

Kelsey Rutherford's best friend rented a house in the suburbs. She could have afforded a large, luxurious apartment in the city, but though she'd inherited a small fortune, Robin refused to spend it frivolously.

She did everything for one reason. She shared an apartment with Kelsey after they graduated college and though Kelsey insisted they split the rent, Robin still picked out a large studio two bedroom. She still paid for part of it, but Robin footed most of the bill, which she insisted was fair because she used most of the space for storage. When Kelsey moved out to be with her boyfriend, Robin could have afforded the rent by herself, but she instead took the opportunity move out of the crowded, noisy city instead.

Kelsey knew the only reason she chose the apartment's location had been to benefit her, being only a few minutes from the hospital where she worked. Robin gave plenty of excuses for why the place was perfect for both of them, but she could have worked out of a cave and it wouldn't have mattered. Robin's fame ensured her success.

Very few people chose to study witch magic in particular. The rule of thumb said if you were researching the practice of magic, then you were a nut looking to hit up a demon for magic. Kelsey believed Robin to be plenty dangerous without a personal compliment of magic charms.

Spirits and demons tried to cut a deal with Robin, but she usually laughed in their faces and then kicked them out. Being her friend could be scary, but Kelsey still found herself rushing to Robin's side after all these years.

Robin's house looked unassuming. The plain white siding and slate gray roof matched the style of the rest of the sunny neighborhood's buildings. The uncut lawn looked a mess next to the meticulously trimmed grass on either side of the property. Robin cared very little for yard work. A single plant placed to the right of the sidewalk just in front of the living room window seemed healthy, though Kelsey could not say for certain. The palm tree-like plant had remained as tall as her since Robin acquired it several years ago. Its dark purple trunk possessed a rubbery texture and its broad leaves were dark red as always. Its leaves rattled softly in greeting as Kelsey passed.

Kelsey paused at the doorstep to check her outfit over, evening out her sleeves. She pressed the doorbell, the harsh electronic buzz didn't sound. Robin hated the distinct sound of the buzzer and hadn't fixed it since it mysteriously exploded one night. Kelsey knocked on the door. She waited a moment, and then knocked harder when her friend didn't appear.

"Hello? Robin, it's Kelsey!"

Her fist rapped against the wood and she called out again to no avail. Grabbing the doorknob, she turned it and it opened. Since Robin was expecting her, she let herself in.

She entered the dark hallway, closing the door behind her. She sighed, grateful to be out of the hot sun. The living room or library as Robin preferred to call it stood to her right, sunlight streamed in through the front window, casting a bright triangle on the tricolor carpet. The dining room on her opposite side held no table; instead piles of boxes lined its corners. Anything their owner hadn't cared to dig out after she moved or that she forgot about seemed to wind up sitting abandoned in one of those boxes. In front of her was the hall leading to the kitchen and a staircase leading upstairs.

"Robin! Where are you? I'm starving and could really use some lunch!" Kelsey shouted. Robin tended to lose track of time and ignored any schedules that weren't her own. Some experiment had probably absorbed her attention and caused her to forget about their plans for the evening.

*Thunk!*

Kelsey glanced up the stairs. Another wooden thud followed the first. She started up the steps, grumbling as she went. "You better be ready to go. I don't want to wait for you to put your face on."

The footsteps sounded like they'd moved into the master bedroom. The dark stained door was slightly ajar and Kelsey could hear the sounds of movement inside. Years of waking up her oversleeping roommate overtook common courtesy as she pushed into the room. Robin's voice squeaked, sounding usually high pitch. "Wait! I'm not decent!"

Robin sat on her queen size bed; she had finished slipping one bra strap onto her shoulder, the other still hung loose at her side. She wore a matching pair of green panties, but was otherwise naked save for patches of light yellow fur. Kelsey forgot to be embarrassed for a moment and gaped at the very real fur growing out of her friend's arm. Silvery whiskers stretched out from Robin's face. A shorthaired feline tail stretched out on the bed behind her.

Kelsey glanced away, heat coloring her face. She tilted her head to the side a moment later to peek at the patches of fur on Robin's forearm. Pieces of hair fell away, vanishing in the dull light of the room and leaving behind pale human skin. Robin's tail zipped back up into her spine.

Slipping fully into her bra, Robin idly ran a hand through her shoulder length red hair. "Not much sense looking away now, Rutherford."

"Y-y-you had a tail," Kelsey stammered, shielding her eyes with the back of her hand.

"Yeah," her friend replied as casually as if discussing a new outfit. She picked up a t-shirt off the bed and slipped it on. "Professor Rowling from the university asked me to take a look at some stuff from her latest find."

After slipping into a pair of tight blue jeans, Robin walked over and swatted her friend's hand down. Kelsey looked at her, thankful she had decided to get dressed before launching into her explanation.

"Look!" she reached down her shirt. Kelsey noticing a thin leather band hanging from her neck, Robin pulled out the pendant attached to the end of the necklace and presented it to her.

She held the small silver medallion as Robin scooped her hair back and put it up into her trademark ponytail. A stylized cat emblazoned on the pendant curled around the smooth green gem in the center. A smaller jewel formed the cat's eye. It looked like a perfectly mundane necklace and gave no sign of being a witch's tool, unlike the weird hissing plant in Robin's yard.

"Yeah, that's nice, but we're late for lunch," Kelsey said, the novelty worn off already. Her stomach growled as if in agreement.

"Pfft!" Robin scoffed and grabbed the pendant out of her hands. She turned it around to stare at it. "Do you know how rare an opportunity this is? Transformation magic is soooo rare! I might never get to experience something like this again."

"How long have you been playing with that?" Kelsey asked.

"Since the mailman dropped it off this morning," she replied. "Can you believe no one could figure out how this thing worked? Ridiculous."

Kelsey disagreed. A witch's charm required the user to perform very specific actions or say a specific word, usually a combination of the two. That Robin had somehow worked it out in less than twenty-four hours would have been amazing, but she always had been talented at figuring out magical artifacts. She'd never made a contract with a demon or spirit and thus didn't have a witch's supernatural instinct, but still figured out wands and potions with just hours of observation. She hired her talents out to professors, archaeologists, and law enforcement at whatever price she deemed fair. She sometimes worked for free when a job interested her enough.

She continued giddily turning the pendant over in her hands, stopping to look at its surface with a smile. She looked up at Kelsey expectantly.

"All right," she sighed, knowing what Robin expected of her. "How does it work?"

Getting her out the door would be impossible now, Robin loved showing off and especially enjoyed treating Kelsey as 'her lab assistant'. She beamed happily at the question, completely missing the lack of enthusiasm behind it.

"Well, you know how most demons and such are fond of incantations? Gestures are also common, too," she said, repeating words Kelsey had heard thousands of times. "Discovering these without the original witch's notes is a pain, but this charm seems to work off some really simple conditions."

"Quit your babbling and show me then," Kelsey said, impatient, but also infected by Robin's childish eagerness though she didn't care to admit it.

Her grin grew wider as she held the silver circle in front of her lips. She exhaled a soft gust of breath over the charm. Kelsey watched intently as the pendant spiraled on its string. The gemstone glinted as it spun in the shuddered sunlight.

Robin's nose melted into her face first, stretching out into a cat's pink flat nose. Long silver whiskers grew out of her cheeks and her eyebrows. Light tan fur sprouted across her face, covering her fair skin. Her headful of red hair turned light yellow to match the coat spreading down her neck and underneath her shirt. Robin fidgeted as the new hair itched against her clothes.

Letting the pendant fall between her breasts, she stretched her arms out, palms up to show Kelsey the thickening skin there. Her nails grew out into long white claws that retracted into her fingers as fur engulfed her hands. Her legs twitched as fur bristled against the insides of her pants. Her toes underwent a similar transformation to her hands, nails curving out into sharp claws that afterwards slid into her fluffy feet.

A tail shot out behind Robin, its fur the same color as the rest of her body. Kelsey wondered how the appendage had shot out through the back of her pants, but waited to ask as Robin closed her eyes.

Her nose and mouth bulged out into a short rectangular muzzle. She opened her mouth, flashing sharp feline fangs and a rough tongue at her guest. Folds of skin grew from the sides of her head, Kelsey realized her ears were transforming and shifting to the top of Robin's head. Her friend blinked, her brown eyes turning huge and orange while her pupils narrowed into slits.

"Wow, that's freaky."

"But cool, too, right?" Robin exclaimed, her ears standing straight up and her tail whipping back and forth excitedly. Her extra appendage slammed against the bedpost, causing her to flinch in pain. She ducked her head; ears turned down shyly as she reached back and steadied her limb. "Still haven't figured everything out."

Her voice had risen in pitch, but was otherwise identifiable as her own. Kelsey noticed her balancing on the balls of her feet and then resting them flat against the floor with nervous energy. "You okay?"

"Yeah," she nodded breathlessly. "I just really want to run around and... and chase something, you know?"

Kelsey stared at her friend in alarm. "This isn't one of those mind-altering charms, is it? Maybe you should turn it off."

"Oh, no! You're right, I'm being compelled by its evil magic to chase mice and play with string!" she waved her hands around melodramatically. "Help me, Kelsey! Without you, I'll have no choice, but to eat kibble for the rest of my life."

She fell silent when Kelsey only glared in reply. "Judging from the bite of your sarcasm, you seem to be fine."

"Yeah, it's weird. I meant what I said about running around, but I'm well aware of the charm and its effects."

"So it's not supposed to turn the wearer into a witch's willing cat girl slave?" Kelsey queried.

Robin gave her a pointed stare. "You've obviously never owned a cat. They'd make the worst evil servants. You'd have to bribe them with tuna to do anything and they'd never get up in the morning to work. You'd be better off with dogs."

"Besides I think the charm is meant for either the witch's own use or one of her followers," she added.

"But what's the point of that?" A witch's charm usually accomplished some practical effect. Lots of wands and staffs held generic fire and explosion spells. Potions contained the infamous mind altering effects and incredible healing properties. Robin owned an old gourd that turned any hot tea poured into it into a great headache remedy.

"Self-defense?" Robin suggested, flexing her fingers. Her claws sliding out of their furry sheathes. "Not for the witch herself, but maybe this charm was supposed to enhance her bodyguard? If you didn't want to trust your minion with explosive

spells, then a physical power boost might be the next best thing. Giving him a cat's carefree attitude doesn't make sense though."

"Hmm..."

"Hmm..."

"What would you do with it?" Kelsey asked.

"Oh, I wish I didn't have to send it back to the Professor," Robin admitted. "I feel so much more agile. I should test if it really does increase my physical abilities or if that's just a mental thing. It could replace coffee in my life."

"You going to use it to fight crime?" she wondered. "You could become Catwoman."

"Come on, no one becomes a superhero," Robin scoffed. "Demons don't give their powers to people that'll use them responsibly."

Kelsey decided not to point out the hypocrisy of Robin using her talents to assist in capturing witches and criminals on multiple occasions.

"Okay, so maybe they just used it as a caffeine substitute like you suggested," Kelsey suggested.

"Don't be silly," Robin chastised, her intense gaze distracted by the twitching tip of her tail. "This item clearly served some nefarious purpose."

*Whompf!*

Robin jumped at her tail, missed as it shot after her butt, bounced off the edge of her bed, and crashed to the floor.

"Clearly," Kelsey agreed, stepping forward. "You all right, Rob?"

"Fine!" she replied, rolling onto her side and craning her head up to look at her.

"So how come your tail isn't crammed into your underwear?" Kelsey asked at last.

"Oh, the spell modifies my clothing so it doesn't," she replied. "I was examining the full body effects in the bathroom mirror when I heard you clambering up the stairs."

"Sorry about that," Kelsey said, blushing.

"Why are you acting like it hasn't happened before?" she laughed, sticking her tongue out cattily. Her blush brightened, prompting another chortle from Robin. Kelsey sputtered a gibberish reply and then stalked away. Frowning, she followed her friend; pretty sure she hadn't gone too far with her teasing, but positive more would likely upset Kelsey. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, it's nothing you did," she replied over her shoulder. "Anthony and I just separated for a while last week."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Robin said distractedly as she recalled all the boyfriends Kelsey had gained and lost over the years, since she moved out. Her friend's nursing career kept her busy and she seemed to attract only the clingiest of men. At last one had accused her of spending more time with Robin than him. She found the majority of Kelsey's boyfriends quite dull and couldn't blame her for preferring to spend time with her instead.

She recalled Kelsey mentioning problems with their relationship. At least, she thought it was this relationship, they tended to blur together for her. Was this still the orthodontist or did they split up already? "Forget him, he'll come around. So where are we having lunch?"

"I was thinking the usual place."

"The usual place it is!"

Kelsey paused to look back at her, a questioning expression on her face. She seemed to be disapproving of Robin's outfit, but Martha's had no dress requirements fancier than shoes and shirt required.

Seeing her lack of comprehension, Kelsey asked. "Are you planning to wear your fur coat out?"

"Oh!" she gasped in realization, her ears tilting back in embarrassment.

Holding the pendant up to her face, she blew on it again. The yellow fur began falling out and fading into nothingness while her snout morphed back into her normal human nose and mouth. Her ears moved back to their original position and shrunk down. Sharp claws pushed out of her fingers and flattened into her short nails. Her tail shot back up into her spine as the last of her fur vanished along with her silver whiskers. The vibrant red coloration of her hair returned as her eyes shrunk to normal human size and color. Robin tucked the pendant into her shirt instead of taking it off, much to Kelsey's disappointment.

"Let me get my sneakers and we're good to go," she chirped.