

“And what sort of witch are *you* supposed to be?”

You can’t help but smirk at her. She’s done up as a traditional witch; she’s got the pointed hat, the dark cloak, even a broom. But she’s young and spunky, barely into her twenties, with red frizzy hair and a spray of freckles. A far cry from the warty, green-skinned hag you were expecting when you learned a witch had taken occupancy in the woods.

She lifts her chin. “One who can still do plenty of magic, so watch your tongue! I may be new, but don’t look down on me!”

You absolutely guffaw. ““Don’t look down on me!”” you mock. “Kind of hard when you’re so pint-sized!”

She glowers at you, but it’s true. She doesn’t even cross five feet without her hat to help.

“I’m warning you,” she says darkly. Snorting, you push past her into her hut, ignoring her protests.

It’s a cramped room crammed with too much stuff. A hammock dangling in the corner in lieu of a bed, hasty shelves stacked haphazardly with moldering books and cloudy vials of mystery fluid. A cauldron in the middle with what looks like brown slop bubbling pathetically, though there’s not a fire to be seen.

“You can’t just barge in!” she exclaims.

“You’re a witch, you’re lucky I don’t report you to the authorities,” you sass back. She starts, suddenly and visibly concerned. “Though there’s not much to report. One sad sack of a cauldron, some dusty old tomes... heh, where’s your cat? Or a toad? Raven?”

“Don’t have one,” she mutters. You boggle.

“Don’t have—*HAH!* A witch without a familiar!” You cackle at her, taking delight in appropriating a laugh her kind normally claims ownership of. “You must be the saddest—” And here she flinches as if at the crack of a whip. “Meekest—” Another flinch. “Weakest—” And again! “Most pathetic magic-user this village has ever seen. Witch? You’re barely even an apothecarist.” Snorting, you push past her to leave the hut, but she defiantly steps in your way, holding her broom.

“Apologize!” she declares, her cheeks a ruddy red.

“Didn’t say anything untrue, did I?”

“I said *apologize!*” Her voice is shrill.

“Oh yeah?” you mock. “What’ll you do? Cast a spell on me? With what powers?”

She glares daggers at you and then suddenly points the haft of her broom, declaring in a harsh tongue: “*Cuidich leam an t-amadan seo a chuir nan àite!*”

The room suddenly darkens and there’s a strange sense of pressure against your skin. Your heart skips, mirth replaced with panic. She wouldn’t... would she?

“What did you—*aahhh!*” Your voice dies as suddenly your body dances with a thousand pinpricks. The young witch looks shocked and then delighted.

“I did it,” she mutters before exclaiming exuberantly: “*I DID IT!*”

“Nnngh, wh-what...?” you stammer out. Your flesh dances with the tingly pinprick feeling and it seeps lower, into your very bones. “What are youuuuuooooowwwwwllll?!”

Your words suddenly stretch into a high, shrill shriek as your voice changes. The tingles set into your mouth and you feel your teeth changing; your incisors lengthen, becoming long and narrow and hooked, while your other teeth shrink in prominence, growing uniformly sharp. You rub your tongue against the roof of your mouth in fear and are astonished to feel it grow rough, sandy barbs. Your eyes widen; from the corner of your vision you see long hairs sprouting from your upper lip and down from your brows. They’re overly sensitive and give you a sudden awareness of the air currents in the witch’s hut.

“A—a cat?!” you exclaim.

“Well, you mocked me for lacking a familiar,” she says acidly. “So I thought I’d claim one!”

You yowl again in response, speech denied you, as the rest of your body starts changing.

The prickly sensation manifests as a sudden spray of coal-black fur. It grows everywhere: on your arms, legs, chin, ears. A popping sensation at the base of your spine heralds a long, thrashing tail. As black tummy-fur claims your torso, a series of sensitive nibs emerge as feline teats manifest on your body.

Your wrists pop, and your ankles too, as your hands and feet change to digitigrade forms. You fall over onto all fours to the witch’s satisfied laugh, catching yourself on your newly-manifested toe beans. Your nails narrow into wicked claws that shrink into your digits.

And they’re not the only thing that shrinks—*all* of you is getting smaller! To fulfill your new role as a witch’s familiar, your body quickly diminishes in size. You spy the witch’s eager face before you’re swallowed by the tent of your clothing. Yowling and scrambling, you fight to escape the fabric even as you get smaller and smaller, shrinking with every moment. You can’t see the changes in your face, but you can *feel* them—your nose flattening into something wet and shiny at the tip of a whispered snout; your ears migrating up to the top of your head, taking on a point. Your vision shifts, letting you see better in the dark, and you finally squirm out of your old clothes.

By the time your paws hit the floor, you're completely transformed—no longer a person, but a perfect, pristine black cat.

The witch's hut seems much larger now, and you hiss as she scoops you up in her arms. "Oh, what a pretty kitty you are!" she exclaims. "Pitch black like the night in the witching hour. You're going to be a *perfect* familiar."

Your heart hammers. She's not serious about this 'familiar' business, is she? She surely won't keep you this way!

The thoughts don't leave your head—how can they? Cats don't talk—but she picks up on them regardless.

"Oh yes," she says, smiling playfully, "I told you to apologize and you didn't. Gave you every chance. So now you're going to see how hard a witch's life can be, firsthand! And in fact..."

She waves her hand and a sudden, simple collar—little more than a knotted leather cord—manifests from nothing around your neck. You become aware of something else, too, that's connected with the collar; an invisible tether keeping you connected with your new owner. You are suddenly aware of where she is and will *always* be aware of where she is, whether she's in the same room as you or two towns away; and you're certain it goes two ways. She'll always know where you are.

“Just so that you don’t get any ideas about flying the coop,” she says in a singsong voice. “Not that you can fly—unless you’re at the end of my broom, that is!” She snuggles you close, squealing with delight, and you try to squirm free. Your claws refuse to come out; another part of the spell, probably. You won’t ever be able to hurt or disobey her.

“Oh poo,” she says, “you never even gave me your name. Well, no matter! The person you *used* to be doesn’t really matter anymore since you’re not a person anymore! Now you’re Kitty. Okay, Kitty?”

You meow in sullen acknowledgement. Magic swirls around you. She may not have had a familiar, but she was a real witch... and you should have paid her more respect.

And you’ll nine whole lives to reflect on that mistake.