see, if we are going to live our The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

very long lives together, we will likely have to find some…accommodation to make it work for both of us. Would you agree?”

“I think that’s what I was suggesting. Perhaps you can’t have the human you love because of the impact on your power and the potential for a diminishing pregnancy, but there are heterosexual male witches who might be discreet—”

“Even if I can endure such an idea, my father is very old-school. He would never accept such an arrangement.”

“For that matter, I’ve not been successful in finding a gay witch to be with either, but on principle, what we do behind closed bedroom doors is no business of our parents.”

“My father is very powerful.”

He looked at her closely. “Not more powerful than the two of us together.”

“No, no. He’s a powerful witch, yes, but that’s not what I meant.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s the head of a branch of the Russian Mafia.”

“A witch wise guy.”

“More like a witch godfather, but yes. And the reason I’ve never just defied him, told him to shove it, and run off with James—you know, the human male?” Killian nodded. “The reason I haven’t done that is because I feel quite sure he would kill James, and while I’m a stronger witch than my father, I can’t bring

the human dead back to life." She petted Aloysius's head. "There are ways to kill witches too, Killian. And we can't protect everyone all the time."

Gods, she wasn't kidding when she said things were worse. The noose he called a life tightened around his throat. "By the powers, Lavender, what the fuck are we going to do?"

"Honestly, I have no idea. And the wedding is in three weeks."

"Have you told your human?"

Tears welled again. "I've told him my father has a husband picked out for me.

He's aghast, of course, to think such a thing could occur in this day and age. He wants me to run off with him, but he's very poor, just a student, and he thinks he would be taking me from my comfortable life."

"He doesn't know you're a witch?"

She laughed, though the sound was sad. "No, he doesn't realize I can pretty much conjure us anything we need. Of course, I guess I'd have to do it before we have sex and I start losing my powers." She broke into sobs. "That's assuming he ever stopped running from the idea of me being a witch long enough for us to have sex." Killian put his arm around her, and Aloysius rubbed against her hair. Gods, he knew so well what she meant. Imagine a physics professor accepting the idea of witches. Some joke! But if it was funny, how come he had tears in his eyes?

Chapter Six

"Excuse me, Dr. Barth."

Killian stopped his briefcase-packing ritual. He didn't feel much like dealing with students at the moment. Yes, but he'd been neglecting them and their questions and problems in favor of his own. He turned to see the handsome young man who'd become a favorite of his in the class. "Hi, Mr. Janx. What can I do for you?" The boy looked at his sneakers for a minute. "Boy" wasn't quite the appropriate description. Janx was likely twenty-one or twenty-two. Hell, Killian was only about five years older.

"Sir, I wondered if I might ever, uh, take you to coffee or something and ask you some questions."

Ah, so maybe the psychic thing was bothering the kid. "Sure." Killian suppressed his sigh. Wasn't doing anything else exciting. "I was just thinking of getting some tea and a scone. You can join me if you'd like."

"Wow." The boy glanced at his watch. "Uh, yes, that would be great. Just need to make a quick phone call. Where shall I meet you?"

"I'm going to the coffee shop over on Prince Street."

"Great. My favorite place. I'll see you in about ten minutes, if that's okay."

"Fine." Killian finished the packing, dipped a shoulder for Al to hop on, and headed out of the history building onto the crowded streets in the cool, fresh spring air.

His eyes drifted toward the physics building across the street. *Don't go there, Killian.*

Literally. The hint of green and growth reminded him of the wedding. He hated this whole thing so much. He was smart, he was powerful, and he was even educated. Why in the name of all the Powers could he not think of some way out while still solving the 48

problem of his people? There had to be something he wasn't seeing. Something he didn't know.

Okay, he needed to work up some enthusiasm for the impending conversation.

“What do you think Jimmy wants?” He shook his head. He was whispering to a cat.

A couple blocks away, he looked around the small, funky coffee shop. Some faculty and several witches. No students. But Jimmy seemed to know where it was.

Since the owners of the shop were supernatural, he didn’t have to conjure to disguise Aloysius completely. He petted Al and flicked his fingers. The little spellet would make the cat invisible to humans.

Sigh. He settled into a comfortable back table and picked up the menu just as Jimmy Janx came in, looking pink-cheeked and breathless. The boy waved and came toward him.

“Sorry, hope I didn’t take too long.”

Killian smiled. “Good conversation? Your appointment didn’t mind being stood up for a mere professor?”

That fair skin colored bright pink to the roots of his dark brown hair. Hmm.

Interesting. “Uh, yeah. No problem. I explained it was important.” Killian raised his brows. “Ah, important.” What did the kid have on his mind? He went back to perusing the menu, and Jimmy took the chair across from him.

“So, they don’t mind if you bring your cat in here?” What? The boy could see Aloysius? “Uh, no. I know the owners, and they’re lenient about Aloysius.”

Jimmy smiled. “I can sure understand that. He’s one great cat. Can I pet him?” *How the fuck would I know?* “Ask him.”

Jimmy grinned and held out a hand across the table—direct, but not grabby. “Hi, fella. Can I pet you?”

Al jumped onto the table and then proceeded to slip directly onto Jimmy Janx’s

lap. Jimmy's grin grew into a face-consuming smile. "Wow. He likes me."

"It appears so." The feline slut.

Killian ordered Earl Grey tea and a lemon scone. Jimmy had coffee and two doughnuts. The waitress brought them right away, since she was the owner's wife and probably wanted to show special attention to the Witch Master. Jimmy continued to pet Al, though Killian couldn't see the full show, since the cat was on the boy's lap.

Killian sipped. He might be American to the core, but he did love tea. "So, Mr.

Janx, how can I help you?"

The boy blushed again. Killian pretended not to notice. "Uh, it's about the witch thing?"

"What thing specifically?"

"You know how you told us that a lot of innocent people got killed because ignorant people thought they were witches?"

"Yes."

Jimmy sipped his coffee and took a big bite of a plain doughnut. Before he could swallow the bite, the question seemed to push out of his mouth, a little muffled. "Does that mean there aren't any real witches?"

Sweet Powers, that wasn't exactly the question he had expected. Killian chewed slowly. "One does not mean the other, no."

The boy looked relieved. Why would that be?

Killian stared at him. "Do you believe there are witches, Mr. Janx?" The big brown eyes got bigger. "Oh, uh, no, I don't know. I guess I wondered if you do. Believe in witches?" He put a hand to his mouth and shook his head as he swallowed the last crumbs. "No, that came out wrong, wait." He took a deep breath.

"Dr. Barth, is there any reason to believe that there are people who have powers

might be greater than what we think of as normal, such that some people might call them witches?”

Killian smiled. “Beating me at my own game are we, Mr. Janx?” The boy grinned for a second, then sobered. “I’d really like to know, sir.”

“Yes.”

Jimmy looked up with wide eyes. “Yes, I’d like to know?”

“Yes, there are such people.”

“Holy shit!”

Killian laughed. “Wait, let me explain. Do you know about some of the feats performed by yoga masters who can stop their hearts, and even be buried underground for extended periods and then dug up completely alive?”

“Yeah, I’ve heard of some stuff like that.” Jimmy leaned forward but frowned. Of two minds, it appeared.

“Such actions might have seemed like witchcraft to people if there wasn’t documented evidence for the biological science behind it. People like Houdini were said to be able to perform truly superhuman accomplishments through the power of concentration and the mind. That’s a type of witchcraft. In the earlier centuries, people were very superstitious. They could easily believe that someone talented with herbs could be using the power of the devil. What we keep in our mind is what we see and become. If people expect to see the devil, they see him.” The boy sat back. “Yes, I understand all that. But I mean real powers, like making things move that don’t have any other reason to move, or making people do things that you want them to do. You know, like witch powers?” Killian frowned. “You mean like spells and rituals? Are you wanting to learn to do these things, Mr. Janx?”

“Shit, no!” The boy jumped, and Al leaped onto the table and then slunk back around Killian’s neck. “I wouldn’t want to learn anything like that. Sorry, Al.”

Killian smiled. This was interesting.

“But what if you…uh, I mean, what if you know somebody who can just do them?”

What could he say? Killian stared at the handsome young face. “I would say to tell the person you know that he shouldn’t worry. Having unusual capabilities is…well, not that unusual.”

The boy sighed. “Really? I don’t know anyone who can—uh, except my friend —

do a lot of weird shit, you know?”

“Like predicting the future sometimes?”

“Yeah, like that?”

“Like thinking of something, and then it occurs?”

“Yes.”

Killian looked hard at Jimmy. Why was the kid asking? If he could do these things, Killian probably ought to know about it. Yeah, but maybe he was better off not knowing. “Jimmy, I know these things seem strange, but many people can—” Killian froze. He stared at the door. The door where Blaine stood. His hands started to tremble.

Just looking at Blaine made his throat dry and caused a very unfortunate hardening of a certain nether area. He had to stop doing this. Then he heard it. *Puuuuurrrrr*. The sound vibrated through his body, making every feeling twice as strong. Damn the cat.

“Uh, Professor…?” Jimmy stopped talking. For a second he stared at Killian, then looked over his shoulder to where Blaine stood. The physics professor’s gaze would start a fire in kindling.

Jimmy grinned. “Hey, it’s Professor Genneau.” Killian reached out to shush him, but Jimmy raised an arm and waved. “Hey, Dr. Genneau. Over here.” Blaine started toward their table, and Killian wanted to run. Al purred even louder, the perverted feline.

Jimmy was all smiles. “Dr. Genneau is my new advisor. I hated the other one, so they gave me Dr. Genneau. He’s really cool.”

Killian tried to talk. “I, uh, thought you were a history major…” As the gorgeous, tall, lean human arrived at the table, Killian got the final blow from his favorite student. “Oh no, I’m a physics major.” Killian watched the man of his dreams—underscore *man*—come closer. Jimmy ran off at the mouth. “Hi, Dr. Genneau. This is Dr. Barth, my history teacher. You guys ought to know each other, because me and the other guys have officially named you the two coolest professors in the school, and—”

Blaine smiled. “Thanks, Jimmy; Dr. Barth and I know each other.” He ran his fingers through his shaggy brown hair, pulled off the dark-rimmed glasses, and put them in his pocket. Powers, those green eyes blazed. And the fire went straight to Killian’s cock. “Can I sit down?”

Jimmy grabbed a chair from a nearby empty table and pulled it over with a squeak to the spot beside Killian. “Here, Professor. Take a load off.” Blaine didn’t move. Just stared at Killian.

Killian cleared his throat. “Yes, of course. Sit.” Blaine slid into the chair. Was it possible to feel body heat from several inches away? Killian’s skin burned. His hands actually hurt to touch the human.

Blaine smiled in the general direction of Killian’s neck. “Hi, Al.” Well, damn, two humans who could see Aloysius? Had his spells completely failed? Had he lost his fucking powers just for lusting after that damned human? Blaine reached out a hand, and the cat leaped from Killian’s neck onto the table, where the human picked him up, turned him over, and began rubbing his tummy. No doubt about it. The cat was a whore.

Jimmy laughed. “Hey, Professor, Al likes me too.” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

Blaine rubbed and petted. “Of course. Al has exceptional taste, don’t you, fella?” The man glanced up at Killian then back at the purring fur rug. “I missed you really bad, Al. I thought about you and dreamed about you, and wanted to pet you and hold you.”

Killian tried to eat his scone, but it tasted like sawdust. Shit, he was going to flame out. Every touch of those long fingers on the silky black fur might as well have been on his own skin. Stroke, stroke. Under the chin. Across the belly. Shit, so close to the balls.

Oh gods! Did witches spontaneously combust? Maybe he’d be a first.

“I wanted to rub your tummy, and make you purr all night long until you didn’t care if anyone else ever petted you.” All four of the damned cat’s legs were splayed out as he lay on his back like the wanton beast Killian wanted to be. Sweet gods, if he could just lie down here on this table, just like Al. Spread his legs, draw them back by his ears, and let Blaine Genneau, human physics professor, ram his cock into this throbbing, pulsing ass until he came in hot buckets—oh crap! “Excuse me. I have to go to the men’s room!”

He sprang out of his chair and headed for the small bathroom down the hall near the front door. He could practically feel Blaine’s eyes burning into his back. The damned human knew exactly what he had done to Killian. Gods! He was going to come. Heat. Pressure. He couldn’t grab his cock to stop it. All these eyes, staring at him.

Two professors looked up from the corner, and a family of witches frowned as he hurried by. *Control, witch! Control.*

When had the bathroom ever been this far? Killian finally got to the door and pulled. Locked. *Noooo!* His nuts throbbed. Gods, he had to think of something else, but his skin burned. He knew the professor was still petting Aloysius, and every hot touch translated to him tenfold. He jiggled the handle. Shit, he’d try the parking lot—The door opened, and a short human male came out, wiping his hands on his jeans. The man looked surprised as Killian rushed past him into the security of the little tile room. *Click.*

Door locked. He ripped his pants and briefs down and had two palms of lube spelled 54

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into his hands faster than his next breath—and he was breathing hard. He positioned himself in front of the toilet. The first touch…

“Ahhhh.” Sweet. Stroke, stroke. Yes, he could see it. Blaine’s hot hands on his cock. Stroke, stroke. The human knelt in front of him. His hot mouth surrounded Killian’s dick, then swallowed it to the stones. Stroke, stroke, stroke. Sucking like a vacuum cleaner. Cum boiled in Killian’s balls. The man begged. *Give it to me, Killian.*

Shove that cock in me. Shoot it down my throat, baby. Gods, *yes!* A scream of heat centered in his balls, then shot out like a brush fire through every nerve. Cum hit the wall. He tried to aim for the toilet, but it couldn’t be contained. Spurt. Relief. Spurt. Ecstasy.

Spurt. Joy.

Finally it stopped. The wall dripped cum, and his cock slowly softened. For a second, he leaned against the side wall, breathing hard. What was he doing? He’d lost his mind. And there were two humans, still sitting at his table, who had witnessed him going crazy. He flicked his fingers, and the wall was cleaner than when he came in. He used the sink for his hands, because the water felt more soothing than magic. Pulled up, buttoned up. Time to face the music.

He took a deep breath. Okay, he was under control, right? He walked back out into the coffee shop. The witch family looked up, and he made a grimace like

“sometimes you just have to go.” The male grinned back. Good. He walked toward the table. Blaine looked up. Oh gods. His cock, the one he had just emptied in an orgasm that should have satisfied him for a year, gave a definite leap. Madness.

Jimmy looked up and grinned. “Everything come out okay?” Humans and their bathroom jokes.

“Yes, fine, thank you. Sorry to take so long.” Killian tried to focus his eyes on

his student. Blaine was still petting Aloysius, and the caresses still vibrated through Killian.

Control. Why didn't he have any? "So, I think we covered enough of what you needed to discuss, right, Jimmy?"

A little pink lit up the cheeks. "Uh, yes, sir."

Blaine looked at Jimmy. "You have a class with Professor Barth?" Killian jumped in before the kid died of embarrassment right before his eyes. "Yes, Jimmy is considering my History of Political and Philosophical Thought class for next semester. He wanted to know what we covered." Killian grabbed a napkin and pulled a pen from his pocket. Here's my number if you have any, uh, further questions, okay?" The big brown eyes sent gratitude. "Thanks, Professor." Blaine looked at Jimmy, maybe noticing the blush, then over at Killian. "You sure teach some interesting classes. Like that witchcraft thing. That sure is popular." Despite his attraction to the man, the witchy part of Killian's brain silently growled. *Watch yourself, human*. "Yes, it's one of the most popular classes in the course list."

Perhaps Blaine sensed he was approaching a black hole, because he backed down.

"I'm sure it's because you're such a great teacher." Jimmy smiled. "Oh yeah, Dr. Barth is the students' favorite every year. How many times have you won that favorite-teacher trophy?" Killian smiled tightly. "A couple." He thought winning it wasn't fair because he was, after all, a witch, but he had never used any powers on his students—ever. It was a point of honor.

"Jeez, way more than a couple. It's been like every year you've been at the school."

"Actually, that's only been three years, Jimmy."

"Wow, seems so much longer."

Killian had to smile. “I’m only a few years older than you are.” The kid’s mouth fell open. “Really? Jeez, you seem so—I mean you’re a PhD and everything, and you know so much.”

“I did complete my schooling a little early. But I’d be quite lost if you were to ask me about physics. I’m just good in my specialty.” Yes, and he could perform a few tricks with their damned laws of physics, but he’d keep that to himself.

Right now, however, the main law of physics in the universe was that he had to get away from the hellish physics professor, or he would turn into a puddle of goo or come in his pants—whichever was messier. It didn’t seem possible, but his rebellious dick kept twitching, and soon he’d be hard again. “If you’ll excuse me, I must get on to my next appointment.” Yeah, appointment with his right hand and some more lube. He looked disgustedly at the freaking familiar still upside down in Blaine’s arms. “Al, are you planning on staying with Professor Genneau?”

“Mrawr.” The cat didn’t move.

The physicist looked up—devilishly. “Alas, he’s made his choice.” He leaned down and whispered in Al’s pointy black ear. “I have delicious turkey breast in my refrigerator, and I’m sure there’s more than one can of tuna.” He stared up at Killian.

“There are clean white sheets on my bed, and a delicious fire in the fireplace, so I’m sure you’ll be very comfortable…Al.”

Jimmy looked wide-eyed. “Wow. Are you going to let him sleep with you? All that black fur?”

“Oh yes, I want him to sleep with me. I truly love cats.” Killian was so out of there. “Keep the bastard feline. I don’t care.” He grabbed his small notebook he’d brought in with him and fled toward the door. He was a Master Witch. No *the* Master Witch. He shouldn’t have to run from anyone. Why did this human have such power over him?

He pushed open the door, and *flash,* a furry collar wrapped around his neck.

Strangle or pet? He petted the beast as he walked toward the motorcycle. “Well, one thing is damned sure. You’re no spy for my mother, because she’d shit a brick, as my students would say, if she saw the two of us drooling over than damned human.”

“Mrawr.”

Chapter Seven

Killian sat on the beautiful old Persian rug he’d found in a secondhand store for a hundred dollars. Aloysius purred beside him. The apartment was illuminated by a small fireplace that unfortunately made him think of Blaine’s erotic description of his bedroom. He was really *trying* to concentrate. He had to. Thoughts of the human consumed him. He had to push him out. Marrying a female was unbearable enough.

Doing it while yearning for this bloody physicist was more than he could stand. He had to fight fire with fire, pardon the pun.

He and Aloysius stared into the carved Moroccan bowl that nestled on a small stand before them, with a conjured flame reflecting blue, red, and golden light on the walls. How long had it been since he had conjured in a big way? Months? Longer?

Crappy Master Witch he was. Why hadn’t the power been given to someone who would appreciate it? The very least he could do was surrender his life to his community, and he couldn’t even accept that eventuality with grace. No, he had to use his powers to, well, not thwart the process exactly. He was going to marry Lavender and do his damnedest to produce children, although he had no idea how. After his latest encounter with Blaine, he realized that just finding someone to fuck was not going to drive the damned human from his system. He was too attracted. The feelings were too intense. What he needed was love, or at least the semblance of it. He’d longed for love his whole life. If he could feel in love with someone, even if it wasn’t completely real, he could forget Blaine. Surely he

could.

“Am I doing the wrong thing, Al? Will it just make matters worse if I find someone to love me…just for a while? Will it make having to marry Lavender more 58

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awful and hopeless?” He lay back on the rug, and the cat familiar curled up on his chest, staring into his face.

Al was not usually affectionate with him—unlike with Blaine, the bastard—so this was a notable move. “I just feel like I have to know love before I give it up for my whole life. It isn’t permanent. It’ll wear off me and the other person eventually, but for a while it will be true love. Will it be a terrible mistake, Al?”

“Mrawr.”

“Think I can teach you English?”

The cat crawled a few more inches up Killian’s chest until his furry head lay next to Killian’s cheek.

Flooded. Killian was flooded with the certainty that he had to conjure the spell.

The love spell that would reveal his “true love,” the one he was meant to be with, if such a person existed on earth. Of course, it was a spell of appearance. Just a bit more than a parlor trick. He couldn’t create love. Love was the stuff of the universe—far too powerful to create from magic. Real love was magic itself. But the spell was like going to an amusement park that looked like England—it gave you many of the sights, sounds, and feelings without giving you the real thing.

But apparently Aloysius approved of his magic. “Okay, Al, I guess I’ll do it.” The second he said it, Aloysius jumped off his chest and returned to staring at the conjured flame.

“What if my perfect person turns out to be Lavender?” The cat turned toward him, and Killian could swear his expression was disdainful. Killian sat up. “Okay, not likely.

But do you think such a person exists? If so, why have I never found him?" The cat crossed one paw over the other, and Killian was sure if he could have clicked his claws on the floor in impatience, he would have. "Okay, okay." Killian scooted closer to the fire and moved a small bowl of rice beside him. He smiled, thinking of his history lessons. No eye of newt, no hen's teeth—just a simple

substance that would burn, to hold the intention. He could just use paper, or nothing at all, but he liked the feel of the rice in his hand.

Forget the pentacles, wands, and candles. He didn't need them, especially with Al around to magnify his power. In fact, no witch really needed them, but most didn't know that, and tradition was a bitch to change.

Killian grasped a handful of rice and added some poetry.

"May the power of the air

Look upon this child most fair,

Bring one with heart to fill a life

That I may love before I wife."

With a flourish, he tossed the rice into the fire of power, expecting a flare. Shit! The flame leaped to the ceiling! Thank the Powers the fire was cool, or he'd be grabbing a fire extinguisher.

"Wow. Something sure as Power happened, Al. Now I guess we just wait for the sign." He wondered what it would be. Often, the next person to cross your path was the one, but Killian would know for certain when Aloysius licked the male. In the meantime, Killian just had to be open to allowing different witches to be in licking distance of the cat.

* * * *

Saturday. Perfect for a find-the-lover experiment. Killian went with Al around his neck to as many establishments owned or frequented by witches as he could

find.

Damned little happened. For one moment, Killian thought the owner of the Chinese restaurant might be the one, because Al slithered down his arm when the owner came to the table to welcome him. Turned out Al just liked egg drop soup.

Killian had decided to give up for a few hours and returned to the car when his cell phone rang. “Barth.”

“Uh, Killian, this is Moran Inglesby.”

What the fuck? “Yes?”

“I have been feeling so badly about our misunderstanding last week, and while I know you could never forgive me, I just wanted to say how sorry I am, and how much I wish things had turned out differently.”

That was interesting. Killian felt Al’s tail swish against his neck. “It was partly my fault, Moran. I certainly was looking for sex, and I found you attractive. I thought I had made it clear that I wanted to talk and get to know you, but perhaps—”

“No, it was all my fault. Your clues were very obvious. It’s just that many people in our community know my, uh, shall we say tastes, and when you said you wanted to play, I took it to mean of another sort. I was overanxious and so very attracted to you.” By the gods, why would this man come back, unless… Could this be the one?

Swish, swish. “I appreciate you wanting to let me know.” Killian practically held his breath. If the man hung up, that was that.

“Is there, uh, any chance that I could try again to get it right? Maybe I could take you to dinner, and we could actually talk.” He laughed. Killian remembered that musical sound, not quite as forced this time.

“Yes, that might be possible.”

“Oh wonderful. I’m sure you’re already busy tonight…” Ordinarily, Killian would never have accepted a date the same night, but he had no time to waste. He had to get Moran into licking distance. “Quite the contrary. I just had a, uh, date cancel, uh, due to illness, so I happen to be free this evening.”

“Splendid. What time shall I pick you up?”

Swish. Swish. “Uh, why don’t I meet you at the restaurant?” There was a moment’s hesitation. “Splendid idea. Do you like Allegro’s?” Hmm. Killian’s favorite, as most people in the community knew. The man had bothered to inquire. “Yes, that would be great. What time?”

“Shall we say eight? I’ll make a reservation.”

“It can be hard to get in.”

The musical laugh. “I’ll just let them know it’s for the Witch Master.”

* * * *

“I can’t believe your students wanted to know if witches with lead weights attached to them could float.” Moran laughed.

“Yes, I didn’t mention that, while a true witch could float easily, a poor, defenseless human with lead weights attached would drown with certainty, and those were the only so-called witches the tribunals ever caught.”

“What a delightful job you must have.”

“Yes, I enjoy the job and the students.” Killian sipped his wine. He was feeling quite at home in the luxurious Italian restaurant with its old-world touches, like candles in wine bottles set against simple, modern steel-and-glass tables, accented by deep, plush red velvet chairs. He was also feeling comfortable with his handsome companion.

He looked at Moran closely. The handsome face seemed open and guileless. Killian felt warmth in his chest. Was that love? It wasn't explosive like what he felt for Blaine, but that was sex. Wasn't it?

Killian kept nudging Aloysius. Why wouldn't the damned cat get close to Moran?

Maybe the beast just didn't like making a furry spectacle of himself around so many witches who could all see him?

Moran sipped his coffee. "Your work must be so fulfilling." Was that sarcasm? Few witches had the slightest clue why he would choose to have any job at all when he was clearly rich and powerful. Moran stared at his wine and seemed to have no subtext. How refreshing.

The man looked up at Killian. "Can I tempt you with dessert?" Killian smiled what he hoped was flirtatiously. So out of practice. "I have to watch my boyish figure."

He got a sly grin and twinkling chocolate eyes. "I've been watching your boyish figure all evening and find it quite delicious with or without dessert." 62

Flattery. How lovely. "You're very kind. I think I will pass on dessert." Moran leaned back in his chair. "Would you like to go to a club? Or a lounge, for an after-dinner drink?"

Ah, perhaps time for a test. "No, thank you. I'm a bit tired. I think it's time to go home."

The full lips smiled. "Then may I walk you to the valet?" Son of a bitch. Passed. If the man had made a quip about whose home, or pushed to continue the evening, Killian would have been uneasy. As it was, Moran had passed with flying colors. "Actually, I parked at a small private lot down the block."

"Ah, let me escort you."

On the short walk, Moran gently twined his fingers with Killian's. Pleasant. Al's tail swishing against his cheek, however, was a pain in the butt.

When they got to Killian's car, he unlocked the door, and Moran opened it for him. Killian untangled Aloysius from his neck and tossed the feline in the vehicle.

"Mrawr."

Moran grinned. "He doesn't seem to like you being in charge." Killian glanced in at the staring, crossed blue eyes. "The jury is still out on the in-charge business."

"Perhaps even cats enjoy being shown who is boss."

"Perhaps."

Moran reached up a finger and touched Killian's cheek, a gesture unfortunately reminiscent of one sexy physics professor. But maybe it was good to see that there were other romantics in the world. Moran smiled as he gazed into Killian's eyes. "May I?" He moved his lips very slowly toward Killian's.

Their lips touched. What did he notice? Nothing. No flash, no spark. The soft lips pressed harder, and a warm tongue slipped between Killian's lips. *Okay, some wiggle in the cock for that one*. Killian opened his mouth wider, and Moran took advantage, The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

pressing in deep. *Yes, very nice*. Killian felt Moran's fingers start to untwist the tie in his hair. He pulled away. His hair was personal to him. Not everyone got to play with it.

Moran tensed for a second, then ended the kiss and stepped back. "Thank you for the most delightful evening I've had in a very long time. I sincerely hope we can do it again."

"I'd like that." Hmm. It was true. While this wasn't the fireworks he thought might be involved with true love, there was a solid chance that Moran Inglesby was the one.

* * * *

Jimmy shuddered. He didn’t really want to know, but what the fuck, the suspense was killing him. He sat on the threadbare rug that covered battered hardwood floors in his one-room apartment over the garage. He stared at the objects he’d found around the trash cans outside. He’d added a few of his own possessions, and they were all spread out around him on the floor. A couple kids’ jacks, three playing cards, a rock, and just because he loved the old Matrix films, a spoon. He laughed. Stupid to be nervous. He either could do it, or he couldn’t, and he didn’t know which was worse.

Deep breath. He stretched out a hand and focused his mind on one of the jacks. It rolled over and bumped the one beside it. Shit! Did he do that? Could have been coincidence. Another breath. Start again.

He again stretched out a hand—at the playing card. Nothing. Well, what did he expect? He shrugged. He’d kind of expected it to rise up. The card fluttered and rose several inches into the air. Shit! It fell back down. Yes, he had made that happen. When he’d made up his mind what he wanted it to do, the card had done it. This time, no hand. He just thought about the card rising, and sure enough, it rose. Then he tried focusing on the second card while not losing the first. Wobbly, but he got the second one in the air while keeping the first one flying. Double shit! The cards fell.

His hands were trembling. The jury was voting. About to render a decision. Okay, might as well go all the way. What was the biggest challenge? The rock. A good chunky 64

rock, weighing a couple pounds. Could he do that? Good grief. What did he think? That his mind had muscles? He focused on the rock, kind of saw it flying. Shit! *Bam*. The thing rose up so fast, it bounced off the ceiling. Yikes. A guy could get hurt. Yeah, in more ways than one. He carefully “thought” the rock back to the carpet.

As a pièce de résistance, he picked up the stainless-steel teaspoon. He stared at it.

There is no spoon. The object that had been solid metal an instant before melted like so much silly putty. Christ! He dropped it, and it instantly returned to normal. *Dear God, I’m Neo.*

He stared at his hands. Just great. His girlfriend's father already hated him. How would he tell his parents? Jesus, how would he tell himself? The verdict was rendered.

Jimmy Janx, physicist, was a freakin' freak.

Chapter Eight

"Damn it, Al. Will you get ready to go?" Sigh. Yes, he was talking to his familiar again. A sure sign of desperate loneliness. Talking to animals. Aloysius was stretched in front of the small fireplace as if he had nowhere he had to be. Oh hell, he'd go without the damned cat. He'd seen Moran twice in the last two days, and the man had been nothing but charming, kind, and gracious. Aloysius, however, refused to give him a look, much less a lick. At this point, Killian was ready to declare Moran the lover and get on with it. They could only really be together for a week and a half, so he had no time to waste. It wasn't what he had expected from true love. No fireworks. Not like…

He grabbed his mind back from its lustful wanderings. That was the exact reason he had to get things going with Moran. Thoughts of that damned human consumed him.

Night. Day. Going nuts. It had to end.

He tossed his hair off his face. Moran seemed to like it, so tonight he was wearing it down. He wanted to show how much he appreciated Moran ordering him a special dinner. It would be their first private evening and their first chance at intimacy. Well, at least the first since they'd made up and corrected their miscommunication. Wasn't going to think too much about Moran's preferences for BDSM. The man now knew that Killian didn't prefer it, and truth be told, if he had to humor Moran a bit in his preferences, he was into give-and-take. He was a witch. He could endure a lot that humans couldn't. He didn't like being hit, but that didn't mean he couldn't take a little paddling in good humor. Maybe it would knock some sense into him.

"Are you coming?" Killian put on his coat and headed for the door. He opened

it, glanced at Al on the chair, and started to close the door. *Wham*. Furry missile around the neck. “About damned time.”

They drove in silence. He watched the road, and Al stared out his window with his back turned to his—what? Master? Certainly not. Partner? Occasionally. The cat was pissed. Killian didn’t want to care.

He surrendered the car to the previously briefed valet, applied the small spell, and marched through the hotel lobby. Unlike at the coffee shop, no one here seemed to be able to see Aloysius. Good. Maybe he hadn’t lost all his powers.

Outside the door to Moran’s suite, he smoothed his hair again and removed his coat, so that the other man could appreciate how good he looked. The slim black slacks showed off his ass. The white silk shirt and blue sports jacket complimented his coloring. He’d worn the diamonds in his ears and nose. Didn’t want to appear too

“teachery.” He smiled. Waist-length hair wasn’t exactly common in the professorial professions. Deep breath. He was excited about this. He was, really. Mostly he wanted to squelch the clammy feeling of guilt that crept up his spine. No, he was not cheating on anyone, damn it.

He knocked gently. Instant response. Moran looked delectable. He’d chosen gray trousers, but topped it with a tight yellow sweater that clung to his well-developed chest and shoulders. He beamed. “Didn’t mean to appear overanxious. I’ve been waiting by the door.” He leaned forward and gave Killian a soft kiss. A muffled growl sounded from Killian’s neck. Moran pulled back quickly. “Oh my, he is a jealous one.” Killian saw Moran’s frown. Damn the feline. He dumped Aloysius on a chair near the door, and the familiar turned and again gave him the furry shoulder.

Moran took his hands and led Killian to the couch in the sitting area. He carefully placed Killian on the cushions and uncovered the wine bucket. Good, champagne.

Moran had learned. Killian watched the golden bubbly fill two glasses. Handing

Killian one glass, Moran sat next to him and placed an arm on the back of the couch. He clinked glasses. “To us.”

Killian smiled and sipped. *Hmm. Why didn’t I repeat the toast?* He knew why and didn’t want to think about it. Moran had shaped up into perfect love-spell material.

Killian would make this work, even if just for a little while.

“I’ve ordered lobster bisque and sole almondine. Not exotic, but I thought you might like it.”

Moran really had inquired about his likes. “It’s my favorite. And I skipped lunch, I was so anxious to share this meal with you.”

“You must be starving. Let me serve, shall I?” Moran went to a serving cart in the corner of the room and looked inside the heated cabinet. Then he pulled the curtains away from the bay window to reveal a lovely table set for two, with camellias floating in low crystal bowls, and rose-colored candles.

Beautiful. “You’ve outdone yourself.”

“I certainly hope so. Come sit.” Moran held the comfortable armed dining chair, and Killian sat. “Would you like to stay with your champagne or switch to a crisp sauvignon blanc?”

“The champagne is fine, thank you.”

For the next hour, Killian ate with relish, and they chatted amiably. Aloysius ignored them completely. His inky fur practically bristled with indignation. Why the hell did the cat hate Moran?

Moran asked interested questions about Killian’s electric sports car. That won him lots of points. They finished the champagne, and Killian licked a few bites of a lemon crème brûlée from Moran’s spoon. Creamy, tangy, and sinful. He sighed.

“Full?”

“Delightfully.”

Moran nodded toward the sitting area. “Let’s sit in there, shall we?”

“Sure.”

Killian followed Moran toward the big plush couch. Why was he so nervous?

Maybe because the moment of truth had finally arrived. He was going to have sex with a male witch. Not the first time, but it had been a while. His stomach tied in a big knot right on top of the crème brûlée. He saw green eyes and brown hair. He felt soft, liquid-fire lips against his mouth. Human lips. Forbidden lips. No, the human was out of the question. He had to get over him. This would do it. He smiled and tried to ungrit his teeth.

Moran nuzzled Killian’s neck. “So, Witch Master, have you enjoyed your evening so far?”

He might have enjoyed being called Killian more than Witch Master. Oh well, why split hairs? “Very much.”

The questing lips found his ear and whispered, “I hope it’s not over.” Deep breath. Plunge in. “I also hope it will continue.” Moran’s whisper tickled his ear. “So what do you like? Do you enjoy fellatio?”

“Yes.”

“Giving or receiving?”

“Both.”

“Well, since I already ate a lot of dessert, perhaps I can be your dessert?” A touch too coy. Killian pulled back from the teasing lips and looked Moran in the eye. “Are you asking if I’d like to suck your cock?” Moran looked confused.

“Yes, I guess I am.”

Killian took a deep breath. “Well, the answer is yes, so would you like to take off your own pants, or shall I remove them for you?”

“My, my, you can be direct when you want to be.”

“Yes.” He smiled.

“I think I would like to see you naked, so why don’t we both do our own disrobing and then enjoy the results?” Moran rose and walked a few paces from the couch.

Killian cocked his head. “Are you presuming you’re going to get more than a blowjob out of this evening?”

Moran opened his mouth, but nothing came out.

Killian laughed. “I’m sorry. I’m teasing. I have thoroughly enjoyed being romanced all evening, and I will enjoy much more of the same, but I am a grown-up, and I have had sex before. You don’t have to treat me with kid gloves.” Killian unbuttoned his shirt and pulled it off. He held his hands tightly, so Moran wouldn’t see them shaking.

Moran gave a soft whistle. “You are so slim and yet beautifully muscled. Like alabaster. A perfect picture.” Moran smiled and winked, then pulled his sweater over his head. The wink was a bit much, but the results were rewarding. The powerful upper body suggested under the garment was drool-worthy, covered by a light contour of brown hair on his pecs and arrowing down his belly into the trousers.

Killian smiled. At least he could be honest. “You’re pretty delicious yourself.”

“Ah, but here is your meal.” Moran slowly unfastened and pulled down his trousers, showing off a bulge in a black thong. Hmm. That wouldn’t have been Killian’s first choice in underwear, but he could get used to it. Moran turned his

back, revealing a nicely muscled pair of buttocks outlined by the thong. He pulled the thong down and stepped out of it, looked over his shoulder flirtatiously, then turned with a definite flourish, revealing a nicely shaped, average-size penis. Perhaps not worthy of a letter home, but quite adequate.

Okay, some comment was required in response to the drama of the moment.

“Beautiful.”

Good. Moran didn’t look disappointed in Killian’s moderate response. The witch walked, with half-hard cock swinging, toward Killian. “Time for dessert.” 70

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Moran knelt on the couch beside Killian. The cock bounced at eye level. Killian liked oral sex. And he’d promised.

Moran wrapped an arm around Killian’s head and twined his hand into the long hair. Hmm. Not completely comfortable—

Snap. Killian’s head was jerked back by his hair. Moran’s mouth descended. His lips pressed hard against Killian’s, and his tongue slipped deep into Killian’s mouth.

Killian liked kissing a lot. If he could just relax, maybe this would be enjoyable. He opened his mouth as much as he could against the pressure of Moran’s lips. The man’s tongue pressed back into Killian’s throat. *Okay, too much*. He softened his mouth, and Moran responded, but, *ouch*, the damned hand was pulling his hair.

Suddenly, Moran’s hand and mouth released him, and Killian fell against the couch back. Moran scooted forward a couple inches and thrust his penis at Killian’s mouth. Time to pay the piper.

Killian wrapped a hand around Moran’s cock and licked the head with his tongue.

Moran moaned nicely. Good. Killian snaked his tongue up one side of the cock and down the other. He had to move his hand to uncover sufficient territory for licking.

Tried not to make that too obvious. Moran tasted salty and a little bitter, but not unpleasant.

“Ooooh, Witch Master, that’s great. Don’t stop.”

With tongue skills warmed up, he swallowed the cock to the balls.

“Powers. Yes!”

It wasn’t hard to deep throat this dick, though *deep* might have been overstating its reach. Killian took it as far down his throat as its length allowed and then swallowed.

“Oh shit!”

There were those damned fingers in his hair again. Moran wrapped the strands a couple lengths around his hands. Damn. Hurt. Killian felt like his head was in a vise.

Moran began to pump his hips frantically. “Oh shit, yes, suck it. Suck it!” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

Killian pulled against the hands. No go. He didn’t like this much. He couldn’t move his head at all, the hair pulling hurt more than he enjoyed, and the cock was being forced so hard into his throat, it was cutting off some of his air. Okay, Moran was carried away, but this was too much. He didn’t want to offend the guy. Hell, couldn’t blame a witch for enjoying a blowjob. Moran didn’t know what he was doing. Killian stopped sucking and pulled at his head. Had to make Moran aware of what was happening.

“Suck it, witch. Suck it!”

Killian was glad Moran was into it. He didn’t want to stop his enjoyment, but this hurt. He tried to pull back again. Damn! Moran pulled his hair harder. Okay, maybe if he just got Moran off, the witch would come to his senses. Time for his best vacuum-cleaner imitation. He sucked till his cheeks caved in.

“Yes, yes!”

Good. Moran would come soon, and that would end this phase of the evening. He just kept sucking while the damned witch shoved his cock as far as it would reach into his throat. Moran meant well. He was just carried away.

One of Moran's hands unwrapped from Killian's hair. Thank the Powers! But the other hand still held him tight. Killian felt Moran lean back. Killian's mouth was still full of cock, and his nose was squashed against Moran's crotch. The dark pubic hair tickled. He raised his eyes and could just see Moran's upper body as the male was leaning back. *Hell, no!* The witch had a thin rod in his hand. He raised it high above his head. He couldn't mean to—he knew Killian didn't want it.

Damn, Killian's back was bare. And bowed. That cane would hurt like bloody hell on his naked skin. Had to move his head. Wanted to get out. He didn't want to hurt Moran. The witch didn't realize what he was doing. Passion and all that.

He tried to scream no. "Nuaaawwww." Did that sound like protest? It had to.

Moran looked straight into Killian's eyes. "Sorry, Witch Master. Gotta do it. Can't come without it."

So that was it. Moran couldn't come without the BDSM. Had to be frustrating.

Killian could try to be understanding. But still… *Wap!* Pain! The thin rod snapped hard against Killian's bare back. Okay, not unbearable. People enjoyed this. Moran thought he was exciting Killian too. Killian tried to relax. Moran was the one the spell had chosen. The witch needed this. Killian wanted to give it to him.

Wap! Shit! Hurt so bad. He tried not to struggle. Wanted to help him come. *Wap!*

Couldn't do it. He pulled against Moran's hand. Couldn't get away with just his physical strength. Pain screamed from his head, where the hair felt like it would come out by the roots… *Wap!* His back lit up like a three-alarm fire. Hurt. Not fun at all.

Didn’t want to use magic. The man was his lover. He couldn’t use magic. It could hurt Moran. *Wap!* Oh Powers, his back, his back!

“*Ahhhhhh*!”

Released, Killian’s head snapped back. His hair flew free. Had Moran finally come? Did he orgasm? Was that why he’d let go? Killian raised his head. Tears dripped from his eyes, and his back throbbed like an open sore.

He tried to focus. Holy gods. Moran’s naked body lay on the floor, both his hands in front of his face. There was blood running down his neck. Had he hit himself…? No.

Moran trembled visibly. No wonder. Aloysius sat in the middle of Moran’s bare chest, the cat’s blue eyes so wide they seemed to consume his pitch-black face. His mouth gaped open, and a hiss poured out like a snake’s warning.

“Get this fucking cat off me. Do you hear me?”

Reality. Killian shook his head. He felt like someone just hosed out his mind. What the hell was he thinking? Had to move. Gods. It hurt. He couldn’t get up from his half-bent position. This was a nightmare, and somebody just woke him up too fast.

Somebody named Aloysius. Slowly, he unfolded. Every inch gained revealed new torture.

What had he done? He’d lost his mind…again. No excuse for him as a witch, much less a Witch Master. He stared at Moran, who was still cringing from Aloysius. “I do not take orders from you, witch, and Aloysius does not take orders from me.”

“This fucking cat bit me…hard!”

Okay, he was more or less straight up. Killian felt something running down his back and guessed it was blood. “You don’t seem to understand how fortunate

you are to be alive. Aloysius or I could have killed you with a thought. Still can.” Moran’s eyes widened. “You knew what I wanted.”

“No, sadly, I fooled myself into thinking that you actually cared for me, despite your sexual proclivities. But, in truth, you have been purposefully deceiving me, haven’t you, Moran?”

The witch looked at Al with wide eyes. *Yes, keep guessing, asshole. Al still might kill you*. Moran glanced up at Killian; then his eyes shot away. “Of course not.”

“You wanted me to believe you cared for me so you could subjugate me. That would be a big feather in your cap. To have the Witch Master on a leash.”

“I do care for you.” He gasped when Aloysius’s tail twitched.

“No lover would ever treat his beloved in this way. Even if you wanted a submissive, a true lover would have trained me slowly and with care. This was cruelty and vanity and ego from a cruel, vain, self-centered witch.” Moran closed his eyes and turned his head away from Killian. Was that supposed to be a show of remorse? If so, the show part was true.

Killian shook his head. He felt like a snow globe with the flakes settling. His perceptions were working fine. Why had Moran been able to fool him for three days?

Gods, it hurt. Killian tried to put on his shirt but couldn’t manage the movement without pain. He looked at the cat, which was still focused on Moran’s slightest twitch.

This was embarrassing. Al had tried to tell him. But any cat in a storm… “Al, will you help me, please?”

Aloysius looked up. Moran must have twitched then, because Al turned back and hissed. Moran covered his face with his hands. All silky muscle, Al jumped the distance to the couch.

It was a shame witches couldn’t heal themselves. Even very powerful witches.

That was why witches could get injured or die if they were hurt while alone. But they could heal one another, though not of all ailments.

Al walked around to Killian’s back and began to lick. Soothing. Odd, the rough tongue should have hurt, but it felt comforting. Warmth flowed through him. Like caring. He raised his arms slowly. He was able to move enough to lift the shirt over his shoulders. “Thank you, Al. Let’s finish later. I want out of here.” Moran had turned back toward Killian but hadn’t tried to get up. “What about me? I’m bleeding.”

Aloysius hissed again, and Moran scooted a couple inches away.

“I’m sure that bandages and a bit of alcohol will suffice. He didn’t rip your throat out. I suggest, however, that you leave North America, Moran, because if I hear of you pulling such a stunt on someone else, I shall see that Aloysius is not so forgiving next time.” Good exit line, if he could keep from groaning.

The coat felt like a lead weight. But Al around his neck felt just right. Together they left the hotel room and the phony lover behind.

Chapter Nine

Jimmy listened to the ringing in his ear for the fifth time this morning. Damn, where was the professor? Why didn’t he answer his phone? He hung up and threw the phone on his bed beside him. Who in the hell could he talk to? Couldn’t do it to his parents. They were such worriers. Even now. He was a grown man, and they still wanted to know how things were going at school, if he had good friends. Bingo. Friend.

Should he? How would he start, even?

He stood up and paced a couple steps to the limit of his bedroom. He had to talk to somebody. The knowledge was killing him. Were there doctors for this kind of problem? Shit. Sammy knew everything.

He flopped on the bed again, grabbed the phone, and dialed.

“Hey, my man, I was just thinking of you.” Good old Sammy! Yes!

“Hey, bro. Uh, I have something I need to talk about, and I think I should do it in person. Any chance you could come over?”

“Yeah. I guess so. I’m doing some homework for Barth’s class. Is it important?”

“Yeah. Maybe I can help with the homework.”

Sammy paused for a second. Jimmy let him think. Sammy was a ponderer.

“Okay, be right over.”

“Thanks, bro. You’re the best.”

It only took ten minutes, which felt like forever. Jimmy let Sammy in, then walked to his little kitchenette. “Want a beer?”

“Hell, yeah. So what’s up?”

Jimmy took his time opening the bottles. This was it. How did he start? He walked over to Sammy, who sat in one of his two rickety chairs and put the bottle on the floor beside him. Deep breath. He plopped down on the edge of the bed. “I’m a freak.”

“I know.”

“I’m serious.”

“So am I.” Sammy sipped his beer, then put it back on the floor.

Jimmy took a drink, then looked up at his friend. “I can do stuff. Weird stuff.”

“Oh, like whips and chains? Women’s undies?” Sammy grinned.

Okay, wise guy. “No, like this.” He focused his mind, pointed a finger, and lifted the beer from beside Sammy, making it float near his hand.

Sammy stared at it. No scream, no faint, not even a “what the fuck?”

“Why is it you don’t seem surprised?”

Sammy sighed and raised one of his hands. A book lifted from the floor beside the bed, floated awkwardly, and then fell with a thud. “Uh, I’m out of practice.”

“What the fuck?”

“I’m a weirdo too.”

Jimmy hopped up and looked at the book, then back at Sammy. “Why the hell didn’t you tell me?”

“Hey man, I thought I was the only freak on earth. I haven’t told anybody.”

“I’m your best friend.”

“Yeah, and now we know why.”

Jimmy sat again. “What do you mean?”

“Remember how we picked each other out at freshman orientation? Like we had radar or something? On some level we must have known we were both weirdos.”

“Freaks.”

“Yeah. We must have freakdar.”

“What in the hell does all this mean? Why can we do these things? I mean, I can make spoons dissolve, for crap’s sake.”

“Like Neo. Cool.”

“Is it cool, Sammy? Or are we sick? Do we have a disease?”

“Like a tumor that has activated unused parts of our brain?” Jimmy pointed. “Yeah, exactly.”

“Both of us?”

“Maybe there’s some radioactive isotope at the college, and we’ve both been exposed or something.”

“The only class we take together is Witchcraft. And there’re a whole lot of other people in there too. Do you think they’re all freaks?”

“Alvin definitely.” They both laughed, which felt damned good. “Have you asked your parents?”

“No way, Jose. They already got six of us to put through college. Not going to add to their worries.”

“Yeah, I feel exactly the same, except for the six part. I did try to talk to Dr. Barth about it a little.”

Sammy sat forward. “No shit? What did he say?”

“He said doing unusual stuff is not that unusual. But I told him I was asking for a friend. I was kind of general. I didn’t give him a demo or anything.”

“Hey, maybe you should.”

“Ya think?”

“Hell, Jimmy. If there is anybody who knows about strange, it’s Dr. Killian Barth.”

* * * *

“Thanks, Al. That feels really good.” Killian lay on his bed as Aloysius applied more tongue therapy. He didn’t have any classes today, due to some kind of 78

administrative meeting, so he'd been hiding out all morning. Al had managed to get him back in full working condition, and the present licking was more for his bruised soul than his back. "Why did I let him do that to me, Al?"

"Mwrar."

"How could he have made me believe he cared for me? Why didn't I see it? He never fooled you."

"Mwrar." Killian was pretty sure that meant "I'm smarter than you" in cat.

He flipped over, and Al crawled on his chest, staring, blue eyes to blue eyes.

"Maybe it's the spell. I've never cast that kind of spell for myself. In other couples, of course, it affects both parties, so that must be true for me too. But Moran wasn't the one, so why should I be clouded by the spell?"

He closed his eyes tightly. No more wussing out in front of Aloysius. "It's pretty clear that I don't have a true love. I'm supposed to marry Lavender and live my life as my people want. So maybe that was why I was confused." His voice broke, and he took a deep breath. "I don't have a true love, and I was forcing Moran to fit the mold, so I used my power…of course, to blind myself. He couldn't convince me he loved me; I convinced myself. Gods, I feel like a human. My students do this all the time. I am such a sorry excuse for a Witch Master." He threw an arm over his eyes.

"Mrawr." Killian felt a small bite on his arm, not enough to break skin, but enough to break his pitiful mood. He sat up. Al let go of his arm and flicked his tail. "Okay, Al, I get it. I may not have a life, but I have a purpose. Let's get on with it. Want some food?" He got up and went to the kitchen, where he found another can of salmon. He was well stocked now after a couple of shopping trips, and Al liked the fish when he wasn't eating whatever Killian had on his plate. He dumped it in a dish, and Al jumped up on the counter and began to chow down. Watching the cat eat made his mouth water.

Apparently, his stomach was as empty as his heart. "I'm starving. How about a trip to the coffee shop? Tea, scones, and maybe one of their omelets should take care of both breakfast and lunch."

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Time to go through the motions. He took a shower, dressed in jeans and a sweater, and then he and Al made a motorcycle trip to the Prince Street Coffee Shop. The owner came out from the kitchen to welcome him personally. He settled into the corner booth he took whenever he could get it. He'd brought a good book, so after ordering, he opened it, hoping to be consumed by *The History of Romance Fiction*. Maybe a bad choice. Al purred around his neck.

"Mrwar." Killian scratched behind the fuzzy ear.

"Mrwar." He shifted his hand to the soft spot under Al's chin.

Teeth gripped his ear. "Damn it, Al!" He looked up to swat the cat.

Blaine was standing at the end of the counter a few feet away, staring at Killian.

How long could a witch live with his heart stopped?

Oh gods. He understood. Heat. No…fire! The way he felt this moment dwarfed every emotion he'd had with Moran by a thousand. A million. The chasm between indifference and…passion. His heart beat fast, his breath caught in his chest, and his eyes never wanted to look on another sight, just Blaine.

He ought to run, but whether away or straight to Blaine, he wasn't sure.

"Mrwar."

Blaine seemed to catch the welcome in that meow. He smiled and took a step closer. "Hi, Al. Good to see you, buddy."

Aloysius unwrapped himself from Killian's neck, did one bound off the tabletop, and launched himself into Blaine's waiting arms. Oh Powers, would that Killian could do the same. He actually had to hold himself still, or he knew he'd follow the cat.

Blaine petted Al as the cat did his imitation of a moving fur coat, purring so loudly that Killian could hear him, even a few feet away. "You seem happy to see me, anyway." He looked up. "Are you happy to see me, Killian?" Killian nodded. Correction, his head nodded. He had no power over it.

Blaine walked even closer. “Could I have lunch with you? Talk to you?” 80

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The head nodded again.

The human slipped into the chair beside Killian. Sweet Powers, he smelled so wonderful. That sweet and spice together. Killian wanted to turn himself into Aloysius so he could rub all over the man’s body.

“This sure is one great cat. Where did you get him?” Killian cleared his throat. “Gift, uh, a gift from my mother.” Blaine chucked Al under the chin, and the cat let him. “My mother hates cats.” He looked up, and Killian swam into the pools of deep green. “Of course, my mother hates me, so she’s not likely to give me the time of day, much less a pet.”

“Surely not.”

He grinned. “That she hates me? Oh yeah. I keep defying her by choosing to be gay when her preacher has clearly cleansed me of this delusion at least ten times, so she has washed her hands of me.”

“But you didn’t choose—Oh, you’re joking.”

Blaine’s grin faded. “I wish it were a joke. Then a lot of beaten up, confused kids would have parents who loved and understood them.” Powers. There were worse things than having a manipulative witch for a mother.

“I’m so sorry, Blaine. I didn’t mean it like that.” Blaine smiled. “I never thought you were making fun. I just have a weird sense of humor sometimes.”

And then he did it. He put his hand on Killian’s arm. Such a simple gesture. Flash!

Heat blazed in Killian’s head, and hot steel filled his cock. Blaine started and pulled his hand away. Those green eyes widened, and he stared at Killian like he was either the answer to a dream or a cobra, and Blaine wasn’t sure which. “Holy shit!” Killian tried to make sense of his brain synapses and grasped at the first thought.

“Uh, food, did you want food?”

Blaine leaned over and whispered in his ear. “I want to eat with you and talk to you and sleep with you and take you home with me. But right now I want to make love to you so badly I’m having trouble focusing.”

There was that head nod again. Where the fuck did that come from?

“Does that mean you want to make love to me too?” Killian stared at Blaine, the human physics professor whose simplest touch could drain a witch’s power until his own mother didn’t know him and his people couldn’t benefit from his great sperm and—and all that dogma. The answer was yes. He did want to make love to Blaine. He wanted it more than anything. The evil witch voice piped up in his head. *Yep, these humans are tempting. That’s how the witch race got so depleted*. He was the strongest male witch in ten generations. That had to be worth something. He had never had a really satisfying relationship with a man, even for a short time. He wanted one. Didn’t he deserve just a little happiness before he gave his life for his people? He’d tried it the right way, the witch-stamp-of-approval way, and nearly got his back broken for his trouble.

Blaine was staring at Killian like he was in suspended animation; only the fingertips that scratched Al’s head moved. There. That was it. Blaine had the best possible credentials. Aloysius, who was no dumb cat, was crazy about the human…and so was Killian. Just that simple. He didn’t care if he rotted in witch oblivion, or if he lost some of his fabled power. How much damage could he do in such a little while? “Yes.” Blaine came to life. “Excuse me?”

“Yes. Please take me home with you.” He swallowed. “And all those other things.”

Blaine’s smile lit like a midwinter bonfire.

“Mwrarrrrr, mrrrrrwarrrr, mrrrrwarrrr.”

The bloody cat was singing while he slithered around Blaine’s neck in some happy dance known only to strange and powerful blue-eyed familiars.

“I think he’s happy.” Blaine chortled in such delight, it made Killian smile back.

Who knew anxiety and lust could cohabit in one stomach? Blaine stood, balancing Aloysius, and managed to reach into his pocket with one hand while containing the cat with the other. He pulled out a wad of bills, barely glanced at them, threw them on the table, and then extended that hand to Killian. “C’mon. We can walk from here.”

“My motorcycle…”

“They seem like a friendly group here. They won’t mind you occupying one of their parking spots, I imagine.”

True, the devoted owners would let him keep the bike parked in front of the coffee shop for the rest of their lives, even if they had to drive it every day to escape the meter maids.

Killian looked at Blaine’s extended hand and then up into that handsome face. The physics professor wore his glasses today, so he looked especially brilliant. How amazing that the young academic didn’t mind the faculty in the restaurant seeing him holding hands with another man. Killian had heard other instructors refer to the new

“gay” physics prof, so the man must be free and open about it. Free. Yes, that seemed to be Blaine in a nutshell. Sadly, Killian didn’t feel as free about letting the other witches in the room see him taking the hand of a human. His community tolerated with humor his strange desire to teach, so being with a human professor would seem reasonable. But touch a human? The word would spread like so much hellfire through the community in minutes. *Sigh*. No, he wasn’t that free. “Why don’t you walk on ahead?” Blaine looked bemused for a second, but quickly got with the program. Slinging Aloysius over his shoulder like a sack of flour, he moved toward the door. Killian gathered up his book. *Okay, look like you’re not in a hurry*. He stopped. Did he know what he was doing? He’d kidded himself so completely with Moran. Was he doing it again?

His cock throbbed. The thought of Blaine outside that coffee shop waiting for

him was like every holiday, every gift he'd ever been given. More real than all of witchery. More powerful than the Witch Master. Killian hurried to the door.

Outside on the sidewalk, Blaine waited, petting Al, who had crawled around his neck in the position he normally reserved for Killian. Killian gave the man a sheepish smile.

Blaine started to walk, and Killian fell in beside him. The man scratched Al under the chin. "Wouldn't it be nice to live in a world where you and I could walk down the street holding hands and no one would think anything except maybe 'what a cute couple'?"

Killian grinned at him. "I think you'd walk anywhere holding hands, regardless of what 'they' think."

"That's probably true. I've been out for a long time. I refused to take my mother's crap, and I don't much take anyone else's. Anytime I've interviewed for a job, I make it very clear that I'm gay, and if they don't like it, they shouldn't hire me, because I have no intention of hiding it." He looked at Killian. "They don't give you grief about it, do they?"

Killian shrugged. "No. Most of my acquaintances know I'm gay. It's just that, uh, I know a couple of people in that restaurant, and they would really love to, uh, spread rumors about me."

"Sure. I understand."

"Since we're not really a couple, I'd hate to start that story, that's all." Well, it wasn't exactly a lie.

Blaine gave him a long, indecipherable look, then pointed to a storefront ahead.

"That's where I live."

"In an antiques store?"

“Above it. Come on.”

Blaine led him to a door at the side of the entrance to the store. He unlocked it, and Killian followed him up a flight of narrow stairs. *Poor Blaine, having to live in a*—Blaine 84

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pushed open his apartment door and swept his arm in welcome. Killian stepped inside.

Paradise.

The big, airy living room glowed with the midday sunlight, beams reflecting off the high ceilings with their carved moldings. This must originally have been the home of the antiques shop owners, because every detail was perfect. Carved wainscoting decorated the walls subtly above gleaming hardwood floors.

Blaine had decorated the room with care. The main pieces, including love seats beside a fireplace, were contemporary and comfortable, but they were offset by a few antiques that looked authentic and well preserved. Killian loved well-planned spaces, and the room filled him with joy. “This is just beautiful.” Blaine beamed. “Thank you. I’ve had fun setting it up.”

“But aren’t you new to the area?” Killian walked to the big bay window and looked down at the city street below. The apartment was like a refuge from the bustle.

“Yes, but I found the place on a visit and decorated it on weekends before I actually moved here.”

Killian turned toward Blaine, who was standing in the middle of the big room, smiling at him, with Aloysius still purring around his neck. “You did an amazing job. I love decorating. It’s kind of a hobby of mine. You’ll find my place a bit more shabby chic.”

The smile expanded. “That sounds promising. Like I might get to see your place.” Did he want that? “Yes, I guess it does.”

Blaine’s grin faded, but he continued to stare at Killian. The green eyes glowed.

“You are so beautiful.”

Killian’s heart beat way above the legal limit. “Funny. I was just thinking the same thing about you.”

Blaine gestured toward a door in the room that Killian could see led to a hall.

“Would you like to see the rest of the apartment?” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

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“Merrrwaow.”

Blaine laughed. “I think we have permission.”

Decision time. *Walk down that hall and get fucked. Stay here. Have tea. Go home*. Killian walked toward the man and the cat. Al purred so loudly, Killian thought he might crack glass from the vibration. Blaine reached out a hand as Killian drew near and touched his cheek ever so gently. “Let me give you a tour.” Killian swallowed hard. Tour? He wasn’t sure if Blaine’s unrushed hospitality was making him more nervous or less. “Lead on.”

Blaine walked into the hall, one hand idly petting Al’s head where it hung on his shoulder. Killian followed. *Into the valley of death rode the three hundred*. Okay, so there was only one of him, but the Tennyson poem still fit. What was at the end of this hall…besides a bed that he desperately wanted to find? Would it mean the death of his powers? His life as he knew it? Was he prepared to give up all that defined him to his community for a roll in the hay with a beautiful human?

He stopped walking. Yes. Yes, he was…if the beautiful human was Blaine. Why did the man attract him so? Was it that freedom? The strength that felt deep and wide?

Or the fact that no matter how much Killian ran, Blaine just kept coming? Blaine wanted him. The human knew nothing of Killian’s power or wealth or standing in the community. And he still wanted him. No one else ever had. Of course, Blaine didn’t know he was a witch. But this wasn’t forever. Just one time. One passionate, perfect time to give him a memory of joy.

“Did I lose you?”

Killian looked up. He was standing still in the middle of a long hall. “Sorry. Just thinking.”

Blaine covered the few steps between them and did that hand-on-the-cheek thing again. “Some cold feet, maybe? I understand. You don’t know me very well. And there’s no rush. If I think we can be together just for coffee or cat petting, it will be fine with me. Take your time.”

What? “No. No time. Now, please. I really want this. I do, so much.” Blaine took his hand. “That’s even better. I want you to want me, Killian, because I’m dying for you.” He started walking sideways, holding Killian’s hand until they got to a door at the end of the hall.

They rounded a corner. Oh yes, so perfect. A high-ceilinged room, complete with fireplace. Crisp white sheets on the big bed, just as the man had promised him. Or promised Al, to be exact. Blaine walked backward until he got to the bed and then dipped a shoulder. Aloysius hopped off. The cat, his shiny blackness startling against the sheets, stalked to the pillows, curled up, and watched, purring the whole time.

Blaine laughed. “I think we have to be exhibitionists with Al around.” He looked toward the cat. “A bit of a voyeur, fella?” He looked intently back at Killian. “Well, watch away, because I’m going to kiss your buddy here until he can’t stand up, and then I’m going to strip him naked and caress every inch of his body, and when he’s ready, I’m going to slip my starving cock into his beautiful ass and fuck him senseless.

Does that sound good, Al?”

“Mwrar.”

Killian seconded the motion. His legs shook so hard, he could barely stand.

“Blaine…”

In two steps, Blaine covered the space between them. The heat of his embrace wrapped around Killian. Holy Power. His arms felt wonderful, strong and safe. Blaine's searching mouth closed over his. Sweet! Even better than he remembered. The softness of his tongue explored the contours of Killian's lips, caressing every tiny, tingling nerve ending. *Oh dear gods, go deep, sweet thing*. Killian opened his mouth to the welcome intruder. Blaine's taste was even better than his smell—like dessert. Hot apple pie, crème brûlée, cinnamon ice cream. *Oh gods, let me lick the bowl*. As their tongues danced and played, a deep tremble crawled up Killian's spine. Powers…a distant rumble of thunder vibrated through the room.

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Blaine pulled back and looked toward the window. "Thunder? It was so bright when we came in."

Killian's heart skipped. He had to control himself. For a second there, he just forgot he was a witch.

Blaine looked back at Killian. "I like the thunder. It sounds like I feel." His mouth covered Killian's, pressing his tongue even deeper this time. Killian never wanted it to stop. One strong arm wrapped around his waist, pulling him tight. Blaine's hand slipped under his butt, raising him the extra couple inches to bring their cocks tightly together. Holy gods! *Rumble*. He pressed closer, rubbing against that hard bulge. Shocks of electricity fired into his belly from his cock. Trembling, like weak and strong at the same time. Thunder rolled through the room again. Oh, yes, Powers, yes!

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Chapter Ten

Sweet Jesus. Felt so good. Blaine rode hard against Killian's cock as flashes of heat seared through him. Had to get out of these clothes. Without taking his lips from Killian's, he pulled off the man's leather jacket and tossed it onto the overstuffed chair by the window. Damn. He needed both hands. He let go of

Killian’s tight butt and grasped the edges of the thin wool sweater that clung to his slender body. Up and over.

He pulled his mouth away, ripped the sweater over the long queue of hair, and tossed it after the jacket.

He stopped. *What a picture. Holy fucking beautiful*. He stepped back, still hanging on to both of Killian’s arms. Wow. He just wanted to look. The man’s skin was like so much warm, soft marble. Smooth. Not one hair marred the surface, just the perfect contrast of the flat pink disks of his nipples. So slender, but with just enough musculature. Like some Greek statue of Pan or Hermes. Killian’s hair had fallen loose, and part of the dark blond silk fell over one shoulder and onto his chest like a river of moonlight. No wonder this guy haunted Blaine’s dreams.

Since the first moment he’d seen Killian that day in the classroom, he’d been a raging mass of hormones. And when Killian had run away, Blaine had gone after him.

Killian was all push/pull and a flaming mass of insecurities. And yet Blaine couldn’t let him go. But then, look at this breathing wet dream standing in front of him. “Sweet Jesus, I have to see the rest.”

Killian looked embarrassed. Cute. *Let’s unwrap this package*. Belt off. He threw the belt somewhere in the direction of the chair. Killian’s eyes cast down like a blushing virgin. Shit, it totally turned Blaine on. Slowly, very slowly, he slid down the zipper on Killian’s jeans. Wow, no underwear. Double wow. No hair. Just skin like warm marble.

Killian made a soft whimpering sound. *Yes, my baby, it’s coming*. Blaine leaned forward.

His tongue slipped out to caress one of those pebbled nipples. Hard and soft, like a tiny cock.

“Oh gods.”

Did he say gods? Blaine sucked harder. *Rumble, rumble*. Thunder again. Still sucking, he began to pull Killian's jeans down over narrow hips, stopping just short of the Promised Land.

"Oh." *Rumble*. The thunder rolled closer.

Blaine pulled back from his minifeast and shoved the denim down. *Slap!* A beautiful, rock-hard cock sprang out of its confines and smacked Killian's belly. *Crash.*

Lightning lit the room. Who had predicted this storm? It was like the thunder was inside him.

Blaine leaned in and nibbled up the soft column of Killian's neck under the shower of hair. He let his hand quest lower. Oh yeah, the object of his quest. Wet and hot. He wrapped a hand around that smooth rod and gave a long pump. Uncut. The satin foreskin slipped and slid over the hot iron beneath. A first for Blaine. Killian threw his head back and moaned. Sweet God, the man was half virgin, half whore. Perfect.

Flash. *Rumble. Rumble*. Jesus, the thunder vibrated straight through Blaine's balls.

His cock hurt. Hot, stretched to breaking, and still confined in his jeans. He tried to adjust his erection with one hand. That hand got a little slap.

"Let me."

"My pleasure." It sounded like a whimper.

He felt Killian pull his zipper down over his swollen cock; then his silky hand wrapped around Blaine's penis. He held tight for a second, the fingertips gently exploring. Each tiny movement created little shocks that zipped up into Blaine's groin.

Sweet torture. Blaine's legs shook. Then Killian began to pump. Tight and hard. Up and down, his hand squeezing like a preview of what it would feel like to be inside his 90

body. Oh God, Blaine loved it, but he couldn’t stay upright another second. “Gotta lie down.”

He pushed against Killian. The slim body fell backward onto the bed. The white sheets had looked satiny until they had to compete with Killian’s skin. It was like the perfect picture Blaine had dreamed about since he’d met Killian. Lean arms and legs spread wantonly on his bed.

He looked down at himself. How was it he still had clothes on? He needed to be naked. He ripped his sweater over his head and began pulling down his pants. He glanced up. Okay, they were staring. The cat perched on his pillows seemed totally fascinated. Killian had propped himself up on his elbows and was gazing with a small smile. Blaine smiled back. “What?”

“Nothing but admiration, I assure you.” Killian was staring at Blaine’s feet.

Blaine looked down. Okay, he had not planned ahead. His boxer briefs and jeans tangled around his ankles, but they weren’t going anywhere with the black sneakers in the way. He grinned. “I’m usually better organized.”

“I like it just fine. Now, I get to watch your big, beautiful cock bounce while you pull off those shoes.”

“You like this cock?” He stroked his cock to the tip and squeezed until the precum beaded, and then caught the pearl on his finger.

Killian stuck out his tongue.

Blaine sat sideways on the bed, no small trick in those pants. He leaned over until he could wave the sticky fingertip in front of Killian’s mouth. Angel-face let his head track back and forth with the movements until he snapped forward and caught the finger in his mouth. Blaine’s little cobra. Killian closed his eyes and moaned, sucking hard. That finger must have a direct nerve connection to Blaine’s penis, because each suck made him harder. Shit, he had to get his cock where it belonged. “Let me get out of these damned shoes.”

He leaned over and ripped the ties loose, pulled off his shoes and socks, and finally got the damned jeans into a heap on the floor. He turned to find Killian lying on his back, one arm behind his head, gazing at him. He grinned and rose up onto his hands and knees. Slowly, he stalked toward Killian like a big predator cat. He got a giggle from Killian, and then a long moan as he lowered himself onto the hot satin of Killian's body. He adjusted until each contour fit together, legs interlocked, hip bones side by side, and—oh, yes, God—cocks snuggled together.

Killian's body was like some kind of wet dream from the gay boys' bedside companion. Thunder rumbled, and Killian writhed beneath him as if the thunder vibrated through him too. Blaine grinned. That was called asking for it. "Is this what you want, baby?" He rocked so the length of their hot cocks slid together in perfect friction, and then he leaned to the side just enough to get a hand between them, grabbed their two dicks in his one hand, and began to stroke. Pump, pump. Jesus!

Killian's head thrashed on the sheets, and lightning flashed like it was next door.

"Oh, Powers, please, please fuck me."

Powers again? Who was that? Hell, he'd ask later. Needed lube. Blaine rolled off Killian and reached for the bedside table, which brought him eye to blue eye with the cat. Jesus, that beast sure seemed smarter than the average feline. The eyes were friendly, but Blaine sensed a small measure of threat. Like if he hurt Killian, he could be in trouble. He was losing it.

A quick rummage produced a box of condoms and a tube of lube. He threw a couple packets on the bed and scrambled back to Killian, who had one arm thrown over his eyes and the other stroking his beautiful, uncut cock. Blaine leaned over him. "Can I do that for you, professor? I want to get an advanced degree in stroking that cock." Killian pulled his arm off his eyes but kept stroking. "I could give a course in the subject."

Blaine laughed. "I'll be your valedictorian."

“Stop talking and fuck me.” Killian grabbed Blaine’s head and pulled him down for a deep kiss. Sweet. Bossy bottom, but oh so delicious. That tongue could do damage of the best kind. After exploring the inside of Blaine’s mouth quite thoroughly, Killian leaned back and smiled. “Ready to matriculate?”

“Hell, yeah.” He rolled the condom on, and Killian’s mouth watered.

Killian raised his legs, bending them at the knees and drawing them to the outsides of his hips, leaving his pink hole open and vulnerable. Perfect.

THE MAN WAS going to kill him. Killian’s heart beat like a patter of hail.

Thunder rumbled through him. Patience was not his long suit. *Get on with it!* He wiggled his ass wantonly. That ought to be irresistible. Gods, if he was going to threaten everything his life was built on, he wanted to do it with all flags flying. No thinking. He ached in his ass and in his heart. He wanted this so much. He wiggled again.

Blaine grinned at him, causing cute crinkles to spring up beside the shining green eyes. Of course, who could pay attention to eyes when the man was aiming a gorgeous eight-incher straight at Killian’s ass? Wiggle. Thunder rumbled. Wiggle.

“Okay, sweetheart. Let me give you what you’re begging for.” Blaine fit the shiny head of that lovely dick to Killian’s hole. *Rumble*. He pushed. Full, stretching pleasure.

Crash. Lightning lit the sky again. Blaine pushed deeper. Flash, ecstasy seared Killian’s gland and into his brain. *Crash!* The room lit up like a stage, once, twice. Oh fuck! Why was this happening? He’d never been so out of control of his powers before. Was this how it started? The depletion! Oh gods, it felt sooo good. Every brain cell was consumed by the deep pleasure of that cock in his ass. Big, hot, full. Powers, yes, he’d waited so long. Forever. Forever.

Lightning flashed right outside the room, and the thunder cracked near enough that it was practically simultaneous. Blaine moaned so loudly, Killian could hear him over the thunder as he pushed in and pulled out, in and out.

Flash. Another thrust lit up his prostate. “*Yes*!” Heaven. Witches’ heaven. Every exquisite inch of Blaine’s cock thrilled him from his balls to his hair follicles. That dick reached all the way to his heart. Was this what he had lived without? Every stroke hit his gland, and flashes of pure ecstasy more intense than the lightning seared from his cock, up his spine, and into his head. *Crash*. Bliss. *Crash*. Joy. His semen boiled through him, ready to explode.

“Holy shit!” Blaine’s hips pistoned wildly. “God, baby, I’m gonna come. Oh, Killian, love…” The man threw back his beautiful, shaggy head. Killian saw the cords in his neck stand out. “Ahhhhh.” Gods, he was magnificent. And that cock. Killian could see in his mind the jets of cum pouring into his ass, but that cock just kept on pumping.

Crash! Inside the room! Maybe it was just inside Killian’s heart. The sound that poured from his mouth sounded like a scream. Every cell absorbed that lightning and then poured it out of his cock. Semen burst onto his belly and Blaine’s chest. His sight blackened and then blazed as light. Sweet sight, no spell or casting had ever equaled the power of this moment. The most powerful male witch in ten generations finally knew true magic.

* * * *

Light. Filled with light. Killian stretched and opened his eyes. Dark. *What the fuck?*

Oh yes. Night. They must have slept through the late afternoon. He closed his eyes again, and everything blazed. He could make some bad joke about finally seeing the light.

So this was what sex could be. Not just sex, but being with another person in body and mind. He wouldn’t say heart. Not that far. He’d never known it was possible to experience anything like it. He reached out a hand and lightly felt Blaine’s smooth, muscled back. Oh gods, he was so beautiful. The feel of him was like velvet, but warm.

Sigh. Blaine just wanted to curl up and go back to sleep.

No. Time to pay the piper. Pay attention.

He scooted a few inches away from Blaine's very distracting heat. Take stock.

What was left of him? How much was he depleted? How much "less" did he feel? He focused and let energy run through his arms and hands. The tingle felt like little lightning. Weird. Not less. If anything, he felt more powerful. Couldn't be possible. Try again. *Power*. His hands prickled as if they were itching to be used. He released a little energy and heard a light roll of thunder. Nothing like the cataclysm he'd somehow launched earlier, but this time he'd done it with the tiniest wisp of power. A little fear trickled up his spine.

No. Had to be some mistake. Deep breath. Oh, bad idea. All he smelled was Blaine and sex. All fresh and clean, with wonderful musk underneath. Vanilla and memories.

The feel of Blaine's tongue in his mouth, his cock deep inside Killian's body. Killian's dick started to tighten just at the thought. *Down, boy. Concentrate.*

Try again. *Power*. The merest twitch. A flash of lightning. Cold chills. This was bad. He pulled himself to the edge of the bed. His power had to be less, didn't it?

Fear. His hands felt cold. What could this mean? He was prepared to have one or two wonderful rolls in the hay with a hot human, sacrifice some of his power, and move on to his responsibilities. He'd made that choice, and he could live with it. But this was different. What if Blaine *didn't* deplete him? What if he stayed the same or… Gods!

What if he got stronger? Then Killian had to deal with the way he felt. He couldn't dismiss the physicist as a walk on the wild side he could fuck and forget. He'd have to admit that the afternoon had been about much more than sex, and if that was true, his life was, in a word, shit. He cared for someone he couldn't have. Was marrying someone he didn't love. Everything he'd been told his whole life was in question.

He sat up on the edge of the bed. No. There was an explanation. Maybe it took time. Maybe this was a false sense of power that had sucked in other witches before him and lured them to their ruin. He smiled. *Control the melodrama,*

Barth. Maybe… He had to get out of here. He had to think.

He looked over his shoulder and saw blue eyes shining at him from the pillow above Blaine's head. Steady. *Okay, witch, use your damned power*. More quietly than any human could have done, he slipped from the bed. He wiggled his fingers at Aloysius.

C'mon, cat. Move. The feline didn't flex a tail. *Come on!* Nothing. Fuck him. Killian searched for his clothes, found his jeans on the floor and his sweater and jacket on the chair by the window. Listening to the soft sounds of Blaine's breathing, he slipped them on. His heart hurt, and there was a dull ache in his chest. He'd get over it. He always did.

He glanced at the unmoving blue eyes. *You made your choice, cat*. He slipped on his shoes and quietly padded for the door. Once out of the bedroom, he lit a small glowing light in his palm and waited for the flying furry missile to hit his neck. It didn't come.

He sighed. Could he stand to lose Aloysius too? Could hearts really shrivel? He slipped out of the apartment.

* * * *

Jonesy stared bleary-eyed through the car window at the front of the antiques shop across the street, where he'd seen the two men go inside hours before. The blond guy never seemed to do anything interesting at his apartment, so Jonesy had decided to follow him today when he'd left that coffee shop with that other professor and that freaky feline. He wasn't sure what the hell he was seeing, but he'd damned near gotten killed by some bizarre thunderstorm that didn't produce a drop of rain and seemed to be centered right around here. So much around here that, when he'd looked up the street, the sky had appeared clear, but above his head it was like freakin' fireworks. He was glad that was over.

He settled back in the car seat a little farther. Wait. He looked closely through the lights of the store and saw a figure slip out of the door. Just the blond. No other guy and… What the fuck? No cat. The guy went everywhere with that cat. Even

into restaurants. Why would he leave it behind?

Jonesy looked closely as the man set out down the road toward that coffee shop he'd left much earlier. That mane of hair was hanging down his back, and he looked…what? *Mussed* came to mind. He'd read earlier in a bio online that the other professor, the one who must live here, was gay. So what had Blondie been up to with the fag? Looked pretty damned suspicious. The guy seemed into men. He'd gone to that restaurant with that dark-haired guy, and Jonesy sure hadn't seen any babes joining them like you'd expect with a couple of good-looking guys.

He glanced at his watch. Only ten thirty p.m. Seemed like it should be after midnight, but they'd gone in early. The boss would want to know. He reached for the cell phone.

Chapter Eleven

Lavender wiped a tear. "I love you, darling, but I have to go. She looked at her beautiful sweetheart's sad face. She wished she had the nerve to just have sex with him, deplete her power, and make herself useless to the community as a baby witch breeder.

But she couldn't. She was their best hope. She couldn't quite muster the selfishness to take it all away and leave Killian holding the bag with some other female witch.

Besides, she had no idea what her father would do to James if she had sex with him. She shuddered.

The bench outside the library was damned uncomfortable, and they'd been doing some heavy petting, which had left her sore in both body and heart. "Daddy will be royally pissed if I miss my eleven p.m. curfew."

He snorted. “Shoot. If you’re old enough to be married off to some man you don’t know, then you’re old enough to stay out as long as you want.” She straightened her sweater and skirt. She looked like she’d been doing…exactly what she had been doing. That wouldn’t be popular at home. “Don’t be pigheaded. You know that’s not how it works. He thinks I’m studying with friends, and he gets suspicious if we study past eleven. Ranting about it isn’t going to change a thing.” He perched on the edge of the bench and dropped his head in his hands. “Sorry. I know. I just feel so damned helpless.” He looked up at her. Gods, that handsome face, so full of love and despair. He ripped her heart out.

“There’s got to be something we can do. You say that guy they’ve got you engaged to is nice. Won’t he help us? We could go to him. Explain.”

“Sweetheart, I have explained. He doesn’t want to marry me any more than I want to marry him.”

“Well, shit, that means he’s an imbecile.”

“James, do you *want* him to be trying to keep me?”

“No. But what guy wouldn’t want you?”

“This guy. He has someone else too.”

He dropped his head back in his hands. “Poor guy.” He looked up again. His desperation was just how she felt. Helpless and hopeless. “Tell me his name. Maybe I can talk to him, and the two of us can figure something out.” She jumped up from the bench. “No!”

“Why not? It might work.”

“Please stop. I have to go.” *How do you repair a cracked heart?*

He grabbed her hand. “Come on, you’re consenting adults. How can they make you marry? This is America, for crap’s sake.”

She pulled her hand away and swiped at the tears that flowed down her face. “I can’t explain. I can’t. And I have to go. I love you.”

“I love you so much.”

Sobbing, she ran toward the corner on the other side of the library. Her father’s chauffeur would be waiting for her. The chauffeur who would drive her one mile closer to marrying Killian Barth. One mile away from the man she loved and wanted to stay with forever. The chauffeur who took her home to Daddy. She stopped. *Okay, get a grip, witch*. She swiped at her wet cheeks. She wasn’t married yet. She started walking as if her whole world wasn’t crumbling.

Behind her on the bench, Jimmy Janx cried.

* * * *

Nicholas Karonoff took the cell from his ear. There she was. Dot of eleven. She didn’t give him overt reasons to be angry with her. He watched her walk from the entry hall. Clearly, she’d been crying, damn the witch. He didn’t like the report he’d just gotten from that idiot, Jonesy. “Lavender!”

She stopped in the archway to the living room but didn’t come in. “Yes, Papa?”

“I wish to speak to you. Please come with me.”

He led her down the hallway to his study. He wanted to grab her arm but knew better. He knew not to touch someone he loved when his anger was hot. He’d learned that with a couple of wives. Of course, in Russia, the authorities thought differently about such things than they did in this country.

Inside the room, he sat behind his massive mahogany desk. She sat across from him. She was his daughter, all right. Usually being before him at this imposing desk made people cringe. Not Lavender. She looked him straight in the eye with no fawning or wheedling.

He stared at her for a moment, and she stared right back. Such a pretty girl to be

so impossibly stubborn. He held up his cell phone. “I have been receiving reports on your fiancé.”

She looked startled but quickly recovered. She was a cool customer, as the Americans said. “You don’t think it surprises me that you have him watched, do you?” Her insolence inspired a little pride. So like him. “Are you aware that the Master Witch consorts with known homosexuals?”

She sighed. “That is hardly surprising, since everyone above the age of three in all of witchery is aware that Killian is a homosexual, and the fact that you all choose to ignore that reality and go on with this sham wedding is a travesty.”

“Nonsense. It is a lifestyle he chooses. He is supposedly the most powerful witch in generations. He can decide to live another way.” She shifted in her seat and crossed her arms over her chest. “Oh, Papa, that is ridiculous and you know it. Killian can no more decide to be heterosexual than I could suddenly decide to be a man, and I’m very nearly as powerful as he. Even witches are subject to certain laws. You know we may change other physical matter or even simple animals, and we can change people’s perceptions of us, but we cannot change our own biology any more than a human can.”

He gave her a tight smile. “Yes, well, the known homosexual in question *is* a human.”

Ah, now she looked uncomfortable. *Good. Squirm, girl.*

She shrugged. “So? Killian lives and works in the human world. I’m sure he knows human homosexuals as well as every other kind of human.”

“One he chose to spend the better part of a night with and whose company he was seen to leave looking thoroughly debauched.”

She was silent.

He leaned back in his chair. He enjoyed sparring with her, but this was no game.

“It appears your erstwhile fiancé has chosen to compromise his abilities given by the great Powers by sexually consorting with a human.” She leaned back and sighed. “You don’t know that. But if he did, we have all driven him to it. The man has to find love somewhere, for crap’s sake.”

“Lavender, don’t be crude.”

She rose and leaned over his desk toward him. “Be warned, Father. The only thing that will make Killian go through with this ridiculous marriage—or me either, for that matter—is a sense of duty to our community. If he and I stand together, there is nothing you or anyone else can do to stop us. You do understand that?” He might be proud of her, but she pushed too far. He leaned forward in his chair and stared intently up into her pansy blue eyes. “And I’m sure I don’t have to tell you that witchcraft is not the only kind of power. Should you defy me, either of you, Killian’s little human friend would never be safe again.” He smiled. “And, Lavender, there is another human you might want to worry about also. You do understand *that*?”

* * * *

Hiding out. Yes, one of the most powerful creatures on the earth was such a coward, he had called in sick for the first time in his career. Why? To escape a mere human. He should have called in miserable or heartbroken. Called in defeated.

He curled into a ball on his bed. No one to talk to. No Al. Of course, talking to that damned feline was clearly sick. He could call Lavender, but she had her own sorrow.

Besides, he couldn’t quite picture describing his sex with Blaine to Lavender. Maybe someday, when they were both ancient witches, he’d be rocking in some chair, regaling her with the tales of his one true love for the thousandth time. True love. Oh gods. No, it couldn’t be that.

He sat up. His hair was damp and dull. Taking a shower made him think of jerking off, and jerking off made him think of Blaine. *Clean up*. A prickle on his

skin told him the magic shower was complete. Instant clean. He fingered the long strands of his hair, glistening, fresh, and dry. Somehow it was always more fun seeing it wet and watching it dry slowly. He should have been a human.

But he wasn't a human. Not even close. And despite all dire childhood education, he didn't seem to have gotten any closer to being human last night. Time to face it. He dragged himself to the edge of the bed and sat. His long mane fell forward over his face and bare chest onto his sweatpants. Good. The facts were assembled. He wasn't depleted. Oh hell, he was exhausted and depressed and miserable. But his magic was not lessened one bit.

He leaned back on his straight arms. Maybe that wasn't how it worked. Maybe the depletion started after you had sex the second time, or fifth, or…seventeenth. Or perhaps it was gradual, like leprosy or some other sneaking disease.

He sat up. It might be different for gay men. Perhaps the older generations hadn't taken that into account. Maybe if there was no chance of producing a child, the effect didn't occur. Was that possible? His pulse sped up. But then again, it might affect his DNA so that he couldn't produce a magic child. Oh damn! This was insane.

He sprang up and paced across his small bedroom. No matter what, he'd done himself in. How had he ever thought he could make love with Blaine and then walk away a happy witch? Even if he'd lost all his power, he would have been miserable to 102

lose the damned human. Of course, if he lost his power, he could have the damned human.

But the damage was done. He fell back on the bed. His chest hurt like there was a Blaine-size hole in his heart. Marrying Lavender would now be more painful, not less.

And he'd done it to himself—with a lot of help from that damned familiar. Oh gods. He rolled back into a ball. He missed Aloysius. The loss of him was as bad as Blaine. The thought of never seeing that physicist again made him ill, and losing Al was unthinkable. How had he screwed up his life so completely?

And how would he stay away from Blaine? Blaine didn't know where Killian lived, but he knew where to find his classroom. There was no certainty Blaine would want to see him again, but he might. Gods knew, he'd been persistent up until now.

Killian sighed. Nothing for it but to give up teaching. It was what everybody wanted him to do anyway. He'd send his letter of resignation tomorrow. Damn. He really cared about that job. Couldn't he have anything he loved?

* * * *

A man walked past Blaine and stared at him. He probably looked odd sitting here on the brownstone steps with a cat in his lap. Killian had sneaked out on him. Hell, they'd had sex that could move the center of the universe, and the guy had left. Shit!

Maybe he should just give this cat to the next person to walk in the building and ask them to give the feline to Killian.

"Merwaow."

He looked at Aloysius. This wasn't the first time the cat had seemed to reply to a question he hadn't spoken out loud. He shook his head. Losing it. It was coincidence. "I know you're a bright cat, but not that bright."

The crossed blue eyes looked up at him…brightly.

"Hey, you're a smart cat. What should I do?"

"Merwaowr."

"On the one hand, I seem to crave the guy like…well, like catnip. On the other hand, he doesn't seem to think much of me."

He rested his head on Al's back. Silky soft. Vibrating. It hurt like hell that Killian didn't want him. More than he would have believed possible a few weeks

before. The man seemed wrapped into Blaine's DNA. Visceral, essential. "I'm tough, Al. But I can't take the hurt. Each time he runs away, the wound opens a little farther. For a while it was fun chasing him, but this time? I barely know why, but I care for him too much." He saw a woman approaching the building on the sidewalk. He waited. Sure enough, she turned and started up the steps beside him. "Excuse me, ma'am. Do you know Dr. Killian Barth?"

She smiled. "Yes, of course I do. That's his cat, isn't it?"

* * * *

The doorbell buzzed. Killian couldn't remember the last time that buzzer had sounded. After all, he could deliver his own pizza. It buzzed again. All right, for gods'

sake. He got up, clothed only in sweatpants and his long, loose hair, and headed for the door. He paused. Maybe it was someone from the university. *Buzz*. Closing the distance to the door, he ripped it open. And stared.

"Excuse me, did you lose a cat?"

That gorgeous face. Shaggy hair fell around his prominent cheekbones, and the glasses outlined the brilliant green eyes. He stood with his arms behind his back.

Stop, stupid heart! Quit hoping. Want something else. No use. Killian wanted to hurl himself into the human's arms. "How did you find me?" Blaine brought one arm forward, full of shiny black fur. "He brought me.

Wouldn't come without me." He gave a half smile as he folded the more than willing cat into his arms. "Clearly he likes me a lot more than you do." Killian sighed and walked away from the door into the living room, leaving Blaine to decide for himself what to do. "It's complicated." 104

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He heard the door slam. Which side of it was Blaine on?

"Complicated? Shit. Why is it complicated, Killian? You and I had some of the best sex ever shared by two men—hell, by two humans—and I wake up to find you missing and a cat in your place." Killian had reached the living room couch

by now and threw himself on it with Blaine hot on his heels. The beautiful human stood over him, still holding Aloysius. “Why is it complicated?”

It was too much. He curled into a ball. “Don’t yell at me.” Blaine was beside him instantly. Al must have jumped away, because the man had two arms to gather Killian into. “Oh, baby, I’m so sorry. I’m not angry at you…exactly. I just woke up all warm and longing for you, and instead I found this big-balled feline.” Killian was covered in his own hair, so he couldn’t see the exchange, but Blaine must have looked at Aloysius. “I love you, Al. I do. But you understand you’re just not my type.”

How could he tell Blaine that he was no more his type than the cat? He couldn’t.

That simple. Telling Blaine he was a witch was not an option. Killian unfolded from his tight ball and sat partway up, still leaning on the arm of the couch. He spoke softly.

“I’m getting married.”

Blaine reached over to pet Al, who had settled on the back of the couch. He grinned. “Yeah, right.”

Killian was quiet. Blaine looked up, and his grin faded. “You’re serious?”

“Yes.”

A flash of pain crossed the man’s face. “I don’t understand. Who is he? How could you have sex with me when you’re marrying another man? Why?”

“Blaine, it’s not a man.”

“What the fu—you’re marrying a *woman*?”

Killian nodded.

“But you’re gay!”

“The marriage is a family obligation. She and I have been intended for each other for a while. Family union and all that.”

He jumped up. “But you’re gay! You need to tell them. You said everyone knew about you.”

“Everyone knows. They don’t care. We’re supposed to produce children.” He pulled at his hair, eyes bugging. “Children? Are you nuts? Is your family crazy?”

Killian stared down at his hands. “Anyway, that’s why I slept with you. Because I wanted to be with someone who really attracted me before…well, just before. I tried to stay away from you.” He looked up. “You know I did. But you wouldn’t leave me alone, and I wanted you so badly. I quit fighting.” He looked back down. “But I didn’t know it would be like this.”

“Like what?”

“Like the earth moving. Like sex has never been for me. Like the idea of marrying her and never seeing you again makes me physically ill. Like that.” He wasn’t even going to try to explain the other stuff.

Blaine sat back beside him and tightened an arm around Killian’s shoulders again.

“Oh, baby, there has to be something we can do.”

Too sweet. Killian burrowed into Blaine’s embrace. Just like in his daydreams.

“There’s nothing. Nothing.”

“When is this ridiculous travesty supposed to take place?”

“A week from this coming Saturday.”

“Jesus. We’ll think of something. Maybe we can find her someone else to marry.” Killian looked up from the softness of Blaine’s neck. “I wish.” Blaine grinned and kissed Killian’s nose. “I know it will be hard to track down a replacement as incredible as you.”

He had no idea.

Blaine’s long fingers wrapped around his cheek. Slowly the man brought his mouth to Killian’s. Oh sweet. A deep, slow burn filled his belly. He yearned for this man. Every moment since he had crawled out of his apartment last night.

Yearning, longing. He hated himself for it, but it was true. Truth. Blaine didn't have to come here.

He could have sent Al home or kept him. But he came back. Always. Killian's mouth opened of its own accord. He couldn't stop himself. He wanted to crawl inside Blaine's body. He was such a hypocrite, but he didn't care.

Blaine moaned. He began ripping at his own clothing, pulling his jacket and shirt off, toeing off his shoes, leaving him in skin, socks, and very intrusive jeans.

Killian felt his hands tingle. He longed to just spell his clothing into nothingness, he wanted to feel that skin so bad. He pressed his bare chest, covered in his mane of hair, against Blaine. Like silk on silk.

"I love this hair." Blaine pulled handfuls and wrapped it around his own shoulder. "I want to drown in it."

Killian tugged at the jeans. "Get these damned pants off."

"Same to you."

Killian pulled down the sweatpants.

Blaine produced some condoms and lube from his jeans pocket and then pushed the pants down his hips.

Killian laughed. "Planning ahead?"

"Hope springs eternal." Blaine had his jeans and socks off and pushed Killian backward on the couch. Talk about going willingly. In one move, Blaine was on top of him and pressing their swollen cocks together. Thunder rumbled. Oh gods, not again.

Blaine rode against him so fast, their dripping dicks could have created enough friction to light the city.

Blaine grinned. "More of that weird weather?"

"Get it in me, please." He was on fire.

Blaine sat back on his knees and pulled on the condom while Killian raised his legs beside his hips, baring his throbbing ass. Blaine had lube on that rod in a second, and Killian “thought” a little extra in his hole. He was so anxious. Had to be careful with his magic. The thunder rumbled again. Blaine pressed his cock against Killian’s hot hole and pushed. The stretching felt like heaven. “Oh gods! Yes, please.”

“Shit, baby, I’m desperate.” Blaine began to ride him hard. In deep. Out to the tip.

Back in so far, he lit up Killian’s gland like a power switch. Pleasure! Like a power rush.

Gods, how could he live without this? How could he live without Blaine? This must be what the other witches thought too. The humans seduced them so completely, they couldn’t leave them. Now, Killian knew why. Oh, Powers, if there was a heaven for witches, this was it. Blaine. *Oh gods, Blaine!*

“Oh, baby, you’re so great. I’m… Oh God, come with me.” Blaine’s hips thrust deep into Killian’s body, dragging his abdomen across a cock so ready to explode Killian couldn’t hold it back.

“Yes, yes.” Semen spurted from his too-sensitive cock onto Blaine’s chest, and the man’s frantic pumping rubbed it into Killian’s own skin. Tingling crawled across his nerve endings. The white light again. In every cell. He swore his power multiplied. Had to be an illusion.

“Oh shit!” Blaine gasped and threw his head back. His hips stopped pumping as his body tensed in orgasm. Killian shifted awareness to his own ass and felt every spurt of hot semen as it poured into the condom. The condom that, as a witch, he didn’t need.

But did he need the man who wore it? Gods, he thought so.

Blaine fell forward onto Killian’s chest, supporting a little of his weight on his forearms. Sweet satin skin. Then Blaine rolled to the side, which pulled his

softening cock from Killian's deeply satisfied ass. He gathered Killian into his arms. So sweet.

Killian nuzzled against his neck. His heart had to be twice its normal size.

"Killian?"

"Hmmmm?"

"How can your parents not acknowledge that you're gay?" He shifted. Didn't really want to think about this now. But he had to say something. "My mother knows…sort of. She just doesn't admit it to herself. She always intended me for this marriage, and she can't see the world any other way."

"What about your father?"

"He's been gone since I was a child. I think she picked him for his good genes or something, and then she was done with him. Anyway, I never knew him." He snuggled deeper into Blaine's strong shoulder. The smell of cinnamon and vanilla surrounded him. "I don't want to think about that."

Silence. Warmth.

"Killian?"

"Ummm."

His voiced was soft and choked. "I think I love you. Please don't marry someone else."

Killian's breath stopped. Love? Someone had just said he loved him. Tears sprang up behind his eyes, and his heart began to pound. His life. He'd waited forever to hear those words. The aching well of loneliness sparked with a rivulet of joy. Oh gods, he couldn't give that up. To be loved and by someone he knew he could love in return. It was everything. Everything he'd ever wanted. And he'd give everything to have it.

Killian opened his misty eyes and leaned back, gazing up into Blaine's beloved face. The man lay with one arm still loosely wrapped around Killian and the other curved up over his head. That hand gently scratched the fur of Aloysius. It was so sweet how much Blaine loved the cat. Al was slowly and thoroughly licking Blaine from his hand to his shoulder.

Licking. Killian just stared. The spell. Chills froze his spine. *No, gods. Please, no*.

How could he have forgotten it? Al hadn't licked anyone else. Killian hadn't been able to force the cat to extend his tongue until this very moment. The perfect, unmatchable, The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

life-transforming moment. He felt like something stuck in his throat. His stomach clenched. A feeling like terror.

This moment wasn't perfect. It was a sham. Blaine was the chosen recipient of the love spell. That was why Aloysius turned into a fur rug every time he saw the man. The fucking, damned, malicious, meddling cat had chosen the one person Killian wanted to love him for himself. But Blaine didn't love him. It was just the spell. The spell deluded both of them.

No, please. No, gods. Don't do this. A crack the size of Kansas appeared in his heart.

One moment before, he'd been prepared to give up everything to have Blaine's love.

Now he could honestly say that witchcraft had taken everything from him.

He looked again into the green eyes. Green eyes that looked at him with love that Killian knew wasn't genuine, or at least wasn't permanent. It would wear off. Maybe it would wear off him too. That was his only hope. That someday he wouldn't give a shit.

That Blaine would no longer represent the end-all and be-all of his dreams. That he would be content with his loveless life.

Killian wanted to throw Aloysius out the window and never see him again. He wanted to run from the fucking witch world and hide in a hole forever. “I’m sorry, dearest. I have to marry the woman. I have to do my duty. We can’t be together.” And this time, the tears filled Blaine’s eyes.

Chapter Twelve

He did not want to deal with his own broken heart and Aloysius’s too. “Do not sit there pretending I screwed this up, feline. You’re the one that lost him for both of us.” Killian flipped over so he was facing the back of the couch and couldn’t see Al’s accusatory face. Sick. Sick of letting the cat see him cry. Sick at heart at the loss of his hopes. The only true dream he’d ever had.

He sat up, hugging his knees. He hated this maudlin nonsense. He had two choices. Kill himself, or go on. Of course, he could just refuse to marry Lavender, and her father would kill him, so no suicide would be required. Killing himself was cowardly, but he was a coward. Otherwise he would have told all of fucking witchery to go screw itself. He’d been bred like some champion steer to produce offspring for the community. Hell, even if he’d been straight, he would have hated it. What did he care if he lost his powers? What good had being a witch ever done…?

Powers. He looked up to find the blue eyes staring at him. “Why haven’t I lost my powers, Al? At least some of them? From what I’ve always been told, I should be a puddle on the floor.”

He got up and walked to the kitchen, Al trotting behind. Killian grabbed a beer from the built-in refrigerator, twisted the cap, and took a sip. He leaned against the counter. “So maybe the depletion takes longer still. Maybe twice isn’t enough. That’s not what they told us as children, but maybe.” Maybe it would happen if he had more sex with Blaine. Whoa. Even the thought made his cock leap. Maybe.

He walked back to the living room couch and sat. Al jumped up beside him, crossing one paw over the other as he seemed to do when he was waiting for Killian to finally catch on.

“But it hasn’t happened, Al, and if it isn’t going to happen, then the community is living a lie.”

But if it wasn’t going to happen, then why in the Powers’ name had witchery declined as it had? If it wasn’t the fault of humans, whose fault was it?

He wanted to pick up his phone and call one of the witch/human married couples. He could ask them their experience. But the mixed-race families were so shunned by the community, he had no direct contact or access to them. Wait. Lavender.

He grabbed his cell and dialed.

“This is Lavender. Is that you, Killian?”

“Hi. I have some really important questions. Any chance I could see you?”

“Daddy’s been watching me like some eagle, but he surely can’t object to me seeing my fiancé.”

“Yes, well, he probably can, but let’s risk it. Meet me at The Moon Garden. No one will think of it, and Aloysius likes egg drop soup.”

“You’re on.”

A half hour later, Killian admired Lavender’s beautiful, erect posture as she walked into the Chinese restaurant. He could sure tell he was gay, or he would have been admiring her pretty, bouncing breasts. The host had given him a quiet, private booth at his request. He loved their tea. The red and dragony decor, not so much. The damned cat was in heaven. Soup clung to his whiskers. When he saw Lavender approach, Al sat back on the table, licked his mouth politely, and appeared to wait for her to be served. Quite a gentleman when he wanted to be.

She looked fresh and proper in her spring yellow skirt and sweater. College girl, one hundred, superwitch zero.

She stopped beside the table. “Man, do you look crappy.”

“Well, happy day to you to.”

She slipped into the booth and petted the fur ball. “Hi, Al. Please go ahead with your meal.” The cat uncrossed his legs and applied himself to the soup. The waiter rushed over, and they ordered more soup and two bowls. Lavender looked across at Killian. “Seriously, Witch Master, you look like shit. I think something really bad has happened.”

“True, but that’s not what I wanted to talk about.”

“Tell me the bad stuff first. Maybe I can help.”

The waiter brought the soup, overeager to please the Witch Master, it seemed.

Killian couldn’t even taste it. Lavender couldn’t help. Nobody could cure him of his massive stupidity.

When the waiter left, Lavender nodded toward him as if he should continue while she took a mouthful of soup. “Hey, Al, you’re right. This stuff is great.”

“I cast a love spell.”

She nodded and ate. “Yes, so you’re a witch.”

“A spell for myself.”

Her eyes widened.

“Yeah, I know. Dumb as hell, but I’ve always wanted to be in love just once and…well, have someone love me back.”

“But a love spell is artificial. Witches use it to torture people. It’s not true love.”

“I know that. I know it so well, but at the time, I thought I’d be happy with just the feeling of true love. Feeling like I had a soul mate for a little while

because…well, because I knew I only had a little while." He glanced up at her. "This is nothing against you, Lavender."

She grabbed his folded hands on the tabletop. "I know that. But I'm guessing this plan didn't work out too well."

He shook his head. "There was this witch, and I thought for a while he might be the one the spell had picked, but he was pretty awful. So I figured there was no one. No true love for me even for a while."

"Oh, Killian." She squeezed his hands tighter. It was kind of nice.

He took a deep breath. "So I had sex with a human."

"*What*?" She released his hands. Damn, it wasn't catching. At least he didn't think so.

He rushed in. "There's this human man I'm really attracted to, and I thought if I could just have sex with him once, I couldn't lose too much power, and I could at least know what it was like to be with someone I really cared about. But then I had sex with him again, and he said he loved me, and I was so excited until I saw Al licking him, and"—tears filled his eyes, and he forced them back—"I knew he was the love spell's target. He didn't love me. He was bespelled."

She shook her head. "Damn, Killian, I'm so sorry."

"Me too." He shook himself. "But here's what I want to tell you. I had sex with him twice, and I'm not depleted. In fact, I feel stronger."

"Maybe it just takes longer?"

"Maybe. But seriously, I'm not even a tiny bit weaker. The first time we had sex, I started a lightning storm."

"That must have been some good sex."

He smiled a little. “It was.”

“But you’re the damned Witch Master, Killian. Maybe you just don’t notice a little power drain.”

“I doubt it. I’ve thought of a lot of things. Maybe it only depletes couples who can reproduce, so gay witches are immune. That’s why I want you to try it.” Deer. Headlights. “Try what?”

“Sex with your human.”

“I couldn’t; it would be a sin against witchery, and my father—”

“I don’t think your father can measure your power. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have had to find out from my mother how much capability you have. I can measure it, but I’m pretty sure he can’t. If it’s depleting, you won’t do it again.”

“I don’t know. It’s hard enough to leave James as it is. If we have sex, leaving him might destroy me.”

“I know.”

“But I would have that to take with me.”

“I know.”

“Some help you are!”

“I know how huge a thing I’m asking, but it could prove or disprove the principle around which many lives are shaped. Imagine if witches aren’t depleted by humans.” Her pansy eyes sparkled. “Imagine.”

“So go forth, my dear, and fuck for your community.” Nervously, yes, but she laughed.

Chapter Thirteen

She stared at James's beautiful wide shoulders and narrow waist where he stood at the window.

"Shall I close the curtains?" James smiled, but his eyes were wide. Gods, he looked more nervous than she was. And he wasn't even scared of losing his power or hers, because he didn't know she had any. Of course, he did know she had a father.

"Yes, please." Sitting on the edge of his plain double bed, she felt like a virgin, which she definitely was not. Witches were pretty laissez-faire about sex. They didn't get diseases and could control pregnancy to some degree with other witch partners. Not so with humans. A human could get her pregnant as easily as he could another human.

She'd never been with a human, of course. Wow, she was scared. What would depletion feel like? Would it hurt? And what would her father do to her if he caught her? Hell, depletion would be a snap compared to that, she was pretty sure. "You don't see anybody watching, do you?"

He walked over to the bed and sat beside her. "No. You did a good job of backtracking." He touched her nose with his fingertip. "You sure you want to do this?" Was she? "Yes, I'm sure."

* * * *

Killian paced the floor in his small living room. Where the hell was the witch?

What was taking her so long? If she lost her power or had a terrible outcome, he would never forgive himself. And if she hadn't lost her power… He sat on the edge of the couch. What would that mean? How could the basic principles that he and every other witch had been taught be so totally wrong?

He looked up at the cat perched on the back of the couch. “I don’t know what to hope for, Al. If she loses power, I’ll still have to explain why I didn’t. If she doesn’t, we both need an explanation for why we were taught humans deplete us.” He dropped his head in his hands. “And Blaine. Oh gods, if I just hadn’t cast the spell. Could he have loved me?” He looked up at the cat, who cocked his head. “No, that’s crazy. How is a physics professor going to fall in love with a witch? He’ll have me committed first.” The phone rang, and he snatched it from the coffee table. “Lavender?”

“Hiiii there.”

He frowned. “Is that you?”

“Yessss.”

She sounded drunk. “Are you okay?”

“Oh, yes, I’m wonderful.”

“Did you have sex with your human?”

She sighed. “Yes.”

“So you aren’t depleted?”

“Nope. Not depleted even a little bit. Feel just wonderful. Oh my, yes, just wonderful.”

“Lavender, I don’t want to seem prurient, but I do need a few more details.” She giggled. *What the fuck?* This woman was not a giggler. “Well, we had sex, and I felt just wonderful after.” She giggled again. “I mean, no powers seemed to be depleted. But I wasn’t positive, so I insisted we have sex again.” Another giggle. “Sure enough. No depletion. But if you doubt my conclusions, I’ll be happy to try it again in the name of science.”

“He doesn’t know that you were testing, does he?” That sobered her up. “No, of course not. I can’t very well tell him I’m a witch. It would freak the shit out of him.”

“That’s the hell of it. Even if we aren’t depleted by humans, we can’t very well tell them we’re witches, so our situation doesn’t change.”

“Damn, Killian. I felt so good for a few minutes.”

“Sorry to burst your bubble, but this is serious.”

“Do you think I don’t know that?” It was the sharpest he’d ever heard her voice.

She sighed. “Sorry. I’m so unhappy. I love this man so much, and being with him was the highlight of my life. I was right that having sex will make the separation worse. I can’t even hate you for suggesting I do it, because it was so wonderful. And we learned something important.”

He felt awful. “I’m sorry. I know just how bad you feel. But we did learn something really important. I’m not sure what to make of it, though. Do you?”

“No. Why would the council tell us we’re depleted by humans if it’s not the case?

And what is the benefit to us knowing that it’s not true? Oh, Powers, I’m so confused.”

“We need more proof. You and I are uniquely powerful. Maybe it isn’t the same for other witches? We need to find one or more of the witch/human couples and ask them questions. Do you know any?”

“Hell, no. My father has kept me very cloistered among the pure-blooded witches.

Going to college with humans was a huge concession from him, and he only did it because he felt my studying law would benefit witchery in the long run.”

“I don’t know any either. I’m ashamed that I was never curious enough to meet any of them. But we have to find someone who can tell us their experience. Maybe it will be different than our own.”

“If I ask questions anywhere around my father, he’ll be suspicious.”

“It’s better if I do it anyway. I can ask a few questions discreetly.”

“Yes, you’re the Witch Master.”

“Huh, some Witch Master. I’ll bet I don’t know half the witches in the world because of my willingness to accept my mother’s version of the truth.” 118

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“It would seem we’ve both been blind. But our vision is improving. You ask questions, and I’ll see if I can learn anything among my friends.”

“Be careful.”

“Oh, yes. My father loves me, but his eyesight is twenty-twenty.” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

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Chapter Fourteen

Fuck. Blaine stared at the saltshaker. He’d come into this coffee shop thinking he might see Killian, but nothing. He couldn’t go to the man’s house. He had no excuse.

When they’d left each other after that second round of mind-bending sex, Killian had said it was best if they didn’t see each other. He said he had to go through with this fucking, ridiculous, assholic marriage, and he needed to focus on the upcoming wedding. Double fuck! How could he do it? Blaine didn’t understand it. If it was him, he’d tell them all to go fuck themselves and do what he wanted. Hell, you couldn’t really serve another until you were first true to yourself. He’d tried to tell Killian that.

The man said he agreed, but it was “complicated.” He flicked the saltshaker across the table with his fingers, and it fell on the seat.

He’d like to complicate Killian’s whole family with a boot in the butt. And he didn’t have a plan. He just thought maybe if he ran into Killian, like accidentally, maybe just seeing Blaine would make Killian remember what they had. *Crap!* The man could not marry a woman. The man could not marry anyone except

him.

“Here’s your coffee, Professor.”

“Oh, thanks, Harry.”

“Be careful; it’s hot.”

The owner of the place was always friendly. “You haven’t, uh, seen Professor Barth today, have you?” The man gave him an odd look. What did that mean? “Uh, we have some students in common, and I want to ask him a question. Uh, if you happen to see him.”

The man smiled. “Of course. I haven’t seen him for a couple of days, I think.” Yeah, not since he’d laid his fucking bombshell. “Well, if you see him…” 120

“I’ll be sure and tell him.” He walked off.

“Thanks.” This time he stared at the pepper. He didn’t really want the coffee.

What he wanted was Killian. The damned idiot weirdo history professor with the damned weirdo cat. He’d give his right nut to be holding that weirdo right now.

He sipped the coffee. “*Fuck*!” People stared.

The owner rushed over. “Is there a problem, sir? I’m sorry. I said it was hot.”

“Yes, so sorry.” He looked up at the few other people at tables. “I’m sorry. Just didn’t pay attention. Sorry.” Oh crap, he should get out of here. “Don’t worry about it, Harry.” He waved the man back to his post at the register.

The owner must think he was crazy. That was two votes. He reached for his wallet.

“Hey, Professor.”

He looked up at his favorite student standing a few feet away. He really didn’t need the kids right now. “Hi, Jimmy. I was just going.”

“Darn. Would have been fun to have coffee with you.” He pointed to the full cup.

“You must not have been in a coffee mood. Bet you’d rather have tea, like Dr. Barth.” Straight to his heart. Maybe he could use some company. “Sit down, Jimmy.”

“Thanks, Professor.” He walked over and pulled out a chair.

Blaine tested the coffee with his tongue. Slightly cooler. He sipped. “Want some coffee?”

“Yeah, Harry will bring me some. I’m pretty regular here.”

“Where are your friends?”

“They like another coffee shop better, but for some reason I like it here. Kind of feels like home.”

“Yeah. It’s pretty friendly.” Might as well ask. “Have you seen Dr. Barth anywhere?”

Jimmy shook his head. “No. I was kind of looking for him too. We even had a sub in witchcraft today. Talk about a guy out of his depth.” He grinned. “And all the girls in the front row were ready to throw themselves on some witches’ pyre over the loss of Dr. Barth.”

“Really? The girls like him, huh?”

“Hell, he’s pretty as a damned picture. Sorry, no offense. I know he’s a genius and everything.”

Blaine sighed and sipped. “Yeah, he is pretty.”

“You really like him, huh?”

Blaine glanced up into the wide and perceptive eyes. “He’s a great guy.” Harry

brought the coffee for Jimmy. The kid thanked him and poured in a small mountain of sugar. “I don’t mean to be nosy, but I know you’re pretty open about being, uh, gay, right?”

“Yes.”

“So, do you like Dr. Barth that way?”

“What way?”

“Uh, romantically.” He sipped and raced on. “Because I think you’d make a hell of a couple. You’re both so smart and good-looking, and you both seem to really like your students. I mean, I don’t know for sure if Professor Barth is gay or anything, but some people say he is. And sometimes I think he’s kind of lonely. And you love his cat.” Blaine laughed and held up a hand. “Yes, I love his cat.” His turn to sip. “Sadly, though, Jimmy, I’m afraid your matchmaking isn’t going to bear fruit. He’s marrying someone else. Soon.”

“Shit, really? He never seems to have a girlfriend, uh, or a boyfriend. He seems alone.”

Blaine felt the knife turn in his heart. “Yeah, well, not anymore.” He pushed his coffee away. “Sorry. I gotta run.” He tossed money on the table. “Let me buy your coffee. I’ll see you in class.”

“Thanks, Professor.”

Blaine fought his tears all the way out the door and then let a few fall. Fuck it!

JIMMY WATCHED DR. Genneau’s back as he rushed out the door. Jeez, the guy seemed upset. He must really care about Professor Barth. Hell, Jimmy knew how he felt, what with Lavender having to marry someone else too. Like a hand reached into his chest and was trying to rip out his heart.

He drank down the rest of his coffee. If he was successful in finding the history prof, maybe he would say something about Dr. Genneau. He fished in his pocket

for the slightly crumbled napkin Dr. Barth had given him that day right at this same table.

Yeah, Genneau had been here then too. Jimmy would have sworn the interest was mutual, but Dr. Barth had rushed off like a scalded cat, with a real cat in tow. Maybe it was because he knew he was getting married. But shit, was he marrying a guy? How come nobody had ever seen him? Or if he was marrying a girl, why did he seem so attracted to Dr. Genneau?

Jeez, this human sexuality stuff was damned confusing. He was glad he just loved Lavender. He sighed. But that was confusing too. Sex with her had been the realization of a dream. Perfect in every way. He'd thought for sure she would say she would run away with him or tell her father she wouldn't marry the other guy, but she hadn't. He wanted to break something, preferably her father's nose. Where the hell did the guy come off telling her what to do with her life? Jimmy was resolved. He was going to confront the high-handed Russian bastard and tell him that he was marrying Lavender whether he liked it or not. But first… Shit. He had to figure out what was going on with The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

his there-is-no-spoon problem. He couldn't ask Lavender to marry Neo, for crap's sake.

But the guy to tell him how to solve the problem was missing in action right now.

He reached for his cell phone.

Chapter Fifteen

Killian hung up the phone. What could be so important that Jimmy would call him at home? He could imagine, actually. If what the kid had hinted at the coffee shop was true, Jimmy could be freaking out. That was why he'd told the boy to come over.

Didn’t want to read about him jumping off a bridge.

He walked into the kitchen and started some tea. Al followed along behind and jumped up on the small café table. Killian leaned against the counter. “Why do you suppose he has those powers, Al? There are a lot of humans with some degree of psychic sensitivity, but what he described could be witchcraft. And yet he doesn’t seem to have any knowledge of it.” He pulled some ginger cookies out of a cupboard and put them on a plate. “I don’t feel much like dealing with him, but I guess I’d better.” Okay, that was all he could muster in the way of hospitality. He walked into the living room and flopped on the couch. Aloysius seemed to want to be his shadow today. Half the time he ignored Killian. The other half, he stuck to him like fuzzy Velcro. Killian leaned back and sighed. “I wish I could get Blaine out of my head.

Maybe when the spell wears off? Do you think?” He glanced at Al, who lay on his stomach, paws in front, head on paws, and eyes staring up at Killian. Yeah, that was cat for “you’ve lost your fucking mind.”

He had lost his mind. His mind lived with a green-eyed physics professor. All he could think about. He very much feared he had lost his heart too. Was it just the spell?

It seemed much more, but then he had never cast a spell on himself before. Blaine was all he seemed to care about. But he had to get himself to care about the witches’

community. If people had been misinformed, he had to tell them. Who knew what it would mean, but living in ignorance was never an option.

His doorbell rang. More action than it had seen in years lately. That made two of them. He went to the door, Al right beside him, and opened it. “Come on in, Jimmy.”

“Hi, Professor. Hi, Al. Hey, cool place.”

“Thanks. I made us some tea and cookies.”

“I knew you’d get me to try tea.” The kid laughed. It was a happy sound, and Killian had to smile.

“I’ll doctor it up so you’ll like it. Go take a seat while I get it.” In the kitchen, he put the teapot, milk, sugar, plate of cookies, and two cups on a tray and carried them into the living room.

Jimmy jumped up. “I can help with that, Professor. Wow, positively upper class.

Tea and all that.”

Killian put the tray on the coffee table and sat in a chair opposite Jimmy, who sat back on the couch. “Nothing but the best, though I’ll confess I got the pot at the Salvation Army. And since we’re likely getting into some uncharted territory today, why don’t you call me Killian?”

“Hey, thanks, Professor—uh, Killian.”

Killian poured tea in a cup, added a little milk and a couple heaping teaspoons of sugar to it, and handed it to Jimmy. The kid sipped and closed his eyes.

“Wow. That’s good.”

“Sugar has that effect.”

Jimmy grinned into his cup. “Yep. Guess I have got a sweet tooth.” Killian leaned back in his chair with his own tea. “So what’s up? What was so important it couldn’t wait?” He had a good idea, but he wanted to hear Jimmy explain it.

Jimmy sighed. “I’m Neo.”

Well, that wasn’t what he’d expected. “Excuse me?”

“Did you ever see the movie *The Matrix*?”

What the…? Oh, of course. Killian started to laugh.

Jimmy hurried on. “I tried these experiments, and I could lift rocks with my mind and move stuff whenever I wanted to, and then I took this spoon and—”

“There is no spoon.”

He shrugged. “Right. You don’t seem very surprised. Hell, that’s the second time.”

“You did tell me some of this about your ‘friend,’ as you’ll recall. You prepared me.”

“So what does it mean?”

“I’m not completely sure yet. Why not give me a demo?” He pointed to a heavy textbook on the coffee table beside the tea tray. “Make it fly.”

“Uh, okay. I’ve never showed anybody except my best friend.”

“Did it freak him out?”

“Uh, not exactly.”

“It’s okay; go ahead. Al and I won’t tell, will we, Aloysius?” The cat flipped his tail.

“Uh, okay.” Jimmy stared at the book, and nothing happened. So maybe he had some accidental powers…

“Wait. I always forget it’s not about will; it’s about intention.”

“What?”

The book flew to the ceiling, bounced once, and settled back to the table. Well, damn, he couldn’t have said it better himself. Intention was the key. “Jimmy, tell me about your parents.”

“Not much to tell. My dad is a businessman. Broker. He does pretty well, I guess.

My mom owns a shop. She sells women’s clothes. They’re great parents, but they worry about me a lot. “

“Would you say they are unique in any way?”

Jimmy shrugged. “My mom is really pretty. They always say my dad fell for her hard when he first saw her. They’re unique because they’re really happy together. They love me and my sister a lot, but what they have together is special. That’s what I want with my girl.”

“Have you ever seen them do anything weird?”

“When I was sixteen, I would have said everything they did was weird, but now I think they’re just your regular parents.”

“Have you ever seen them lift objects without benefit of a tea tray?”

“You mean like… Shit, no. I think I’m a freak all by myself.” Killian laughed. “Maybe not entirely by yourself.”

“You wouldn’t think it was funny if you knew my girlfriend’s father.” What? “What about her father?”

“He hates me as is, and I imagine if he knew I was some kind of freak, he’d hate me even more.”

“Why does he have to know?”

“He’s some kind of big-time godfather or something. Freaky scary. He has my girlfriend watched. Probably me too.”

“Once you get married, he’ll no longer have control over your girl.”

“That’s the fucking thing, Professor—uh, Killian. He doesn’t want her to marry me, because he has some other dude picked out for her. I mean, who does that anymore, except maybe in China? And even then, it’s not life-threatening if you don’t go along. But I think this guy might do something really bad if he doesn’t get his way.” This was sounding way too familiar to be true. “Is your girlfriend’s name Lavender?”

Jimmy’s eyes widened. “How did you know that?”

“Because I’m the other dude.”

“Holy shit.”

“Yes.”

* * * *

Lavender flew to Killian’s apartment the second he called her and told her he had Jimmy there. Flew by cab, since witches couldn’t fly, despite the myth. Broomsticks were only for sweeping. Now she sat on Killian’s couch, holding Jimmy’s hand across from where Killian lounged in the armchair. “Show me, darling.”

“Oh, baby, I don’t want you to think I’m a freak.”

“I won’t; I promise. Show me.”

The big book rose from the table, hit the ceiling, made a circle around Lavender’s head, and settled back on the table, opening to a spot that discussed witches’ powers.

Killian laughed. “Okay, now you’re just showing off.” The boy looked down. “Sorry.”

“Just kidding, Jimmy.”

Lavender looked at Killian. “So, he’s a witch.”

Jimmy jumped up. “What? What the fuck?”

She took his hand and pulled him back down, still looking at Killian. “It’s okay, sweetheart. So I guess since he’s a witch, the fact that I’m not depleted doesn’t prove anything. We’re back where we started.”

Jimmy plowed a hand through his rough-cut hair. “Depleted. What are you talking about? I feel like I walked into a movie.” Killian grinned at him. “You did. You’re Neo.”

Lavender laughed too. “Right. There is no spoon.” Jimmy pulled away from Lavender’s hand and stood. “Okay, stop. You two just said I’m a witch and then went on as if that was normal conversation. What the hell is going on?”

Lavender reached up and took his hand again, patting it soothingly. “It is normal conversation for us.”

Killian flicked a finger, and the book flew over to Jimmy, opened to a place on the training of witches, and began to turn the pages. “Shit!” Jimmy jumped back. Lavender raised a hand, and all the lights in the room came on. “Double shit!” For a second he looked like he’d pass out; then he collapsed back onto the couch beside Lavender, breathing hard. “Okay, explain.”

Killian leaned forward in his chair. “I know it’s hard to take in, but you’re a witch.

So are Lavender and I, both witches. And so are Lavender’s father and my mother, which is why I asked about your parents.”

“And what about him?” Jimmy pointed a finger at Aloysius, who sat in his favorite spot on the back of the couch.

“He’s a witches’ familiar. Extremely powerful.”

Jimmy looked at Al with some fear in his eyes. “Sorry for all those tummy rubs, Al.”

“Mwrar.”

Killian smiled. “That’s cat for ‘rub my tummy anytime.’” Jimmy threw his hands up. “What the fuck is a witch? I thought it just meant you followed certain practices that I sure as shit don’t follow.” Killian smiled. “No, witches look like

humans, but we're actually a different species. You have to be born a witch. You can't become one, although some children come into their powers later than others."

"But my parents aren't witches!"

"Yes, well, that remains to be seen."

"And my friend Sammy is a freak too, and his parents are just regular, hardworking folks."

Killian glanced at Lavender. "Interesting. Your friend is also a witch?" 130

Tara Lain

"He doesn't know what he is any more than I do. We just told each other our secret."

Lavender leaned forward so she could look directly into Jimmy's face. "We'd like to meet your parents."

He looked at her. "I always dreamed of you meeting my parents, but telling them I'm a witch was not a part of that dream."

Killian poured some more tea. "The fact is, Jimmy, you can't be a witch unless one of your parents is also. That's witch biology. So someone isn't telling you the truth."

"My parents don't lie."

Lavender petted his arm. "No, but they could be neglecting to tell you something, maybe because they think it's for your own good. It's important that we talk to them, darling. It could mean everything to you and me, as well as to a lot of other people." That got his attention. "What do you mean 'you and me?'"

"One of the reasons my father insists that I marry Killian and not you is that we have been taught that humans deplete our energy if we have sex with them. There is a possibility that might not be true. Nonetheless, if you are supernatural, which you certainly appear to be—"

Killian leaned forward again. “And a very powerful witch, from the little I’ve seen.”

“Then perhaps I can talk Daddy into letting us marry.” Jimmy slumped back on the couch. “Wow. This is a lot to believe.” Killian sipped his tea. “Harder than believing you made the spoon dissolve and re-form?”

“Yeah. It’s easier to believe that I’m a freak of nature than that there’s this big flock of witches running around that nobody knows about.” She laughed. “You’re not a freak, darling. Just a regular witch.” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

“Jeez.” He wiped a hand over his face. “But what about Killian? If we get married, what happens to him?”

Yes, that was the question. And maybe the answer wasn’t so bad.

“Darling. Killian has someone else he loves.”

Was that true? Did he love someone?

Jimmy grinned. “I’ll bet it’s Professor Genneau, isn’t it? I saw him this morning, and he is sure upset. Hell, that man is gone on you.” Powers. If Blaine didn’t deplete him, and Lavender was allowed to marry Jimmy, could Killian be with the man for a while? Until Blaine lost interest and the spell wore off? Would that be better than this eternal loneliness? Oh gods, he knew the answer to that question. He hated that Blaine was under the spell, but it only took a day to realize a little Blaine was better than no Blaine at all. He ached in places he didn’t know he had.

“Jimmy, if you’ll arrange for us to meet your parents, that will set all this in motion.”

“Jeez, how do I do that?”

Killian smiled. “Just tell them that Killian Barth, the Witch Master, would like to meet them.”

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Chapter Sixteen

Finally, they'd left. Jimmy was going to work up the nerve to talk to his parents.

Lavender was going to teach her boyfriend some craft. Killian picked up the tea tray and cups and carried them into the kitchen.

"Mwrar."

"Hey, Al. What's up?" The cat didn't vocalize unless he had something important to say.

The doorbell rang. What did they forget? He dumped the dishes on the counter and headed for the door with Al following.

"Merwaow."

"Yeah, okay, I'm hurrying…" He pulled open the door. Heart-stop city.

Blaine pushed past him into the entry. "You can't do it. You can't marry some woman. It's not fair to the woman, and it's sure as hell not fair to you. In fact, it's not fair to me." He turned and, in one move, grabbed Killian, pulled him close, and crushed his mouth down onto Killian's lips, which were still parted in protest. Oh gods, yes.

What had he just been thinking about some Blaine being what he needed? How fast could he get this human into bed?

With a kick, he closed the door and began pulling Blaine into the apartment.

Couldn't stop kissing, though. Never wanted to stop that. Oh sweet. Wet tongue collision. Circle. Caress. Mmmm. Cinnamon. Vanilla. Bliss.

Blaine got the idea quickly. He grabbed Killian's leg and lifted it up around his waist. Killian pulled back. "You're crazy. You can't carry me. We're practically the same size."

"Watch me."

“Oh sweet.” He hopped, and Blaine caught him, helping get Killian’s legs around his waist. Blaine positioned two hands under Killian’s butt to hold him. The reward.

Gods, he’d never been in this position with anyone. Their cocks met like two hot, pulsing bulges that wanted to be one. Couldn’t control. He pumped up and down, rubbing and pushing. Not close enough. Needed more. His arms hugged tight around Blaine’s neck as he shoved his tongue so deeply, he thought he might choke the man, but Blaine took it all and sucked for more. Frantically, Killian’s hips kept thrusting.

Blaine ripped his lips away. He let go his arms, and Killian’s legs slid to the floor.

“No…” Blaine turned him around and pushed him up against the door. Killian’s face pressed against the painted wood. Never had a door looked so promising. He felt hands pulling at his jeans until they slid down his legs, boxer briefs with them. He tried to separate his legs but couldn’t get too far, hobbled by the pants, so he pushed his butt out.

“Yeah, baby, this is what you need.”

Oh, yes, cold and slippery in his ass. “You came prepared.”

“Prepared and determined. I want you to know what we have together.” A finger probed gently, and Killian tried to push against it, but Blaine held him back. “Wait, want to get you nice and lubed. Need to get the condom on.”

“Hurry. Need it.” Thunder rumbled. He didn’t care.

Blaine’s breath warmed his ear. “I never hear thunder without thinking of you. It’s like your symphony, baby.”

If he only knew. “Hurry, please.” He bent farther. Reward. Big, hot, and hard pushed against his hungry hole. “Oh, yes, Powers, yes. Push. Do it. Do me, please.” Gods! Straight in across the prostate, fire and shivers at the same time,

bliss, joy.

Fuck! And that's just what Blaine did, pushing in and out, hard and fast. "Like this, sweetheart? This what you want?" His hips snapped. In. In. In. "I've lived for this since I met you. I can't live without it. I can't live without you." 134

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More. More. Couldn't think. Only feel. Full of light and life and…love. Oh crap, who cared if it was a spell? It felt so real. The power of magic. "Don't ever stop." Blaine's hot cock thrust deep, deep. No thought, just wave after wave of volcanic heat washed up Killian's spine, and sweet pressure built in his balls like the lava from that volcano.

The thrusts got harder, more frantic. "Gotta come, baby. I haven't dreamed of anything but you, fucking you, since last time. So hot." A hand grabbed his cock and began to crank. As if he needed the stimulation. That hot dick in his ass pounding his gland was enough to turn him to vapor. One hard pull, and he was done. Yes. Oh gods.

Every cell exploded, like they couldn't contain the heat. The bliss expanded and turned to a river of fire, pouring out of his cock onto his door as he felt Blaine's body shudder over his back. One huge thunderclap shook the apartment. Oh sweet Powers.

Breathe. Just breathe. His heart hammered, then slowed. Killian grinned. "My door has a whole new pattern."

They managed to drag themselves into the bedroom, strip, and collapse on the bed, twined together. It was so nice dozing in Blaine's arms. Almost as nice as the sex.

He felt warm and safe. Not so lonely. Blaine shifted beneath him. "Sweetheart. Please don't marry her."

"I'm not."

"What?" Blaine rose up on one elbow. "Really?"

"Yes." He pulled at Blaine until they were resettled, his head on the human's

shoulder. “She’s in love with someone else. I’m going to refuse to marry her, but our parents don’t know yet. It’s all over but the shouting.” Yeah, and that shouting would be loud.

“That’s so wonderful. We can be together. I love that. I love you.”

“Mmmm.” The nonresponse seemed to be all that Blaine needed, and he quieted.

Killian burrowed closer. Didn’t want to think. Not about the spell, or the fact that, no matter the outcome with Jimmy’s parents, he was still a witch, and Blaine was a human.

Not just a human. A physicist who thought witchcraft was crazy. He sighed. Not going to think about it now. Too happy. Too happy.

* * * *

“Would you like some tea, Professor?”

Killian looked up at the really stunning woman standing over him with a teapot.

“I see Jimmy has communicated my proclivity for tea.” She smiled. She looked nervous, though not as jumpy as Jimmy’s dad. “He has dropped a hint or two. After all, you are his favorite teacher.” Since he and Lavender had arrived fifteen minutes before, everyone had been maintaining the fiction that he was just Jimmy’s professor and Lavender his girlfriend.

Soon the piper would be paid.

Mrs. Janx poured tea for everyone while her husband served some lovely lemon cake. It was easy to see where Jimmy got his looks. His dad, Vern, was tall and striking, with a full head of deep brown hair and dark eyes. His mom was truly beautiful. Tall and slender, with huge blue eyes and dark blonde hair. Yes. A witch would be more than tempted. And Jimmy’s dad was surely a witch, and quite a powerful one.

Interesting that Killian could read Vern's power more easily than he could Jimmy's. He suspected that the boy had been spelled by his father to cover his obvious talent. Killian had discerned Jimmy's sensitivity but not his power. It took some witchy chutzpah to hide from Killian. He was intrigued.

Finally, Rita Janx perched on the edge of the love seat beside her husband. They sat across from Jimmy and Lavender and adjacent to Killian's armchair. Mrs. Janx looked like she might run at any moment. "Lavender, it does seem like we should have met before now. We know how much you and Jimmy, uh, like each other." Jimmy squirmed. "We're in love, Mom. Not school chums."

"Yes, dear. I know."

Vern Janx raised his head from his teacup and stared directly at Killian. "But then I suppose Professor Barth has something to say about that." A challenge. The gauntlet had been thrown. So that was it. They thought he was there to object to Jimmy and Lavender. Killian smiled. "All I'd have to say is mazel tov, I suppose."

Mrs. Janx eyes got even wider. Vern leaned forward. "You have no objection to Jimmy and Lavender's relationship?"

"Quite the contrary. I am delighted." Killian set down his teacup. "Let's get to the point, so you can stop guessing why I'm here." He glanced at Jimmy. "Clearly, our emissary here hasn't done much of a job of preparing the way." Jimmy shrugged. "No problem. First, I want to deeply apologize to you for never having met you before or including you in our community."

"What the fuck?" Vern straightened. Killian braced for a battle on some level.

Then the witch relaxed a little. "I don't get it. The entire witches' community has been nothing but horrible to me and my family since the day I married Rita. Before even." Killian nodded. "I realize that now. But you know I was barely born then." Vern frowned. "Oh yes, I remember everyone hailing the heir apparent when they were busy ostracizing my son only a few years later. By the time my daughter was born, we were separated from witchery, and she had

nothing to fear from you. Or at least not much. We integrated into human society and never looked back."

"You know, of course, all the things we are taught about consorting with humans."

The man sat up. "I don't consort, Professor. I deeply love my wife and have since the day I met her. Your conniving witch of a mother can't say she has ever been loved by anyone."

On target. "You are exactly correct. And I meant no disrespect in my choice of language. Sometimes I'm too professorial for my own good." He picked up his tea again and turned it in his hands. "I only recently had reason to doubt all the dogma I The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

was taught as a child. I apologize again for being so slow. I have always enjoyed humans and yet never came out of my ivory tower enough to question the liturgy, so to speak."

"And you question it now?"

"Yes. That's why I'm here. I needed to know something about you. Jimmy is very powerful, yet he is the product of a witch/human union. Contrary to all we have been taught."

Vern nodded. "I knew he would be powerful. You should see our daughter."

"I look forward to it."

Vern set down his cup. "I'm also a half witch, although no one in the community knew it. By the time we moved here, my human father was dead, and my mother simply played the widow. No one questioned it, since they were not quite as vigilant then as now."

Lavender broke in." That means that James is only one-quarter witch, and yet he's very powerful. How is that possible?"

Vern shook his head. "You should meet some of the other half- and quarter-

breeds. Though we don’t associate much, out of a desire to assimilate with humans, there are others that nearly equal my children.”

Jimmy looked at his dad. “Yeah. My best friend Sammy is a witch too. You never told me. How could you hide it?”

His mother leaned toward him. “I’m so sorry, darling, but they were awful to you.

The witch children called you names, and the bigger children would use their powers against you. We just wanted away from there and all things witch. Your dad almost never uses his power, so we hoped you wouldn’t have to deal with it at all.” Killian sipped at the tea. Be gentle. “And yet what occurred was that Jimmy was left to deal with his own burgeoning power with no one to ask questions or go to for help. I’m sure you’ll be more open with your daughter.”

She nodded. “Yes, we will. And thank you for being there for Jimmy.”

“My pleasure. He’s my favorite student.”

Jimmy grinned. “Even if I am majoring in physics?” Killian sighed. “Yes, even so.” He set down his cup. “I am going to try to right the wrongs that have been done. I know that nothing will ever make up for the prejudice and exclusion. I also know that minds can be hard to change, but we must start somewhere.” He turned to Vern. “Is there a chance that I could call on you to speak to members of the Witches’ Council, if that is required?” Rita held her husband’s hand. “I’m not sure I want him to have to go through that again. It’s too hard on him.”

Vern touched her cheek. “Thank you, darling.” He turned to Killian. “I’ll do it if I must, to save my children.”

“I doubt it will be necessary, since we have the living evidence of the untruth of their teaching in Jimmy.”

Rita shook her head. “We’ve tried so hard to protect him.” Jimmy held his lover’s hand. “Mom, what I want is Lavender, and I can only have her by being a witch, so I’m willing to do whatever it takes. I know there is no spoon.” Killian

and Lavender laughed while Jimmy explained. But Killian knew that might be the last laughter for a while.

Chapter Seventeen

“Yes, Mother, I need to speak to the council right away.” Killian shifted the phone and nibbled a scone.

“Darling, why do you need to speak to us?”

“I’ll tell you when I see you, but it’s urgent.”

“I’m sorry, but the council is in recess for some time. One of our members is ill, and another is out of the country.”

“So when will you be meeting?”

“I can’t say, dear.”

“Find out soon, or I will take matters into my own hands.”

“What on earth does that mean?”

“I think you have a good idea. Someone is manipulating the truth. I hope it isn’t you.”

“Killian, I have no idea what you’re talking about. Call me again when you can be respectful.”

“The times don’t call for respect, Mother; they call for truth.”

“Killian, you’ve lost your mind.” She clicked off.

He leaned back on the couch. Interesting. She couldn’t wait to get him off the phone. He wanted to believe the council was totally innocent, that all the tales of depletion were just a big misunderstanding, and that his mother loved him unconditionally. He also wanted to believe that Santa Claus was gay.

More tea needed. He padded into the kitchen and poured boiling water into his pot. He'd have trouble calling together the council himself. A group of stubborn,

powerful witches who were disinclined to march to his tune. He'd have better luck with the community. The council had built up his image to the community because it aligned with their intentions. Now he could use that positive image against them. That was his rabbit in the hat. If the council saw him gathering the rank and file witches, they'd likely pay more attention to him.

He poured a cup and sat at the little table. Al sat on the seat opposite, his eyes just peeking over the table edge. Better not ask Lavender to help. There was no telling what her father might do, and she was too much in the line of fire. He'd wait until they were further along to reveal Lavender's involvement.

"Sorry, Al, I forgot your breakfast." He got up and spooned some salmon into Al's pretty porcelain dish. He set it on the table, and Aloysius hopped up and started to eat.

Killian picked up his teacup, leaned on the counter, and sipped. Who should he call first? Yeah, Joe Soza and Elaine Indilitch came to mind. They were reasonably well respected, but more importantly, they were blabbermouths. He'd tell them that he wanted to gather the community at his home. Of course, he'd mean his mother's home, but legally it was as much his as hers. He'd tell them it was important and ask their advice for how to best notify the witches' rank and file. He smiled. "That should get the council's attention in about fifteen minutes, don't you think, Al?" He set down his cup on the counter. First, he had to go to class. Since he wasn't hiding from Blaine, he hadn't quit his job. Blaine. It was stupid how much he longed to see the human. More than stupid. With all this going on with the council and his community, he didn't need the distraction. Hell, all he wanted was the distraction. The last time with Blaine had been a kind of heaven he'd never thought he could have. But he was a witch. A fact he had neglected to mention to the human. The human he had spelled into loving him. Killian dropped his head into his hands. Even witchery was not as complicated as his love life.

* * * *

“James!” Lavender giggled and ducked the nibbling lips of her lover that crept toward her ear. Her very sensitive ear. “You have to be more serious. Practice.” She stepped back to give him room, although the word *room* was clearly overstated in his postage-stamp-size apartment.

Jimmy moaned like a little kid and flopped onto the edge of his bed. “Oh, can’t I fuck you now, please, please?”

She put her hands on her hips. She wasn’t going to tell him how cute he was. “You are likely going to be called upon to display your power, James. You have to be ready.” She giggled again. Only he made her resort to that silly sound, and she loved it.

“Besides, we have been fucking nonstop since I found out you can’t deplete me.” He looked up at her. Gods, she loved those big brown eyes. He smiled. “I can’t believe you still loved me when you thought I might be the death of everything you hold dear.”

She sat beside him and took his hand. “Not nearly everything. You are more dear to me than power or duty, my love.”

He grabbed her and pulled her onto the bed. “Good, then we should fuck, don’t you think?”

“Practice first, sex after. Think of it as foreplay.” He sat up fast. One sure way to get his attention. He raised his hand, and three books lifted. He made a little circle with his fingers, and the books revolved, then returned to the overloaded desk.

She grinned. He was getting better. “Show-off.”

He smiled back. “Just for you, darling.”

“Okay, here’s a different kind of test.” She gathered a little ball of energy in her palm. The tingle raced up her arm. “Catch.” She lobbed it to him; a little ball of swirling light sailed through the air.

“Whoa.” He stepped aside, and the ball dissipated. “How did you do that?”

“The same way you get to Carnegie Hall.”

“Practice?”

“Yep. Let me show you.” She stepped up beside him and put a finger on his palm.

“Focus your mind here.”

“Okay.” His face got still.

“Close your eyes.” He complied. So adorable.

“Now, gather the stuff of the universe into your hand.” The big eyes flew open. “What?”

“Shh. Close. Focus. You’re a physicist. You know the universe is made of energy.

Can you feel it?”

She saw a crease appear between his eyebrows. Stillness. Then a small smile curved his pretty mouth. “I got it.”

“What’s it feel like?”

“Creepy.”

“Creepy?”

“Like tingly. And it’s getting warm.”

“Okay, good. Now just maintain—”

“Shit!” He pulled his hand away, shaking it. “Hot!”

“No problem. You just held it too long. Try again.” He repeated the process. A small glowing ball appeared in his hand.

She grinned. “Open your eyes slowly, and see what you’ve manifested.”

“Holy shit.” His smile would have split a log, it was so huge.

She backed up a few feet. The crowded little room wouldn’t allow for much more.

“Now throw it to me.”

“How?”

“Just like you would a softball. Gently, okay?”

He drew back his hand, holding the little glowing orb, and tossed it underhand toward her. She reached out and snagged it before it got by. Soft hands allowed the ball of light to float above her palm.

He clapped his hands like a happy kid. “That is so cool.”

“Warm, actually. Good job. Come with me.” She held the light and led him into the little bathroom at the back of the apartment.

“Oooh, we could shower together.”

“You do have a one-track mind.”

“Hey, I’m at my sexual peak.” And didn’t she know it?

She held the hand with the ball of light in front of her. “Watch.” She reached in with her other hand, took the soap from the holder, and threw it onto the floor of the shower. With a flick of her fingers, she directed the ball of energy at the soap. The white bar exploded in a dozen pieces.

“Holy shit!” Jimmy danced back toward the door of the bathroom with big, wide

eyes. “How did you do that? And don’t say practice.”

“Intention. All energy has the potential to combust, explode. I intended for it to explode…mildly. Hence, only twelve pieces. You try.” He grabbed another piece of soap from the sink and tossed it onto the shower floor. That grin was infectious. “If I’m successful, I may not be clean for days.” He laughed.

She loved his humor. And now that he knew there was the chance for them to be together, he barely stopped laughing and teasing. He didn’t know what they might be up against. She watched him stare at the soap like it was a rattlesnake. Even Killian didn’t understand the threat that they could all face. Her father was not to be trifled with, and this whole “misunderstanding” about the depletion by humans stank of her old man. She hadn’t told them yet, because she wanted to believe her father was innocent, but fat chance.

Jimmy took a deep breath and closed his eyes. The ball of light formed. He opened his eyes again and focused his gaze on the soap. She knew the staring only helped with the intention. He didn’t really need it. His chest expanded as he breathed. He threw the ball of light at the soap pretty grandly. Light scattered, but the bar of white split in two.

She smiled. “Good job.”

He shrugged. “Didn’t look too impressive to me.”

“That’s where the Carnegie Hall part comes in.”

“Jeez, I can’t wait to show Sammy this trick.”

Whoa. She put a hand on his arm until he turned and looked at her. “It’s not a trick, James. And it is best if you don’t share it with Sammy. I believe as Killian does that you are a particularly powerful witch. Not all witches have equal or, better to say, equivalent powers and capability. You don’t want to lord it over Sammy if his power is different from yours.”

“Hell, no, I’d never want to hurt my friend.”

“So wait until later to tell him, after we know more. Meanwhile, practice. You did well for a first attempt. I’m impressed.”

“Cool. Can we have sex now?”

She wrapped her arms around his neck. “Oh, yes, my darling, now will be fine.”

Chapter Eighteen

“Dr. Barth, are there still witches who do spells and incantations and stuff?” The girl who had asked was one of the front-row dwellers, redheaded, big breasted, and pretty.

“Yes, of course there are, Miss Kristie.”

“Do they make stuff happen with the spells? Like do people fall in love and stuff?” Pretty close to home. “Things that are repeated with belief and conviction have power. You know how yogis chant mantras that are said to be able to silence the mind and create powerful states of consciousness?”

She shrugged. “Kind of.”

He smiled. “Take my word for it. Spells and incantation may have that same power when used by the right person.” He didn’t say the person better be a witch.

“Excuse me, Professor.”

Killian smiled. Jimmy had taken time off from learning spells and incantations to come to class. “Yes, Mr. Janx?”

“Sir, how much of the witch hysteria was really disguised prejudice against the victims?”

Poor kid. Jimmy must have been talking to his parents about his childhood.

“A great deal, we think. Have you heard of the *Malleus Maleficarum? The*

Hammer of the Witches?”

Jimmy shook his head.

“It was published by the Catholic church in 1487 and was used in the identification and prosecution of witches. Many claim it is pure misogyny, beginning 146

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with the proposition that most witches are female.” Several students laughed. “Yes, it sounds funny, but sadly it wasn’t. It’s to this book that such ideas as attempting to drown the woman to determine her nature are attributed. If she floated, she was a witch, because she must be using her powers to remain afloat. If she drowned… Oops, she must have been pure. Generally, the accusation of witchcraft was made against women who acted outside the norm of required gender roles. If they were too outspoken, too unorthodox, they were killed. Sadly, this often meant the smartest and most unique women of their villages were destroyed. I’m sure we lost some very good bloodlines.” He used that “we” loosely. “Few societies deal well with people who are different. Burning them at the stake was a pretty extreme response.”

“Thank you, sir.”

He nodded at Jimmy and looked at his watch. “You know your assignment for next class. See you all then.” He turned and started gathering his laptop and notes. He needed to make those phone calls.

“Merwaowr.”

Oh yeah, he knew what that meant. He turned to find Blaine standing inside the classroom door as students filed out. The man turned him inside out. His hands twitched to touch him.

Blaine walked over until they were face-to-face. He smiled. Killian’s heart smiled back. Blaine touched his cheek in that Blaine way. “Hi.”

“Hi.”

“Wanted to see you.”

“Yes.”

“Need to touch you.” His fingers traced a line of tingling heat down Killian’s neck.

“Oh yes.”

Blaine sighed. “But I have another class in half an hour, so we’ll have to save serious touching until later.”

Killian’s cock throbbed. “No, now.”

“Where?”

“I brought the car.”

“Really, you have a car?”

“Yes. Follow me.”

In one big leap, Aloysius landed on Blaine’s shoulder. “Whoa.” He laughed. “Hi, fella.” He reached up to hold the cat in place. As if the feline couldn’t stay on a moving F-35 if he wanted to.

Killian led the way out of the history building to the side parking lot in the back, where he always put the electric sports car. Body on fire. Couldn’t get to the car fast enough.

As they approached the sleek little vehicle tucked into a saved space in the far back of the lot, Blaine stopped. “Holy shit. You are kidding me. I thought you were poor.”

“It’s my one indulgence.”

“Jesus. Indulge me, baby.”

Killian unlocked. “Get in.”

Blaine walked around to the other side and looked in. “Uh, Killian, it’s pretty small in here.”

“There’s room.” Maybe not for his erection. “Get in.”

“Where’s Al going to fit?”

“There’s a little room in the back. He likes it back there. Or at least he will if you’re in the car.”

Blaine crawled in his side, depositing Al in the small storage space behind the passenger’s seat. Killian sat in the driver’s seat and closed the door, shutting the world out. Fortunately, it wasn’t too warm today, so they didn’t need the air. Good. Less obvious that way if somebody noticed the car.

Killian unfastened his belt and began work on his zipper.

Blaine watched. “You really think this is possible?”

“It has to be, or I’ll implode. The console’s pretty small. Just get your cock out and let me sit on it.”

“Since you put it that way.” He unfastened his jeans and pulled them down to his knees, taking his boxer briefs with them. His big, hot cock sprang free. Oh gods, Killian’s mouth watered, but there wasn’t much time for preliminaries.

He reached over to the glove compartment and pulled out a paper bag. “I got this yesterday and stashed it here to take home. Good fortune.” He pulled out a bottle of lube and box of condoms. Of course, it was just for appearances. While Blaine fit the condom, Killian worked the damned plastic off the lube bottle. He applied a tiny tug of magic, and it ripped. He flipped open the cap. “Give me your hand.” Blaine held out his palm, and Killian squirted.

Blaine applied his sticky hands to the big rod and massaged until the latex was shiny and delectable, making little grunting noises as he did it.

“That is so pretty.” Killian dripped lube into his own hand, rose up as best he could under the steering wheel, and pushed lube into his hole. Felt good, but not good enough.

Blaine held his cock upright in his hand. “Here it is, baby. Get on if you can.” Killian slipped out from under the steering wheel and tried to throw his left leg across the low console. Stuck. Damn. This wouldn’t work with the pants on at all.

Blaine laughed. Killian glowered. “Men have died for less than that laugh, my friend. I’m desperate for that cock.”

He pulled back, ripped his pants off, and tried the maneuver again. Leg across, foot on floor, cock sticking out like a flagpole, other leg over, knee on seat, other knee on seat. Ahhhh. Cock pressing into hole. Oh yes. Ohhhhh. He lowered himself fully onto Blaine’s magnificent penis.

Blaine moaned. “I think you could take that move to the circus. Do it.” Not much time. Ride hard. Up on his knees until the cock almost popped out.

Down hard, so the dick pushed so far in, he thought he could taste it in his mouth. Up, down, up, down. Felt so good. Up, down. Had to bend his back to keep from hitting the roof. That was okay. The top of his head was about to come off anyway. Up, down. Hot, hard. Yes.

“Jesus, Killian. Ride.”

Killian’s cock rubbed against Blaine’s shirt. Going to leave a trail, but great friction. *Oh gods, going to come. Have to*… “Holy gods, Blaine.” Damn! The shirt. He grabbed for his spurting cock and managed to hold most of his fountain of cum in his hand as the orgasm ripped through him.

Blaine’s body bucked up into him.

Power filled Killian’s body until he knew he could light the city with it. Other people felt that way, but in his case, it was true.

Still breathing heavily, he leaned forward and kissed Blaine's cheek. "Are you going to be able to teach a class after this?"

"Hell, yeah. I think having sex in this car has extended the laws of physics." 150

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Chapter Nineteen

"Killian, I understand you have been trying to assemble the community." He shifted the phone and made another note on his list of people to call. "I haven't been trying, Mother; I *am* calling together the community."

"May I ask why?"

"You explained how hard it would be to convene the council. I have important new information that affects some key decisions, and I need to communicate it right away. I have no choice but to go straight to the community."

"That's ridiculous."

"Be that as it may, that's what I'm doing."

"Do not do this." Fear in her voice. Interesting.

"Why? You want me to take an interest in the community, be their 'king.'"

"That's not what I meant, and you know it."

"Then call the council together, Mother."

"I can't—"

"Then my course is set."

"Killian, what you are doing could be dangerous." His mother didn't scare easily. "To whom?"

"You, me, others."

"Bring it on."

“I know you’re powerful, darling, but there are other types of power, and you’re playing with fire.”

“I’ll take my chances. Call the damned council.”

She sighed. “All right. Give me a few days.”

“Two. Two days.”

“I can’t—”

“Mother.”

“Yes, two days. All right.”

He hung up and looked at his list again. He wasn’t waiting. If the council’s story was sound, and no deception seemed evident, he’d just tell the community it was a surprise party and announce Lavender and Jimmy’s marriage. It didn’t sound that way, though. His mother’s fear was palpable.

The phone rang, and he grabbed it. “Dr. Barth.”

“Hi, Dr. Barth, baby.”

Heart palpitations. “Hi. How did the class go?”

“After I washed the cum out of my shirt and figured out how to get myself back into my jeans, it went fine.”

“Sorry about that.”

“No apologies. You’re not even a little sorry…I hope.”

“So true.” And it was.

“Hey, don’t I remember you’re free this afternoon?”

“Not exactly. I have some phone calls to make for, uh, some students.”

“Leave it. I have a surprise. Come meet me in the park at Broadway and Lafayette.

We’ll have an early dinner.”

Gods, that sounded nice. And he loved surprises. “Okay. I’ll take the subway. Be there in half an hour.”

“Great. I can’t wait. See you.”

Killian hung up. Blaine sounded excited. Okay. He’d be excited too. He hurried into the bedroom to dress in something irresistible.

Twenty-five minutes later, he stepped off the subway with Aloysius around his neck. A spell had taken care of any objections he might have encountered from the other passengers. The teal leather jacket and white shirt he’d put on topped off his jeans and set off his blond hair perfectly. Couldn’t wait to see Blaine’s eyes when he saw him.

He looked around and spotted the City Hall building a block away. *That’s right; there’s a park there*. He walked toward it, moving past the tall buildings and late afternoon pedestrians. Inside the park, he stopped. Blaine sat on a park bench. Killian just wanted to stare at him. So beautiful. Not that perfect kind of beautiful like Moran.

Blaine looked…what? Smart as hell, yes. Free, self-actuating, brave. That was a kind of beauty no picture-perfection could match. But the chiseled face under the shaggy brown hair wasn’t far from the perfect department. Killian loved the way the black-rimmed glasses sat on his high-bridged nose.

Blaine looked up as if he’d felt Killian staring at him. Goal achieved. The human looked entranced without benefit of spells. Killian paused. It wasn’t without benefit of spells. The man was righteously bespelled. He took a breath. But at least he had Blaine now.

He walked up to his physicist, putting a little extra sway in his walk.

The green eyes shone. “You look beautiful.”

Killian smiled. “Thank you. I wanted to be fitting of your surprise, whatever it may be. You look pretty yummy yourself.” It was true. Blaine was usually very casual, but he’d made an extra effort today. Freshly washed jeans, a white shirt, and a dark sport coat. What was the occasion?

Blaine looked up at Killian’s shoulder. “Hi, Al. Good to see you, buddy.”

“Merwaor.”

Blaine glanced at his watch. Hmm. Was he taking Killian to a show? Maybe he had a restaurant reservation. The man patted the bench. “Come sit down.” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

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Killian sat. Curiosity gnawed. He glanced around the park for a clue. “I hardly ever come here. I forget what a great building the City Hall is.” He looked at Blaine.

“Are we going on a tour?”

“Not exactly, but there is another building I want to show you, I hope in a few minutes.” Blaine’s eyes crinkled. He looked like he wanted to laugh.

“What’s going on? What is the surprise?” Why did he feel anxious? Aloysius began to purr.

Blaine giggled. Giggled? Really? “I’m so bad at secrets.” Al’s purr got louder. The man reached in his pocket. Oh, Killian had an odd feeling.

Blaine pulled a box out of his pocket. Oh gods. He couldn’t breathe. Blaine opened the box, revealing the most beautiful antique gold and sapphire ring. He looked up at Killian. “I love you. I know it seems fast, but I think you feel it too. I’d like to walk you over to the marriage license office this afternoon and apply. Will you marry me?” Killian couldn’t breathe or speak. He just stared at the ring. His life passed before his eyes. Every dream and barely acknowledged wish.

Every lonely moment's ache of longing. It lay there in that box. Tears pushed behind his eyes. He had to say yes. In all his life, no matter how long he lived, there would never be another moment like this.

There would never be another Blaine. He looked up. "I can't." A crease pushed between Blaine's eyebrows. "You told me you weren't going to marry her."

"I'm not. Though I haven't told the family yet."

"So tell them you're marrying me instead."

"I can't. You are the most wonderful thing I have ever known, and that is the most beautiful ring on earth. But I can't." And that was it. If his heart had one tiny sliver still intact, it broke.

Blaine took Killian's hand, wringing it tight. "Why? Tell me." 154

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Killian sighed. So his hope to have this magic in his life just a little longer was over. "Because you don't love me really."

"What the hell?"

"It won't last, and soon you'll be glad you dodged this bullet."

"Bullshit! I'm a grown man, and I know how I feel." Blaine glanced around at the few passersby and lowered his voice. "How can you believe that idiocy?"

"Because it's true." Aloysius bit Killian's ear. "Ow. Damn it, Al." He pushed the cat onto the bench.

"At least Al's on my side." Blaine took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"Sweetheart, I know you've been sheltered and never allowed to explore your feelings for a man. It makes sense that you'd be nervous. Maybe expect me to leave like your father did. But I love you, and I want to be with you for the rest of our lives." Killian stared at his hands. "It can't happen. You won't love me much longer.

Maybe days are all we have left. It’s different for everyone.”

“What’s different? Killian, you’re not making sense.” It seemed there was only one way to persuade him. He looked up into those confused and beloved green eyes. “The spell is different.”

“What do you mean ‘spell?’ The spell of time two people love each other?” Killian sat up straight. “No. I mean the witch’s spell that I cast on you to make you love me. And Aloysius helped.” The cat hissed. “Get over it, Al.” He looked back at his hands. The hands Blaine was no longer holding. “The witch’s spell that is right now running out. Though in my defense, I had no idea you would be the target of the spell.

If I could have taken it back, had you love me in truth, I would have done it a thousand times. If I could stop being a witch so you could love me, I would do it. None of those things are possible, even for me.” He looked up. The human stared at him with wide eyes.

“You’re a witch?”

“Yes.”

“You mean like a Wiccan? Chants and moonlight and shit?” Sigh. “No, I mean like a witch.” He flicked his fingers, and thunder rumbled.

“What was that?”

“My symphony. Don’t you remember?”

“So you attract thunder?”

Killian stared at the human. Distance. If only he could feel the tiniest bit separate from this man. “No, I can make thunder.” He flicked his fingers again, and the thunder rumbled closer.

Blaine looked up at the sky. “Coincidence.”

“Hold out your hand.”

“Why?” His eyes were wide.

“Just do it.”

Blaine held out a palm that clearly shook. Killian flicked a finger. A small flame sprang up in the middle of that beautiful, precious hand that would never touch Killian again. “Sorry. I could do a bigger demonstration, but the park service frowns on burning bushes.”

“Shit!” Blaine sprang off the bench and fell back a few steps. The flame snuffed out. “Are you crazy?”

“It was a cool flame. I would never hurt you.”

“Crap!” Blaine walked a few steps, pulling a hand through his messy brown hair.

“Killian, I mean *are* you crazy? Have you lost your mind? You really believe you’re a witch?”

“It’s not a belief; it’s a fact.”

“There are no such things as witches. You have to know that.” 156

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“Do you need a bigger demonstration?” Killian raised a hand. An ominous rumble moved across the sky, and suddenly a flash of lightning split a small tree a few yards from Blaine. Flames leaped up as the smoke spiraled.

“Holy crap!” Blaine fell backward and landed on his butt. Several people started toward them from different parts of the park. He scrambled to his feet. “You’re crazy.

How could I love a crazy man? A crazy man who goes everywhere with a crazy cat.” The hole in Killian’s chest deepened and blackened as if the fire burned through him.

Blaine held up his hands to a man who was rushing toward him. “I’m fine,

thanks.

Must have been some freak heat lightning or something. It didn’t hit me. Don’t worry.” The stranger looked confused. “You want me to call 9-1-1?”

“No, the park service will be here soon, I imagine. I’m fine, really.”

“Okay, if you’re sure.”

“I am. Thanks.”

The stranger walked away, still staring at the decimated, now smoldering tree.

Blaine turned back to Killian. “I don’t know what you think happened here, but there are perfectly logical explanations.”

“Yes. The explanation is that I’m a witch. Card-carrying and certified.”

“Certifiable, you mean.” Blaine shook his head and took two more steps back.

“How could I have been so nuts?”

“You see. I was right.”

“What the hell do you mean?”

“I told you the love wouldn’t last.”

Chapter Twenty

“Lavender!”

Lavender stopped in the hall and detoured to her father’s office. She looked in.

Damned officious boor. He sat behind his desk like it was a throne. “Yes, Father?”

“What the hell is your fiancé up to?”

“You mean Killian?”

“Do you have another fiancé, girl?”

Oops. She wasn’t going there. “I haven’t seen him in days.” He peered under bushy brows at her. “Why not?”

She crossed her arms. Damn the man. “Father, if I see him too much, you aren’t happy, and if I see him too little, you now complain. The fact is, I have been studying for an exam and have been too busy to see him.”

“Go see him now. I want to know what he’s doing.”

“Father…”

“*Now*, Lavender!”

“Yes, sir.” She headed for her room to change, smiling all the way. How to get her father to do what she wanted? Say she didn’t want to do it. But she was really glad Killian had told her nothing about his plans. She didn’t have to lie that way. When she got back? Another matter.

A few minutes later, she left the town house. Avoiding the chauffeur, she hurried toward the subway. Damn, wished she knew for sure if her father had her cell phone tapped. She stopped and held the phone in her hand. It didn’t appear to be spelled, and 158

she hoped he valued her good opinion enough to avoid physical tapping. *Okay, take a chance*. She dialed James, uh, Jimmy. She had trouble thinking of him that way.

He picked up on the first ring. “Hi, sweetheart.”

“Hi. Daddy wants me to go to Killian’s. Meet me there.”

“What’s your father got up his sleeve?”

“His arm and a gun. But right now, he wants me to spy on Killian. At least I have a good excuse to find out what’s been going on.”

“Man, the professor has been so happy lately. I think he finally hooked up with Dr. Genneau.”

“I hope so. I want him to be happy.”

“Meet you there in fifteen.”

“Great. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

* * * *

Gone. Everything. Killian sat up on the bed. No reason for him to exist. He had power he didn’t want. He did not have the only thing he did want. Love. Blaine.

Aloysius lay on the pillow and stared at him.

“Damn it, cat. What was I supposed to do? Not tell the man I’m a witch? Let him marry me and find out later?”

“Mwrar.”

Killian threw up his hands. “How does that work, Al? I spend my whole life pretending to be something I’m not?” He stopped. Powers, that was what Jimmy’s family had done, and all those others. They pretended to be human. He could have done that, pretended. He’d be happy as a human. He fell back on the bed. “I blew it. I fucked up. I could have lied. Could have had Blaine. At least until the spell wore off.” Lying. That was what he’d been doing all along. Lying to himself, mostly.

The doorbell rang. Oh gods, it was him. What could he say? That he had made it up? That he was frightened? He’d think of something. He ran to the door and

tore it open. He stared. Of course it wasn't Blaine. The man didn't want to be with a crazy person. "Hi. Don't really want company now, you guys." Lavender pushed into the entry. "What is going on with you? Jimmy said you were so happy."

He walked away from the door and went back toward his bedroom. He looked over his shoulder. "Not anymore. Want to sleep now." She barged in front of him. "Like hell you will. Jimmy, make some tea."

"Uh, how?"

"Boil water. I'll do the rest."

She looked at him with one eyebrow raised. Killian looked down at himself. Yes, he looked bad. He was still wearing the jeans he'd had on yesterday when…just when.

He'd at least taken off his nice shirt and jacket and pulled on an ancient sweatshirt.

Looked like he'd slept in them. He had.

She grabbed his arm and pulled. He was not about resistance right now, so he followed. When she got to the living room couch, she pushed, and he fell onto it. Jimmy came in with a pot of boiling water and a big grin. "I almost forgot I know how to heat stuff without fire."

She walked toward the kitchen. "I'll get the tea. Don't let him go anywhere." As if he had the energy and drive to do anything. He turned on the couch so his back was to Jimmy, who sat in the armchair. He looked up and saw Al peering down at him. Judgment. Definitely judgment.

Lavender's voice came from behind him. "Oh no, Mister. Sit the hell up and have tea and tell us what happened." Jeez, did she think they were married? Okay, he'd do it because he really wanted tea.

He turned over and sat up slowly. A cup of tea sat on the table in front of him. He grabbed and sipped. “I fucked up my relationship with Blaine.” Jimmy leaned forward. “How? I thought you guys were meant to be together.”

“I told him I’m a witch; that’s how.”

“But you are a witch. You had to tell him sometime.” Killian put down his cup and leaned against the back of the couch and closed his eyes. “But I didn’t have to tell him now. Gods, you should have seen the ring. He is so beautiful. Oh, Powers, I love him.”

“Ring?” Lavender’s voice.

Killian opened his eyes. “He asked me to marry him. He wanted to go to the marriage bureau and get the license. I thought I had to tell him about the spell and me.

So I did.”

Jimmy frowned. “What did he say?”

“That I was crazy.”

“But you showed him, right? That there is no spoon.”

“Oh yes, I showed him.”

Lavender’s voice was soft. “What happened?”

“He fell on his ass, jumped up, told me I was certifiable and he couldn’t believe he’d been nuts enough to love me, and left.”

“I’m so sorry, Killian.”

Jimmy threw himself back in the chair. “But you showed him! Maybe you weren’t convincing enough.”

Killian wiped a hand over his face and picked up his tea. “Jimmy, you’re a physics major. If you’d seen these phenomena rather than creating them yourself, what would you have done?”

“Yeah. I’d try to find a logical explanation. That’s what he did, right?” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

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Killian nodded. “Heat lightning. I’m not sure how he explained the fire I started in his hand.” He sipped again.

“He loves you, Professor. He’s gotta come to his senses.”

“I doubt it. He was pretty certain about my insanity.” *Why is it so hard for witches to die?*

Lavender poured him more tea. “What are you going to do?”

“I’m thinking of leaving. Going to a place where there are few witches and they don’t know me.”

Jimmy looked shocked. “But what about my parents? You said you’d fix things.”

“He’s not leaving, Jimmy. Don’t worry.”

Meddling female. “Why shouldn’t I leave? How the hell do you know I won’t leave?”

“Because you may be gentle, and you may be gay, but you’re not a coward, and you hate injustice and manipulation. You want to right the wrongs that have been done.

I know you do.”

He wasn’t going to answer. They waited him out, both staring. No, make that three of them. Aloysius stared too. “Okay, yes. I want to make things right for all the mixed-breed witches. I do care about that. And then I’m going.”

“What you do then is your business, Killian. If you can establish what is happening with the council, I think you will have done a great service for witchery. You will have fulfilled your destiny as the Witch Master.”

“Shit, never wanted to be a Witch Master at all.”

“None of us get asked who we want to be. Jimmy didn’t ask to be a quarter-breed witch and be mistreated as a child by other witches. I didn’t ask to have a tyrant for a father.”

“Okay, okay.” He sipped some tea. “Why are you two here, anyway? I thought we were keeping you out of this until we see the council.” 162

She grinned. “My father sent me to spy on you.”

He cracked a small smile. “You’re kidding.”

“Nope. He wants to know what you’re up to.”

“Hmm. Maybe that presents us with an opportunity.”

* * * *

“Papa, are you here?” Lavender hurried down the hall toward her father’s office.

“In here.”

She peeked into his office. He put down a file and looked at her. “Well?” She crossed the room and sat opposite him. The big, imposing desk gave the impression of the power he sought. Humph. She’d show him power. “Father, Killian is in love with a man.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know exactly. He wouldn’t say.”

“A human?”

So he had his own ideas, the spying SOB. “No. Gods, Father, he’s not that crazy. I should have said male. I think it’s some male witch from Europe. But he says he’s not going to marry me. He’s trying to go to the council to tell you this. Failing that, he’s going to bring together the community and call off the wedding.” The bushy brows met over his nose. “The pup can’t do this. Your marriage is bigger than just some infatuation. It will save all of witchery. He

isn’t free to dissolve it on some romantic whim.”

“He insists there is another way to save witchery. He said he had a better solution to the marriage. He seemed quite excited, but he wouldn’t tell me. Said he wanted it to be a surprise.”

“Ridiculous. But I suppose the council had better hear him out before he throws the entire community into an uproar.” He stood, and she followed his lead. “Don’t worry, Lavender. This witch will do his duty to you. I will see to that.” She couldn’t seem too compliant. “You know I have no stomach for this wedding either, so if Killian has found a better way, I’ll support him.” He used his best glower. “There is no better way, Lavender. You were born for this marriage, and you will go through with it.”

She smiled. “Of course, Father. If it’s the only way.” The bastard.

* * * *

Evangeline hung up the phone. Killian was in love with someone? She had thought he had some other idea entirely. She shivered. Actually, she thought he had found out. Surely, this was better for all of them. She wanted her son to be happy. Well, as long as it didn’t compromise her whole life and all she’d worked for. She didn’t have to be related to Karonoff. Gods, the man was a tyrant and a royal pain in the ass.

Having the Witch Master for a son was power enough. If Killian had a better way to marry off Lavender without his being the groom, more power to him. She chuckled at her own joke. Of course, Nicholas Karonoff was no joke. She’d call the council and see what happened.

Chapter Twenty-One

Blaine stared at his laptop screen. No use. He'd been trying to chat with a mathematician friend in Turkey, but he couldn't seem to focus. He typed a farewell and closed the case. He leaned back in his chair and looked at the shelves beside his desk.

He needed something good to read. Maybe Niels Bohr? No. Something lighter would be better. A novel. A searing pain ripped through him. *No. Don't think. Read*. His throat tightened. *Fight it*. Heat filled his head. *Stop*. He dropped his head to the desk. *Stop*.

Tears ran down his cheeks like rain after a thunderstorm. Thunder like Killian's symphony.

Surrender. His shoulders shook; breath caught in his throat. Might die from no air.

Didn't care. How could this happen? Life made sense. No more. He'd never been in love, and then…Killian. The beautiful. The perfect. The insane. People didn't think they were witches. Not in his world. No, God, no. Couldn't love a crazy man. But he did. He loved him as he never thought he could love anyone or anything.

He sat back and wiped his eyes. *Enough. Think about this logically*. He loved Killian.

Couldn't get around it. He wasn't dumb, so there had to be some reason for loving the man. Well, duh. About a million reasons. Everything about the guy was special. His great mind, wonderful sensitivity, beautiful face, fun humor. Yeah, and the sex. That was supernatural, for sure. So if all those things were right, how could he account for the witch business?

He got up and walked into his kitchen, grabbed a beer from the fridge, and carried it out to the chair by the bay window. Hypothesis one. Killian was crazy. But he knew the man, and crazy didn't add up. Besides, there was that very convincing display of fact in the park. Burning bushes could happen, but not usually out of a clear sky on a The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

sunny day. He could rationalize all he wanted, but that was unlikely heat

lightning.

Okay, hypothesis two. Killian was a witch. There were no such things as witches, so back to hypothesis one.

He sipped the beer. *Come on, Genneau, use your brain. Think outside Schrödinger's box*. He was shocked by Killian's claim and his demonstration. But Niels Bohr, the father of quantum physics, said, "Anyone who is not shocked by quantum theory has not understood it." So forget for a moment the whole witch thing. One who understood quantum physics could admit the possibility that consciousness affects subatomic particles and that the universe was interconnected with faster-than-light transfers of information. So…

He leaned over and looked out the window. What if there were people who were good at affecting subatomic particles with their minds? Could he even entertain that possibility? And could Killian be one of them? Weird, wonderful Killian? Hell, if there was anyone on the planet who could do such a thing, it would be Killian. What had he said the other day? Killian's mystery attracted him. Could that mystery be that Killian was a, uh, special person, who could affect matter and energy directly? Otherwise known as a, uh, witch? He laughed. Maybe Aloysius was Schrödinger's cat, the famous quantum experiment?

Okay, get serious, Genneau. One truth was for sure. He wanted Killian back. But could he accept him the way he was, believing he was a witch? No fair trying to change him. Shit, he wasn't sure. And there was no guarantee Killian wanted him back. The guy hadn't accepted the ring. And after the things Blaine had said…

He got up. One thing was sure. He'd never find out hiding here in the apartment.

He had a class to teach and a witch to find.

* * * *

"Don't be nervous, Mr. Jones. Just tell me what you learned." Why did he hire such an idiot? But the man was loyal to a fault. Loyalty was valuable.

The little detective shifted from foot to foot. “Yes, sir, Mr. Karonoff, I followed the cat man when he went to that guy’s hotel. Nosed around and found out the name was”—he pulled out his notebook—“Moran Inglesby. From Europe, I heard. Good-looking guy. He did a lot of stuff with the cat man. They seemed real chummy. Dinners, some clubs. Real chummy.”

Ah, so Killian’s story seemed to agree with the facts. Yes, he’d heard of this Inglesby. Wouldn’t have thought the Witch Master would have such tastes, but what could one expect from a degenerate? “Thank you, Mr. Jones.”

“Haven’t seen him around much lately, though.”

“What?”

“Yeah, they were real hot and heavy there for a week or so, but now the guy has vanished. Poof. Must have gone back to Europe.”

Perhaps Killian intended to join the man in Europe. He’d see about that. His influence was stronger in the old country even than here. “Well, maybe Mr. Barth intends to join his friend somewhere else. Let me give you your check…” He reached for the desk drawer.

“Suppose so. But that physics professor might have something to say about it.”

“Excuse me?”

“That physics professor. Now there’s a good-looking guy. I mean, not that I look at guys like that, you understand, but it’s easy to see why cat man would like him best.

Do you think these guys are gay or just good friends? Not that I have anything against them. I mean, different teams and stuff.”

“Mr. Jones!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Are you saying that Mr. Barth has another companion?”

“Doctor.”

“Excuse me?”

“Dr. Barth.”

Murder. He intended to have this little idiot murdered. He took a deep breath.

“Does *Doctor* Barth have another companion?”

“Yeah. I think so. They seem to really like each other. And they’ve spent a night or two together, as far as I can tell. I mean, one could have sneaked out, but I watched really carefully and—”

He gripped the edge of the desk. “Thank you, Mr. Jones. And this is the human, uh, the physics professor you mentioned in your notes. You said you thought they were no longer friends.”

“Yep, but they must have made it up, because they’ve been together quite a bit.”

“I see.” He took a deep breath. Who was lying? Killian or Lavender or both?

“Thank you for your help, Mr. Jones.” He wrote out a check and handed it to the idiot.

“I put in a little extra for your hard work.”

“Thanks, Mr. Karonoff. That’s great.”

“You know how to find the door.”

“Sure. I’m a detective.” The man laughed at his own ridiculous joke all the way down the hall.

So was Killian back with Inglesby? Or was that story a cover-up for his real agenda? He would find out, but first he needed a little leverage against the Witch Master.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Jimmy paced the floor. That was a very short trip in his apartment. “Shit, I don’t want to blow this for you guys. I don’t really know what I’m doing.” Lavender looked up from her note pad. “Don’t worry, darling. We don’t know what we’re doing either.”

Jimmy collapsed in the bean bag chair. “Why doesn’t that make me feel better?” Killian turned the rickety desk chair. Aloysius purred from his spot around Killian’s neck. “We don’t know what we’ll find when we get to the meeting. They’re expecting us at three o’clock, so we’ll arrive at two. We’ve planted the idea that I am calling them together to say I’m not marrying Lavender; I’m marrying a male witch.

That will give us a small advantage of surprise. From then on, we have to improvise.” He stood and paced to the window. “I think I’ve figured something out. Another piece of the puzzle.” Gods, he was impressive. So damned smart. Jimmy felt so lucky to have found him. Killian turned and faced them. “We know that witch/human marriages are not responsible for the depletion of witchery. So what is?” Jimmy laughed. “Meanness?”

Killian smiled. “There’s a thought.”

Lavender looked up. “I’ve had some thoughts.”

Killian nodded. “Me, too. Share.”

“Your mother says I’m the most powerful witch of my generation, which proves that pure-blood witches are the salvation of the race, right?”

“That’s what she says.”

“But while I have a lot of power, I also have blind spots. Important ones, like the inability to sense power, even my own. I am coming to suspect that this

weakness is hereditary and that it has been magnified in each generation of purebred—or should I say inbred—witches."

Killian laughed. "Exactly! The decline of witchery is a result of the opposite of witch/human marriages. It's a result of too much inbreeding that has increased certain weaknesses and reduced the power of each generation." Jimmy shrugged. "But what about you, Killian?"

He cocked his head. "I don't know. Maybe I'm just the exception that proves the rule. Hell, I'm gay and neurotic." He laughed. "Maybe that's from too much inbred witchery. But we know the decline of the race is not because of witch/human interaction. That we know for sure, and we have the proof." He pointed. "You, Jimmy.

And lots of others, if they need to see them. If the council listens and considers what we're saying, then we can try to do this thing through channels. Bring them along gradually. If they're defensive and refuse to consider the facts we're presenting, then we move on to the community. Jimmy, your dad is standing by if we need him, right?"

"Yep. Mom is scared for him, but he wants to help." He grinned. "In the last few days, I've found out how powerful he is. He should be able to hold his own if he has to."

"So should you."

"Thanks." Amazing to think how far he'd come in a few days. Of course, he'd probably never be as strong as Lavender, though she insisted he would.

Lavender walked over and sat on the floor beside him. God, oops, no that was gods. She'd been teaching him about the ancient witches' religion that saw the great energy of the universe manifested in many points of magic light that they called gods.

So, gods, he loved her. She took his hand. "One way or another, we have to tell the community something, because the wedding is scheduled for Saturday. Everyone is all excited about it."

Killian leaned back in the chair. “We’ll give them something else to be excited about.”

LAVENDER LOOKED UP at the man she loved and smiled. Gods, the love in his eyes. And here she was, placing his life in the balance for an unknown outcome. She glanced at Killian. Man, she sure hoped the Witch Master was up to the challenge. Her father was one mean witch, in every sense of the word, and Killian’s mother was probably as powerful as Lavender. Maybe more, since Lavender had her blind spots.

And that wasn’t even considering the three other council members. Shah Mugal spiced his witchery with a touch of mysticism. Robert Valmont couldn’t claim the power, but he was a master politician, and Mimi Merced looked like a housewife from Nebraska, which made her power sneaky and elusive.

She took a deep breath. There was no telling what her father would do when he knew she was involved. Yes, he’d had her watched, but she’d been careful enough and told enough half-truths that he may have slacked off. She certainly hadn’t seen any sign of his men, and he had such a bad temper she could usually tell when he was pissed at her. No, she suspected he’d be surprised, and not in a good way. She shuddered. It was worth the risk. Having Jimmy, setting his family and all the other mixed-blood families free. It was worth it, but it all depended on the Witch Master.

* * * *

Blaine packed up his stuff. Not his most stellar class of all time, but he’d made it through. Now he could do what he wanted. Go find Killian and see if they could resolve this whole witch business. Funny, the guy hadn’t been home when he’d tried before class. And he wasn’t at the college, as far as Blaine could tell. Out doing witchy stuff? He stopped. That idea half made him laugh and half cringe. Jesus, could he do it?

Could he accept this idea of Killian’s? He shook his head. No, it couldn’t just be an idea, or Killian was insane, and he couldn’t accept that. It had to be a truth on some level. He sighed. The truth was he loved the damned witch, so he had to work it out.

He waved the last student out of the lab. No other class followed, so he turned off the lights and locked the classroom door. Out in the quiet hall, he slipped on his jacket against the still-cool spring. *Okay, off to find the man. The witch.* He grinned. His witch.

He walked out of the building into the bright day. God, it smelled good. The flowers were coming. Green buds made the trees look fuzzy and impressionistic. What a great time of year to be in love. If he had any say in it, every time of year would be great to be in love. *Find Killian.*

“Excuse me, sir.”

He looked around. Where had the voice come from?

“Here, sir.” A hand waved from the front seat of a car parked at the curb.

Lost student? He walked over and bent down by the car. There was a young guy inside, probably in his early twenties. “Can I help you?”

“Yes. Are you Dr. Genneau?”

“Yes.”

The kid smiled. “Oh good. We’ve heard so much about your class on quantum theory. I wondered if I can still sign up.

Odd. Why would the kid think he could sign up this late? “No, the class is full.

You can try for next term.”

The young man looked over his shoulder and said something into the backseat.

Oh, that’s what he meant by “we.” There was somebody back there. Blaine bent more and tried to see.

The back door of the car opened. A male voice said, “Do you deal with black-hole theory?”

What? He walked over to the backseat and again bent down. There was another man, not so young, on the far side of the backseat. “Sorry. You can get a good idea of what we cover on the course description listed online. Just go to—” Shit! A powerful 172

force hit his back, propelling him forward. Hands grabbed his shoulders before he could fall and pushed him into the car. “What the fuck?” He lay on the seat and looked up into the eyes of a large blond man. Shit, that smile was not friendly. Another hand covered his mouth and nose with a strange-smelling cloth. *Holy fuck*. That was all he remembered.

Chapter Twenty-Three

This was it. Lavender’s father’s house looked big and imposing. Some prime New York real estate. Scary. Lavender’s back was straight as she led the way. Confident?

Hell, none of them were. He glanced back at Jimmy. The kid looked scared. Yeah. He adjusted Al around his neck. A soft purr sounded in his ear. Even the cat was trying to soothe him.

Lavender turned her front door key in the lock and pushed through into the front hall with Killian and Jimmy hot on her heels. An elderly butler rushed toward them.

She waved a hand. “Hello, Dimitri. Don’t bother yourself. We have an appointment with the council.”

The old man frowned. “But wait, Miss Lavender; I was told you were coming at three.”

She just kept walking, and poor old Dimitri—who was seventy if he was a day—

was trying to catch up. They passed a large formal living room and moved into a

hallway. Lavender smiled at the old man but gave no quarter. “Sorry. Must have been an error. We made the appointment for two.”

“Let me announce you, Miss.”

She waved a hand. “No need. We don’t stand on formality.” She got to a set of double doors. Dimitri reached for the handle, and she knocked his hand away and pushed the two doors open at once. Killian saw the tableau. Five witches seated at a huge table and Nicholas Karonoff saying, “And where did these events occur?”

Heat flashed to his face. The damnable son of a witch. He swept past Lavender into the huge formal dining room and stopped in front of the table. He glanced at his 174

mother, Karonoff, Shah Mugal, Robert Valmont, and Mimi Merced, all of whom were staring at him. But what filled his vision most was Moran Inglesby, standing in the middle of the room. Aloysius’s growl rumbled in his ear.

Killian raised an arm toward Inglesby. “What in the hell are you doing here?” Moran flushed. “I, uh, I don’t take orders from you, Witch Master. I was asked here by the council.”

“I was quite clear about my instructions to you, Moran. I told you to leave this continent and do it quickly.”

Karonoff’s deep voice sounded cajoling. “Ah, Killian, my boy, Mr. Inglesby is correct. We did invite him here. Of course, we were unaware of any direct instructions you may have given him. But I’m sure you can understand his conviction that our invitation superseded your wishes.”

Killian looked at Karonoff. Tall, imposing. Killian wanted to kick his regal butt.

Clearly he’d brought Inglesby here to report on Killian’s sex life. But, while Killian might be more powerful than Karonoff in theory, the old witch headed the council. He had authority, and Killian wanted to at least make a show of respecting him. “I understand, Master Karonoff. But believe me when I say that Moran Inglesby is a threat to the community.”

Karonoff smiled, half sneer. “Come now, my boy. We have many *degenerates* in our community. They aren’t necessarily a threat.” Sometimes respect was hard. “They are a threat when they impose their degeneracy on others without permission and by force.” Robert Valmont leaned forward. “Surely not.”

Killian stared at him. “You will have to trust me on this one, Master Valmont. I do not intend to share the details. But Moran Inglesby will leave for his homeland today, or he will deal directly with me.”

Karonoff smiled—the definition of indulgent. “Ah, young witches. So full of passion.”

Killian looked directly into the old Master’s eyes. “You have no idea.” Perhaps that gave Karonoff pause. He didn’t blink, but his color paled ever so slightly. He looked at Moran. “Well, Mr. Inglesby, it seems you have worn out your welcome in New York. Unless you feel up to challenging our Witch Master?” He paused. Probably hoped that Inglesby was willing to give it a try. But Moran shook his head. “Then your usefulness to us is at an end. Please leave our fair city with dispatch.”

“But I thought—”

Killian stepped forward, and Moran fell back a couple feet. “I told you to leave.” Moran frowned. He looked at the Master Witches arranged at the table and mustered a small sneer. Killian didn’t blame him much. Clearly the council had tried to use the witch and now abandoned him. “I shall return to my home, where witches are civilized.” He swept out of the room with as much grandeur as he could muster under the circumstances.

Al’s soft growl just magnified Killian’s pissed-offness. “I hope you were able to find out everything you wanted to know about me before the twit left.” Lavender, gods bless her, stepped away from the doorway where she’d been hanging out. She held on to Jimmy’s hand and flashed a huge smile. “Hello, everyone.

Thank you for agreeing to see us…so graciously.”

The frowns on the five council members deepened, so the sarcasm wasn't lost on them.

Karonoff screwed on his best thundercloud face. "Lavender, what are you doing here? And who, may I ask, is this?" He pointed dramatically to Jimmy.

"Papa, I don't have to tell you who this is, since you have been spying on me and Jimmy for many months. It may interest you to know, however, that Jimmy is not just a 176

human; he's also a witch, and he's here with us today because all of us have something important to share with the council."

"He is not a witch. If he was, I could tell."

Ah, so Lavender's blind spot about sensing power *was* inherited from her father.

Theory confirmed. Of course Jimmy had been well hidden. Killian stepped toward Lavender and Jimmy. "It's not surprising, Master Karonoff. Even Lavender and I had difficulty perceiving Jimmy's power." He couldn't help emphasizing the *even*. "Jimmy.

If you please."

Jimmy swallowed noisily but raised a hand, and the water pitcher flew into the air without spilling a drop. The pitcher lowered over two glasses, into which it poured a half glass each, and then righted itself and landed back on the table.

Lavender had clearly been working with her lover. Good boy.

Karonoff shrugged. "Parlor tricks."

Killian smiled. "Quite the contrary. As you all know, control of fine movement is far harder than gross magic. Jimmy is only a newly discovered witch, but he is very powerful."

Evangeline stepped around the table with her best hostess smile. "Why don't you all have a seat?"

Lavender sat in an upholstered chair on the other side of the table from the council. She pointed to the one beside her, and Jimmy sat. Killian, with Al around his neck, stayed standing. He positioned himself so that all the council members got a good look at the crossed blue eyes staring steadily at them. Al was sweet, but gods, he could look intimidating.

Evangeline seemed to be trying for her best maternal smile. Hmm. Not too successful. She was off balance, and he knew she hated that. “Killian, dear. Nicholas heard that you were coming to tell us that you have fallen in love and refuse to marry Lavender. He thinks you have some hidden agenda, but I have assured him that isn’t The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

so. And now that I see you have brought this young man, I’m thinking perhaps you intend for Lavender to marry him.”

“Whaaaaat?” Karonoff rose from his chair.

“Interesting idea, Mother. And it is true that Lavender does intend to marry Jimmy, and I am very happy for them. Since we now know that Jimmy is a witch of great power, no one can have any objection to her marrying him.” Karonoff needed to watch his blood pressure. His ears turned red. Lavender looked a little scared but sat straight and proud. Good girl.

The old Master pointed at Killian. “You are engaged to my daughter. There are many other powerful witches, and I could have betrothed her to any of them, but I did not. She is intended for you, and you will marry her.” Killian shook his head. “No, sir, I won’t. First, it’s not your decision, or mine.

Lavender is a grown and capable adult in this country and can make her own decisions.

And the fact is that Jimmy is a far more appropriate husband for the most powerful female witch of her generation.”

“Why, because she *loves* him?” He made a mockery of the word, the bastard.

“She does love him, but more importantly because Jimmy is only one-quarter witch and, therefore, will strengthen the witch blood in their children rather than

compromising it by inbreeding weaknesses."

Shah Mugal threw himself back in his chair, eyes wide, and began a quiet, intense caucus with Robert Valmont beside him. Mimi Merced, the oh-so-not-innocent, leaned forward. "Whatever could you mean by that? Pure-blooded witch blood is the strongest."

He took a deep breath. *Be polite*. "No, ma'am, we have reason to believe it's not.

Quite by accident, because of Jimmy here, we have come to realize that there are powerful witches that have been produced from the unions of witches and humans for many years."

"But the offspring aren't witches. They are human or have only the tiniest particle of witch power."

"No, ma'am. As I told you, Jimmy is only one-quarter witch, and yet when he is fully developed, he may well be as powerful as I am." Evangeline threw up her hands. "Impossible. Don't be silly, Killian." He looked at his mother, but from the corner of his eye caught Karonoff watching the whole interchange with narrowed eyes and a deadly calm. Killian knew where the power in the room lay, and he better not turn his back on it.

He looked at his mother. "No, it's not silly at all. Jimmy's little sister is even more powerful than he is. She will exceed the capabilities of Lavender and yourself when she is grown. Jimmy has another part-witch-blood friend who he says is very accomplished."

Robert Valmont spread his hands on the table. "So, what we have here is a marvelous exception that proves the rule. This extraordinary family must be incorporated into the community at once. But we must watch closely to be sure the enervating effects of the human blood do not show up in future generations." The damned politician. Killian wanted to spit in his face. Make Jimmy and his family lab rats for a bunch of so-called purebreds.

"Councilman, the science is already established in the form of hundreds, perhaps

thousands of powerful witches that are hiding now in the human community to escape the prejudice and bigotry of us so-called pure-blooded witches. In fact, it appears that human blood does not enervate witchery; it makes it stronger. While inbreeding among pure-blooded witches is what is actually forcing our race into decline." The faces of the council members told the story. Well, ten thousand hells! They already knew! Perhaps they had come to believe their own propaganda, but they knew about the mixed-race witches and had done nothing. He wanted to throw up. This was the worst sort of betrayal. But why?

Evangeline stepped closer. Hell, she was his mother. And she'd dragged him into this pot of lies on purpose. "Dear, even if it were true, consider. The humans are taking over. Witches are stronger and more powerful than humans, but we are dying while the humans thrive. We can't allow them to overwhelm witchery." Killian stared at Evangeline. Suspended. He could hardly believe he was looking at his own mother. She'd been willing to sacrifice his happiness for this fiction. The witch!

Killian looked around at the council, who all stared at him, transfixed. "So you have all decided to create a fictional world in which humans are the enemies of witches."

"Of course they are. The burnings, the tribunals—"

"Mother, I have told you. Few, if any, witches were ever killed in those trials. The humans killed one another. And it was hundreds of years ago. Have you never thought that if enough humans and witches intermarry that soon all the world will be witches?

Witches will have nothing to fear, because we will be the dominant species." She stared at him. "No, I haven't thought of such a thing." She frowned. "Do you truly believe we could make that much of an impact?"

"You've all told us that humans are practically irresistible to us witches. Sounds like a lot of sex to me. And since witch females get pregnant easily by human males, and human females just get pregnant easily, it seems inevitable." Evangeline smiled. He could practically see her imagining the hordes of mixed-

blood witches she would control and manipulate.

She looked at him with narrowed eyes. “You believe that this mating could be reliable? It would invariably produce stronger offspring?” Oh yeah. She had world domination in her sights. “I believe the power varies just as it does in all witches, but yes. From what I have learned so far, it could be reliable.” 180

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She turned to the others. “Killian has a point. If mating with a human produces more powerful offspring—reliably—then we could populate the world in a few generations.”

Mimi Merced leaned forward at the table. “Evangeline, you know there are only one or two of these examples. A couple of offspring that got stronger”—she flicked her fingers toward Jimmy—“do not prove anything.”

Evangeline looked at the floor and then up at Mimi. “True, one or two examples is not enough.”

Killian stepped closer. “I have many more—”

His mother held up her hand. “I believe I have the most convincing example of all.” She looked at him, then at the other council members. What was she weighing? She took a breath, held it for a second, then spoke in a ringing tone. “Killian is half-human.” The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

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Chapter Twenty-Four

Son of a bitch. Literally. Stunned. The council went nuts.

“What do you mean?”

“How can this be?”

Jimmy’s smile split his face.

Killian felt like he’d been shot.

Evangeline walked toward him. “I fell in love with a human when I still lived in England. I believed, as we’d been taught, that I was surrendering my powers to him, but I didn’t care. As I lived with him, however, I discovered that he was not all that I believed him to be. He was weak, sensitive, vulnerable. Just what we had been taught about humans. He died quite unexpectedly, and shortly after, I discovered I was pregnant. I also realized that my powers were not compromised. Quite the contrary. I was a uniquely powerful witch. So I came to New York and joined the community as a widow.

“When Killian was born and I began to see how powerful he was, I thought that I had produced a miracle child. I claimed that I had selected a Master Witch as Killian’s father in order to produce a superior offspring. It was a lie, but I couldn’t let them discriminate against us. You were half-human, and they would have hated that. You know the rest.” She sat in a chair.

“For a while I thought Killian was one of a kind. Then I met one or two others like this part witch.” She nodded toward Jimmy. “Eventually I was invited to join the council, and then learned that what we had all been taught was a myth. Council after council had perpetuated the fiction that humans deplete witches, in an effort to keep us isolated and pure, out of a fear that humans would overrun us. I believed it to be true. I 182

knew that humans were bad for us. I had loved my human, and he died. Humans are so fragile compared to us. It didn’t make sense that we should produce children with them. And besides”—she looked up at Killian—“Killian is so odd. Homosexual, human-loving, wanting to work. And he doesn’t even appreciate his power. I decided it was a human thing.”

She rose and walked a few feet toward the door, then turned. “But now I suppose there is nothing to be done. I know my son, and he will never agree to join us in protecting the race as it has been done. After all, he is half-human. So I suppose we should make the best of it.”

Mimi Merced looked like someone had hit her with a brick. “You can’t be serious.”

Evangeline’s face lit up. “But I am. Imagine, Mimi, if the reproduction is reliable.” Killian held up a hand.

He felt all the eyes in the room boring into him. What did they expect? That he would suddenly morph into some wizened, frail creature before their eyes?

Human? Gods, he couldn't catch his breath. Half of him was numb with shock and horror. The witch had kept this from him all these years. Denying him the truth of his life and his heritage. Feeding him fiction for breakfast and dogma for dinner. He shook his head. Maybe it would clear it. Did some piece of her really believe she was doing the best for him? Maybe.

But the other half of him felt awe and delight. He was half-human. Human. Like his students, his friends, and…the man he loved. Maybe his father would have loved him. He would never know. Weird, but it made him feel better about himself not to be some genetic experiment.

"Mother, I don't know what to say to you. You've been responsible for so much pain and suffering, it's incalculable. All the exclusion and discrimination. All the lies.

The lies to me and to everyone." He sighed. "And now you will take a step to help undo The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

it. Please go to our house and meet the community as they arrive. Tell them I'll be there shortly."

"Like *hell* you will!" The voice rang in the room, and Killian turned to look at the old Master. He hadn't thought Karonoff would take this lying down.

Karonoff stood slowly. Lavender jumped up and grabbed Jimmy, pulling him up beside her. Killian felt her move closer, felt her energy magnifying. Aloysius's growl rumbled through his neck. Five against three—against four, counting Aloysius. And Jimmy was a novice. But maybe it wouldn't come to that.

Karonoff pointed at Killian, his long, thin hand looking very clawlike. "You degenerate half-breed! How dare you try to command this community? I am in charge here. You will do as I say, and I say that you will marry Lavender, the community will be happy and satisfied that the power of next generation of witchery is assured, and things will continue as they are."

Lavender shook her head. “But, Papa. How can you say that? You wanted me to marry Killian because he was pure witch. Now you know he’s not, so why do you still want me to marry him?”

That was the real question, and Killian knew the answer. He nodded toward her, but never took his eyes off her father. “He doesn’t care about pure blood or the future of witchery. He just wants to be in charge. He’s afraid that if we let in the mixed-blood witches, many will be more powerful than he is.” He nodded toward her father, his hand gently stroking Aloysius on his shoulder. “I mean no disrespect, sir, but I am more powerful than you are, so how precisely are you going to stop me?” It was at least part bluff. If the others didn’t join in, he thought he could take Karonoff. He was more powerful—but the old Master was a hell of a lot meaner and very determined.

Karonoff smiled. Not a good sign. “There are many kinds of power, Witch Master.

In this case, my—how do you Americans say?—ace in the hole is one human physics professor who will meet an untimely end should you not do as I require.” 184

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Ice. Every nerve, every cell froze. Blaine. Could he have Blaine? Or was this a bluff?

Jimmy yelled, “You bastard!”

Karonoff glanced at the young witch but kept his attention on Killian. “I assure you, young man, *my* parentage is not in question.” Thunder rumbled outside and made the windows rattle.

Lavender looked up. “What was that?”

Karonoff stared at him, his eyes sparking. “I think you know what I will do to your *friend* should you refuse to comply. Now, Witch Master, here is what you will do.

Yes, you will go to the gathering of the community, and you will tell them some fancy, made-up story about sharing your joy in the marriage. You will give a

toast, and they will go home smiling."

No sound. No sight. Blaine. The witch had Blaine. The thunder crashed louder and closer.

Karonoff looked up, but then returned his gaze to Killian. "When this is complete, I will release your little human friend. But believe me, he will be watched until he ends his miserable, degenerate existence on this earth, and he will live that existence at my sufferance and without you. You will be a model husband and upstanding member of the community"—he pointed at Lavender —"with my daughter on your arm." The windows rattled like machine guns. Control? He didn't give a shit about control. The bastard had Blaine.

Karonoff pointed at Jimmy and raised his voice. "As for you, I don't care what happens. Cross me, and I will see to it that you and your family suffer far worse than you have to this day."

Cross him? Cross *him?* Was the man deaf and blind? Did he not understand what was happening? Did he not see that the world could end in fire? Killian would not care.

Time to understand who he was dealing with. Flames licked at Killian's eyes. The rumble of Al's growl became a roar filling his ears. The chandelier swayed like a palm The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

in a hurricane, and crystals crashed like cymbals. Power raced up his throat and out his mouth. "*Stop*!" The walls shook. He felt Aloysius's claws digging into his shoulder as the great familiar screamed his anger, the blue eyes flaming like hell fire. "Return him to me *now*!"

Karonoff's eyes widened, but he shook his head. "Never." The old witch raised a hand to cast. Killian hesitated. The particle of sanity he had left didn't want to hurt Lavender by harming her father. Suddenly a blaze of light streaked past him, and the old man fell back against the wall behind him. Killian glanced and saw Jimmy staring at his own hand.

Lavender screamed, "Good job, Jimmy!"

Karonoff recovered instantly, his eyes narrowed. “How dare you, crossbreed!” White light hurled from his hand. Lavender threw up an energy block, and it fell, harmless.

“Daughter, you will pay for this.”

Killian glanced at the council members. His mother had inched her way to the back wall. The others seemed scattered, trying to decide which horse to back. *Pay attention, you conniving assholes. Look what you created!*

Karonoff raised a hand again, mumbling an incantation. The bastard had Blaine.

What if he’d hurt him? Wind blew like a gale through the room.

Karonoff stared at Killian. Blue fire leaped from his hands.

Heat seared up Killian’s spine and reached for the sun. Who was he? He didn’t know. He didn’t care! *Crash*. Lightning pierced the window and struck the table in front of Karonoff, splitting it.

Killian’s hands blazed. The scream poured from his mouth. “I. Said. *Stop*!” Karonoff turned white and his eyes bugged, but still he raised a hand to cast another spell.

“Meeeerrrwaoooowww.” Aloysius’s shriek shattered a window behind the council table. The council people jumped. Mimi huddled by Robert, and Shah seemed close to slipping under the part of the table still standing. Every hair stood straight out on the cat’s body, and his mouth gaped over gleaming fangs. The floor shook like an earthquake.

Light. Made of light. His body expanded until he filled the room. Killian walked toward the table. “Return Blaine to me *now*.” He flicked a finger, and lightning crashed outside the broken window. “Bring him here within three minutes. If you do not, I will kill one of you for every minute he is late. Do you understand?”

“How can you say such a thing to your mother?” Evangeline gasped and backed

toward the door.

Robert spread his hands pleadingly. “We are innocent. Surely you would not harm us?”

Crash. Lightning hit the table, leaving a pillar of smoke and shattered wood.

“None of you are innocent. You have been aiding *him* in the destruction of witchery for countless years.” He turned to the old Master. “I am counting!’

Karonoff sneered. “If you kill me, you will never find him!”

“Do you believe that, little man? I am the Witch Master. Bring him now, or you die first!”

Evangeline pulled at the door only to find it locked. “Dear gods, Nicholas, do it now!”

The old Master stared. Ice filled Killian’s veins. He would do it. Whoever it was who stood here now would do it.

Ruthlessness must know itself, because Killian saw a switch click in Karonoff’s eyes, and suddenly they were filled with fear. He pulled out his phone, hit a button, and started talking.

“You have two minutes.”

“For gods’ sakes, hurry!” Mimi looked like she would faint.

The old Master ended the call. “They can’t get here that fast.” Killian walked up to the witch. “If they don’t, you die.” Karonoff’s eyes widened as he was finally convinced. He clicked on the phone again and spoke in Russian. Killian couldn’t hear the words over the rushing of the wind in his head.

A CLOCK TICKED in Lavender’s head. For nearly a full minute, no one moved.

Powers, talk about terrifying. Killian was transformed. His very skin glowed with power, like Al's eyes. He stared at her father, who tried to hold his gaze and failed.

Mimi had begun to cry, and Evangeline was comforting her. Maybe she didn't believe the Witch Master would kill his own mother. Lavender had her doubts. He was no one's dutiful son right now.

A knock sounded. Killian looked at the door, and it opened. Two men, one tall and blond and the other young and fresh-faced, half dragged another man between them. That had to be Killian's lover, Blaine.

Jimmy pulled away from her side. "Professor! Let him go, you assholes." He ran over and delivered one very unwitchlike punch to the large blond, who slumped to the floor. *Go, Jimmy!* The other thug was obviously confused about who was in charge of this half-destroyed madhouse. He looked at her father, dropped Blaine's arm, and started backing up. Jimmy grabbed the professor.

Holy shit. From the corner of her eye, she saw her father rally. *No!* In the commotion, he gathered power that shone from his hands like fire. Killian didn't even turn from looking at his beloved. He raised a hand, and lightning struck her father full in the chest. He fell to the ground, smoke rising from his prostrate body. Her heart wrenched. He was despicable, but he was her father.

Killian turned and looked at her, his blue eyes glowing. "He's still alive." 188

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The Witch Master walked across the room to where Jimmy supported the physics professor. The man's face looked bruised, and he had a split lip. Killian touched the lip gently with a finger. "Are you all right?"

Amazingly, the lovely human smiled. "I am now. They just roughed me up a little.

Nothing permanent."

"They were trying to get me to go through with the wedding to Lavender. I'm deeply sorry to have involved you in the politics of my community." The man looked around at the wreckage of the room. "This gives a whole new meaning to

arranged marriage."

Killian sort of half smiled. She could see the glow of his skin fading, and the fire in his eyes seemed damped. Still, what must the human think? Killian nodded at Jimmy.

"Jimmy, can I ask you to take Blaine to the hospital and have his injuries checked?" He touched the human's cheek again and looked at him with such love, it made her heart ache. "I have to speak to my community, or I would take you myself." He handed Jimmy his keys. She thought he looked sad. "Take my car. Take Blaine wherever he wants to go, and you come back to my mother's house." Blaine actually laughed. "Wow. If you'll loan your car, I must look pretty bad." After his incredible power, Killian somehow seemed ancient and broken. "No.

You look beautiful. May I call you later to check on you? I am truly sorry to have involved you."

Blaine reached up and stroked Aloysius. "Hi, buddy. You're some amazing cat." He looked at Killian. "Why would they take me? What leverage did that give them?" Killian shook his head. "Karonoff knew I would do anything to protect you." Jimmy laughed. "Yeah, he just didn't know what 'anything' meant." Blaine looked like he wanted to speak, but Killian tapped the keys in Jimmy's hand. "Be careful…with Blaine." Jimmy led the man out of the room as Killian watched.

Then he turned back to the council, three of whom sat huddled together at the table.

Shah Mugal had managed to revive her father and was kneeling beside him.

"Mother—you, at least, I expect to attend the meeting of the community. The rest of you may do as you wish. Do not ever question what I love again." He swept out of the room, and she followed him. Holy Powers. What a day.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Killian sipped some champagne and watched the group of witches interacting tentatively. Some of the more bigoted had left in a huff right after his announcement, but most had stayed. Yes, his food and drink attracted a lot of the community. But some were trying to get to know the mixed-race witches that he had also invited. He could see the so-called “pure” witches attempting to politely learn just how powerful the mixed witches were. Especially since they’d found out Killian was only half-witch.

Powers, that was a shock. But he loved the idea. That must be why he had always liked humans so much. He suspected more than a few of the community had already known about the mixed-race witches. One couple admitted to him that they had stayed in touch with their relative who had married a human.

“Killian.”

He shook his head. “Not sure I want to talk to you, Mother.” She stood beside him, holding a glass of her favorite red wine. “I would have told you someday.”

“After you had ruined my life? And Lavender’s?” Of course his own was already shit.

“I’m sorry. I thought I was protecting you and all of us.” He turned on her. “Did you? Really?”

She gazed at him. So much power in that little package. “Would you have killed me, really?”

He knew his smile was grim. “I guess neither of us will ever know for sure.” She turned a little paler, shook her head, and walked away.

He sighed. Somehow they’d go on. Maybe find a way to like each other. Maybe.

For now, it was time for the big announcement, and then he could go home and hide himself forever. His body hurt, and his heart felt like a gaping hole. He had never truly realized what it meant to be the Witch Master until today. Horrifying, that much power.

Would he have killed his own mother?

“You’re thinking too hard.”

He smiled at the pretty witch who had stood by his side through it all, defying her father. “Sure would have been easier if I had just loved you.”

“And I had just loved you.” She laughed. “But then I wouldn’t have loved Jimmy, and you wouldn’t have loved Blaine, and the community would still be living in gross ignorance and—” She must have seen it on his face. The pain. “Killian, what’s wrong?” What to say? “Nothing. I’m so happy for you and Jimmy. We need to get on with the big announcement.”

She frowned. “Jimmy’s not back yet. But it’s you I’m worried about. Why do you look like I just killed your cat? Actually, where is Aloysius? He was pretty damned amazing today. Hell hath no fury and all that.”

“Last I saw, he was hanging out by the front door.”

“Being inscrutable?” She touched his arm. “So what’s wrong?” He looked toward the windows and the sky. The sky from which lightning came.

“Do you think I would have done it?”

“Killed five people if they didn’t bring you Blaine?” He nodded.

“I believed it at the time, and more importantly, so did the council. They were scared witless. Even my father.”

“I don’t want to have that kind of power.”

She looked at him quietly. “Maybe you don’t.”

“What?”

“Maybe you don’t have that kind of power. Consider. You had me, Jimmy, and most importantly, Aloysius, magnifying your spells. That’s not a juxtaposition that is likely to happen again. Above all, Killian, you were protecting Blaine. Spells are one thing, but love exceeds it all.”

Dear gods, that was true. All his life he had said power was no substitute for love, without realizing that love was the greatest power. He shoved at the tears pushing behind his eyes.

She touched him again. “Killian?”

“I’m sorry. I really am a wuss at heart.”

“I’ll bet Blaine loves you that way.”

“Blaine doesn’t love me at all. He thinks I’m mad. And now that he’s been a pawn in World War Witch, he’s not likely to ever reconsider.”

“It didn’t seem that way—”

Jimmy came up behind Lavender and kissed her cheek. “Hi, sweetheart.” She turned. Powers, she was so radiant, looking at her lover. Killian’s heart swelled in gratitude to the universe for granting them such a love. “Looks like it’s time for our big announcement.”

She beamed. “Announce away.”

Jimmy took his arm. “Killian—”

“No backing out now, kid.” Killian turned to the assembled group. “Members of the community of witches, both old and new, may I have your attention?” People turned, stopping conversations, but still munching and sipping. “Many of you know that you were promised a wedding. Although Lavender and I will not be wed, I am happy to say that you will still have this great occasion. It is not only a union of love; it also represents the uniting of witches. On Saturday, my dear friend Lavender will marry Jimmy Janx, the son of Vern and Rita Janx, a witch

and a human. Jimmy is a brave and powerful witch. Without his help, this bringing together of the community The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

would have been impossible." Vern and Rita glowed with pride. Killian raised his glass.

"I give you Lavender and Jimmy, soon to be Mr. and Mrs. James and Lavender Janx." Everyone raised a glass. "Cheers."

"Good wishes."

"Shouldn't you be getting married too?"

What the…? The voice came from behind him. He turned and looked at the entry to the living room, into that most-loved face. The face that had launched the Witch Master. Blaine walked into the room with Aloysius on his shoulder. Killian shook his head. "I don't think so… Uh, I don't know? Should I?" Blaine walked around the couch to where Killian stood. Lavender scooted aside to make room for him. "Of course. Since you are uniting witches and humans here, shouldn't you show your support by marrying a human? I happen to be one, and I even have a ring."

"But I'm a witch."

"Yes."

Sweet gods, Blaine believed him. "But you don't want to marry a witch."

"I want to marry you."

"But the spell?"

"Fuck the spell." He looked around at the gathered witches. "Please excuse me." The green eyes came back to him. "I don't care about spells; I care about you. Marry me."

Love was the greatest power. Greater than any spell.

The room stilled. Killian bet they could hear his heart beating. He took a deep breath.

A little voice rose. One of the mixed-race witch children said, “Oh, c’mon, Witch Master. Say yes.”

Laughter erupted everywhere. He felt his own chest shaking, and Blaine reached up and wiped the wet from his cheeks. *Oh, blessed gods, don’t take this away. Make it be true*. He smiled. “Are you sure? I really am a witch, you know.” Blaine laughed. “Hell, yes, I know. Even I couldn’t explain away today’s demonstration. But I’ll share with you my theories about the relationship of the quantum reality to witchcraft…”

Jimmy laughed. “Hey, I want to hear that. But first, don’t you have to get a reply?” Blaine’s face softened. Al purred so loudly, the children nearby laughed. “Marry me, Killian. I love you. We’ll work out the details.”

“Yes, oh gods, yes. I love you so much.”

Lavender raised a glass. “Friends, on Saturday you are also invited to the wedding of Killian Barth, Witch Master, and Blaine Genneau, professor of quantum physics.

Human.”

Chapter Twenty-Six

He’d outdone himself. Killian smiled as he peeked into the room where the wedding would soon take place. In all his long, lonely life, the big formal living room had never looked this beautiful. The canopy required by the ritual of their witches’ faith sparkled with true images of clouds and stars. Brilliant red and pink roses lined the pathway to the canopy, and their scent filled the room.

Candles gleamed on every surface and never burned shorter, because the magical flames burned cool.

He loved the venue, but he was most delighted by the guests. Pure witches and half- and quarter-humans mixed throughout the room. The mixing wasn't completely intentional. It was tough to tell who was who. The pure witches could sense power and so accepted the person next to them as a witch. Yes, but maybe only a bit of a witch.

Behind him, Killian knew the dining room looked equally beautiful. Crystal and silver gleamed. A few little witches had already explored some of the cakes and candies on the side table, so he had repaired a handprint or two. He thought the circling doves—poopless, of course—were a nice touch. This was the kind of power he enjoyed.

Not raining down fire and bringing the lightning. He shuddered.

An arm slipped through his. "Hi, my friend."

Lavender looked gorgeous. "Love the dress." The gown swept the floor, its glorious, deep purple color reflecting off the diamond circlet Lavender wore on her forehead to hold her veil in place.

She beamed. "You look pretty gorgeous yourself." He had chosen white. A plain white tuxedo with the soft glow of silk. It was a human gesture, but he thought it appropriate somehow. To many humans, white signified purity. He certainly wasn't pure. But his love was. His soul was a virgin, and he felt brand-new. He brushed his 196

mane of hair off his shoulders. It was just a few shades darker than the gleam of the tux.

He hoped a certain professor would like it.

She looked around at people still rushing in to find a seat in the big room. "Let's step back, so no one sees us before we enter."

He pulled her into an alcove off the entry that held the telephone—a relic of pre-

cell-phone days. “How are you?”

“Ecstatic, thank you. And thanks to you.”

He shook his head. “Hardly. Today is as much your doing as mine.”

“We’ll accept the blame together.” She laughed.

“How’s your father?”

“Don’t worry. He’s going to recover nicely. More or less.” She grinned.

“What does that mean?”

“Nothing to worry about at all. I’ll tell you all the details later.”

“So you get to marry the man you love.”

“Yes. And so do you.”

Gods, his heart wouldn’t stay in his chest. “Yes.” He knew his smile was as big as a searchlight. Music started playing. Chopin. He loved Chopin. He looked at her. “Are you ready?”

“Oh yes. So ready.”

He slipped her arm through his and walked her out into the entry. The music swelled. Two young witches scampered through the arch into the living room, grinning at them like loons. He took the few steps to the archway, feeling the rustle of Lavender’s gown against his leg.

The music changed and blossomed. He loved that part of the human tradition.

Faces turned toward them. He smiled at those he knew and many he didn’t. His gaze traveled forward. Jimmy’s friend Sammy and his family. Shah Mugal. Good. Glad he The Aloysius Tales: Spell Cat

was there. His wife was very pretty. Jimmy’s parents and precocious little sister. There was Evangeline. His mother. Maybe there was a chance for them to be

friends, and—

Oh my God. His heart. His gaze stopped traveling, and he stared.

He started walking down the long green path. But his feet didn't feel the ground.

Maybe there were three hundred people here. Maybe none. Because to him, there was only Blaine. The amazing, smart, free, beautiful physics professor stood under the canopy, to one side of the presiding witch. He wore a black tuxedo that somehow managed to look casual and comfortable on him. It was so inky, Killian almost didn't see that the collar on the tux was made of fur with crossed blue eyes. Aloysius wouldn't be left out.

Blaine's mouth opened just a little, and his eyes widened when he saw Killian. The black glasses outlined those eyes that glistened with tears. Did he like what he saw? Oh yes, it looked like he did.

Two steps toward a life of happiness. Two steps toward joy. Two steps toward companionship and the end of loneliness. A final step toward the moment of his dreams. He placed Lavender's hand into Jimmy's. "Take good care of her, young witch."

The young witch in question wore his blazing smile as he wiped at tears streaming down his face. He leaned down to Lavender. "Oh my gods, I didn't know anyone could be so beautiful." He walked her under the canopy.

And then the moment came. Blaine stepped down from the small platform and took Killian's hand. "I love you, Killian."

No words were big enough. The feeling of Blaine's hand in his consumed all other thought. He just nodded, and together they stepped under the canopy of stars.

The words flowed over him. Eternity, truth, love, light. A commitment beyond time and the grave. All were real because Blaine held his hand.

The presiding witch held up a flame. "Forever bound in the purity of love. United in the eternal circle." The four of them held out the rings, and the presiding witch 198

passed the cool flame through each opening. Jimmy placed the ring on Lavender's finger, and she on his.

His hands were shaking. He looked down at the ring he had manifested for the occasion. He'd wanted to go out and buy it, but he and Blaine had been together every minute since the party, getting the license, filling out the forms. No alone time. So he and Aloysius had slipped out of bed last night, sat on the rug, and created the ring together. A circlet of diamonds, each casted perfectly, but only a shadow of the perfection of the hand that would wear them.

As the flame passed out of the circlet, he turned Blaine's hand and slipped the ring onto the tip of his finger. Killian looked up. The green eyes met his. Tears glistened above a huge smile.

Blaine whispered, "I feel like I've been waiting forever." Killian slid the ring home. "I *have* been waiting forever." Blaine held the antique ring he'd bought. "I have a ring. Will you wear it, my love?"

Killian held out his hand. The ring went on. Click. The great puzzle of the universe fell into place.

"By the powers vested in me by the state of New York and the gods of our ancestors, I pronounce you forever wed. You may kiss." Blaine's lips touched Killian's as the music swelled in the background. The only thing louder was the purr coming from Blaine's shoulder.

* * * *

Killian snuggled closer to Blaine under the covers and held up his left hand in the soft light coming in the window. Beautiful.

"Admiring your finery, Dr. Barth-Genneau?"

"Yes. Always." He looked up into that handsome face. "It was a perfect day."

Blaine laughed. “It was pretty great, even if I never expected to be married in front of three hundred witches in a ceremony invoking the Powers of the Universe.” He must have looked worried, because Blaine touched his nose. “I loved it, darling. I always thought I understood what was going on in the world. Now I know nothing made any sense until you came into my life with your spells and your crazy cat.”

“Merwaowr.”

“Yes, crazy cat, I mean you.” Blaine reached up to the highest pillow and chucked Aloysius under the chin. “He sure is one powerful cat.”

“Familiar, not cat, remember?”

“Whatever, he’s powerful.”

“Mmmm.”

Gods, he loved these quiet moments. Comfortable, easy. Blaine took a breath.

Then let it out.

“What, darling?”

“I just wondered if you thought the Russian would try again.” He smiled against Blaine’s neck. “No. I just heard from Lavender after the wedding today. Apparently the spell I cast depleted Karonoff’s power. I didn’t intend it. Actually, I didn’t really intend any of it. But she says he has no more power than a human.” He glanced up. “No offense, darling.”

“None taken. Man, that sure is poetic justice about Karonoff.”

“Yes. He gets to live as the very beings he hated. Plus, Lavender told him she will not hesitate to tell the head of the Russian crime family that Karonoff is a witch. That sealed the deal. I don’t think we have much more to fear from him.”

“Good, because I’m going to be busy.”

“Oh? Doing what?”

“Being irresistible. That’s what I hear. We humans are so irresistible, you witches can’t stay away from us.”

“You don’t think my spell had anything to do with it?” Blaine rose up so he could look at Killian. The soft light made his green eyes gleam. “Baby, I loved you the first time I saw you, and it’s been growing ever since. I know that as well as I can spell cat.”

“Just one question.”

“Yes, Witch Master?”

“Are you ever going to shut up and kiss me?”

Blaine leaned down and closed his mouth over Killian’s. Dear gods, the sweetness, like honey and vanilla in his mouth. That soft tongue pressed deeper. In an instant, his mellow comfort turned to fire flaming through every cell. He pulled back. “Fuck me, my love. Please.”

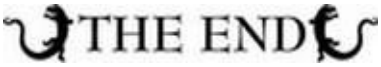
“Oh yeah.” Blaine scrambled toward the side table where the lube was kept.

“Wait.”

Blaine looked at him. Killian flicked a finger, and soft lube coated his hands. He reached out and began stroking it on Blaine’s already hard cock. “I put some in my ass too. See, it’s nice to have a witch around the house.” Blaine’s hips pushed up into Killian’s palms. “Oh yes, baby. Pull up those legs; I’m coming in.” He scrambled to his knees while Killian pulled back on his thighs, exposing his throbbing hole. Blaine fitted the beautiful mushroom head to that waiting orifice and pushed. Oh gods. Like silk on silk. Thunder rumbled through the sky. Blaine pushed harder until he was balls-deep.

“Oh gods, fuck me. Don’t ever stop.”

The beautiful human pushed in and pulled out as joy and ecstasy filled Killian’s body and soul. *Rumble. Rumble. Crash*. Lightning lit the sky.



Blaine’s hips pumped, and his head fell back as he laughed and laughed. “Play it, my darling.” *Crash*. “Play Killian’s symphony.” ABOVE THEM ON the pillows, Aloysius purred. He looked out at the night sky through crossed blue eyes, anticipating his next adventure.

Tara Lain

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Tara Lain never met a beautiful boy she didn't love—at least on paper. A writer of erotic romance, mostly ménage and male/male, Tara loves all her characters, but especially her handsome heroes. A lifelong writer of serious non-fiction, Tara only fell in love with EROM in 2009 and, through perseverance and lots of workshops, had the first novel she ever wrote accepted for publication in 2010. She's now on book six. After an exotic life of travel all over the world and work in television, education, and advertising, Tara settled in Southern California with her soul-mate husband and opened her own small marketing business. She paints, collages, and started practicing yoga "way before it was fashionable." Passionate about diversity, justice, inclusion, and new ideas, she says on her tombstone it will read, "Yes." Main Web site: http://www.taralain.com

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