



MARANTHA'S CURSE

(A sequel to Mr. Kroll)

By

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It was the night of the midsummer moon.

Sebastian Kane stood silently in the warm, mellow darkness, gazing upon the pile of burnt debris that had once been his protégé's cottage. Twenty years had passed since the young witch's murder, since she'd cursed the villagers of Devington with her dying breath.

No innocent soul could live in the once prosperous town. All the babes were stillborn. Any child who stepped foot inside the boundaries of that poisoned place suddenly fell ill with mysterious maladies.

The warlock smiled. His lovely Marantha had punished the villagers well, and rightfully so. How unfortunate it was that he must now end their suffering. That hypocrite and blackmailer – the Mayor of Devington – had given him little choice. Free the town or he would be hanged as a witch. Succeed and he would be allowed to live in exile.

Sebastian was tired of running. It did not matter if one used The Craft for good or evil; one was considered damned for practicing it regardless.

The Mayor be damned as well – along with his late wife. The first Mrs. Hartwicke had been a member of the mob that had ended Marantha’s life – even though she had not deserved a death sentence. Now the Mayor’s second wife hoped to have his child, a son.

Sebastian sighed. It was time to complete the cleansing spell. And for that, he needed blood.

Why her bones cried out to me, I did not know. But I was compelled to heed the calling, to make my way back to the sad place that had once been our home. So great was the guilt and grief I carried after that fateful night that I had wandered aimlessly for several years, refusing to seek out another mistress.

I am a familiar – a feline endowed with demonic powers and human-like perception. And I had failed my beloved Marantha. The careless actions I had taken to save my own life had led to her execution.

Whatever her restless spirit required of me now – I was willing to endure.

Sebastian had discovered Marantha’s blackened bones in the rubble. He could not let himself dwell on the pain and degradation she had suffered, or he would not be able to undo the powerful curse that vengeance had crafted.

The warlock stood over her skeleton for the third midnight in a row. He pushed back the hood of his long black robe and raised his arms to the starlit sky.

“Call to him again, child. Summon your familiar. Bring him to me this night.”

An ethereal mist spiraled above the witch’s remains, and then snaked out into the surrounding darkness.

Sebastian could feel the creature close by. He masked his own presence so as not to alarm the black cat known as Mr. Kroll, who was as old as he was, and nearly just as savvy. The warlock did not look forward to the task that awaited him. He had brought his dagger for the ritual, and a tightly woven sack to be used for the burial. Marantha’s bones needed to be splattered with the blood of her familiar. Then the two would have to be interred together at the nearest crossroads before dawn.

Sebastian watched, hidden by an oak tree, as the familiar approached the ruins of the cottage. Mr. Kroll shifted direction, making his way towards his mistress's remains. Sebastian quickly stepped into the feline's path and mesmerized him with a wave of his hand. He pulled the dagger out of the deep pocket of his robe and knelt in front of the mystical creature.

I recognized the old warlock on sight. It was futile to struggle against his magic.

“Dear friend,” he said, “you can still see into my mind, as I see into yours. Believe that you served your mistress well. Know that we have a common enemy, and that I break this spell with a heavy heart.”

Yes, I understood survival. I had lived many lives at the cost of others.

Sebastian Kane struck swiftly. I barely felt the sharp bite of the blade upon my neck. He carried me gently as I bled, and held me above Marantha's bones. My life force covered the remains, my vision faded. I knew my spirit was slipping away.

I welcomed the release.

As I floated above my body, hovering unwillingly, I heard the warlock recite an incantation in a language unknown to me.

His derisive laughter echoed across the night sky. “Your memories will live on, Mr. Kroll,” he shouted. “The demon inside you will never die.”

I seemed to escape, then, into the ether. Peace and silence were my only companions in the beginning. After a time – I know not how to measure it – I felt myself enveloped by a warmth that was oddly familiar. The soothing murmur of voices kept me company.

I wanted to stay in this safe haven forever, but one day I found myself violently thrust into another world – one that was cold, bright, and filled with anguished screams. My lungs filled with air and I used them to convey my fear and displeasure.

The voices returned, louder. I opened my eyes reluctantly – and gazed upon the face of a man I already knew.

My father. The Mayor of Devington.

THE END