

Wizard

by Cate Cavnagh

He was not surprised when it started snowing that June day. He proved himself once more. Creating snow in June. In addition, they weren't just flurries but blizzard-like snow. Now that was something. He now knew he also controlled the elements. He stood at the bus stop and leaned his head back, opening his mouth to feel the cool flakes land on his tongue. It was a stark contrast to the ninety-degree temperatures he felt against his skin. Lowering his head he thought, "Stop" and it did. He took note of peoples' reactions around him with great amusement. during the minutes of snow, the summer heat melted it as it fell on people's heads and shoulders. The chill of it made them wrap their arms around themselves then seconds after it stopped and clothes dry, they looked quizzically up at the sky where the sun still shone as brightly as before and then at each. The weatherman will certainly have something to say about this tonight, he chuckled to himself. So would Jonah if they were still speaking to each other. But, they weren't and he knew that Jonah knew he had created this. It was exactly what Jonah never wanted him to do. He never wanted him to exert his control, his power which was why Jesse stopped studying with him. What good was knowledge and power if you were too wimpy to use it? What did he care that somewhere in Pennsylvania it did not rain just because he summoned up snow in New York City for ten minutes? What harm could that be?

Jesse had always been a dabbler. He cast his first circle and spell when he was seventeen to get a passing grade on an essay test. He knew the essay was horrid but his was a mathematical mind not a literary one. What should have

been a failing essay passed and thus began his new life path.

His bus stopped and hissed as the steps lowered. He got on and slid his transportation pass through then he sat down in the first row by the window where he could see people waiting for the bus at the next stop. It was his show again and no one would ever know. The anonymity of it all was the best part. The next stop was in sight. There were three people waiting. There was a young man, in his twenties in a white jogging suit. He seemed anxious to be the first one on the bus judging from the way he seemed to be positioning himself as if trying to guess where the front door would stop. The second was an elderly lady, dressed in a white pin striped summer dress and straw hat. She held two overstuffed shopping bags and the third--well, that would be his gift to himself. The bus stopped and Jesse cupped a hand over his mouth.

As expected, the young man rushed to be first at the door. Jesse cupped his mouth and moved his lips. As the young man clipped up the steps, he suddenly fell. Embarrassment crept up his face and behind his sunglasses. His white pants were soiled at the shins and knees. Jesse smiled behind his hand. Next on was the older woman who waited for the bus's steps to lower. Hand still over his mouth as if yawning, he stretched his other arm toward the man sitting one row behind him on the other side of the aisle.

"Here you are, M'am", he said as he got up and offered his seat.

Jesse did not have time for another smile so he lowered his hand briefly onto the seat next to him before crossing his arms and pretending to look out the window. He smelled a delightful fragrance as the young woman sat down next to him. Then he turned around and smiled at her and she smiled back. She would

miss her stop. This would be a good day indeed.

Jesse was an adept. He had a private and devoted clientele that helped him live comfortably. He worked on referral only and rich people tend to refer other rich people. He was not a principled practitioner. He could make someone marry someone or destroy a marriage so the lover could then edge into marriage with the person desired. He made people fall ill, lose jobs, get jobs, healed people of chronic and minor ailments and on more than one occasion, he caused someone to die. He especially remembered that one. Margaret was her name. She had come to seek the death of her cheating husband. Since her husband was very wealthy, upon his death, she became wealthy and, because Jesse could cause someone to die, she gifted him with a nice "tip". So, he was comfortable enough, but that was not enough. He had long abandoned the Wiccan Rede. Jonah and his watching for consequences. Jesse had come to see his mentor as an annoying bastard. No, Jonah's magic was, frankly, too White for his taste. Jesse's taste in magic ran dark. Very dark. And as his power of the dark arts grew, so did his quest for magical power.

He invoked more and more powerful entities to do his bidding and the bidding of those he served. As impatient as they were with him, they had no choice. He bound them by and to his rituals. It was no coincidence that the furry, winged worker-creatures scampered away from him when he came home. They were the easiest to bind to his will and sometimes he ordered one, and at other times all of them to do his work. He left the purple, tentacled entity alone. He always sat atop the curtain rods. How quickly he moved from room to room scurrying up the curtains and perching atop the rod. Quick as a blur that one was.

He was the watcher and snitch for the Tall One. In time, he would be part of Jesse's fold, Jesse believed with increasing confidence.

The Tall One was not patient. More than once, he flung Jesse across the living room and against his bookcase with the flicker of one claw. If the Tall One thought Jesse would take a backseat in fear, he was wrong. As far as Jesse was concerned, even a demon was showing weakness when it lost its temper. He would have him under his control yet. One day, that Tall One would scamper from his sight just like the fuzzy workers. He would reduce him to being a servant too. He would see.

Her name was Mary. Her blonde hair shone as the sun touched it through the dirty, streaked windows of the city bus.

"Wasn't that snow really strange?" She said to Jesse.

"It was but, scientifically explainable, I am sure. We'll just have to see what the weatherman says tonight."

"Do you live around here?" Mary asked but her eyes showed no interest.

"As a matter of fact I do. And you?"

"No. I live in Manhattan and am--was--am going to visit a friend"

"Oh." Jesse made it a point to sound disappointed.

"What's your stop?"

"Fifteenth street, by the park."

"How about coffee?" She suggested.

"And your friend?"

She took out her cell phone and cancelled with her friend. When the telephone clicked shut, she turned and looked at Jesse as if to say something.

But, she didn't. Her blue eyes lost their luster.

They had coffee at his apartment. One cup. That was all. She lay on the bed exhausted no so much from her pleasure so much as from his. He was a vigorous lover.

A part of her had no idea how she wound up in bed with him. That same part had no idea why she moved in with him that night. That same part of her that would question faded away into a corner that used to be her own mind, not someone else's.

He was attractive enough. Any girl would go with him at least once but, women being perceptive as they are, veered away after a date or two not knowing why. It was just the womanly radar that went off within the gut of them and, for most women that was enough. They had been toys he would have tossed anyway but Mary, she was lithe, like a spring breeze and the darkness of his apartment needed that. She was beautiful and his bare arm needed her loveliness as they walked through the park where, against what she would have chosen, she allowed him to take her under a ravine off the bridle path. She never understood why she allowed it, nor did she understand why she remained with someone whose lovemaking was brutish and selfish. Inside her, somewhere, there was a part of her that would have wondered why she would allow any of it.

The mock rapes in the park, the sexual control did not allow her to become excited but merely a vessel for his satisfaction and living with him? When had she last spoken to her friends or even her family? She did not remember. Somewhere inside of her mind, she questioned. She just did not have answers.

He told her he was a consultant yet, she never met any of his clients or

saw his "office". It was always locked, even when he worked in the office.

Whenever a client visited, she suddenly became sleepy and went to the bedroom to nap. Her nap would be hours, sometimes into the next morning but she never understood why. She always awoke to find a new dress lain out on the bed with antique earrings and necklace draped on the bodice. Jesse had a taste for long dresses of silk or velvet in the darkest shades of scarlet, moss green, cobalt blue and black. The jewelry was always silver with matching gems cut just to catch the light. Still, she never understood why she stayed with him. Not at all.

As for Jesse, his clientele grew, as did his income, but nothing he had was enough, he wanted more and would have it. The more he had, the more he bought Mary. He needed to drape her well and she needed to know no one else would do so. This was her worth he told her often. Her eyes searched his all the time part confused and part dazed but he never noticed. It was the measure of her value to be doted on. Every time he said this, deep within, that part that was still Mary would have preferred freedom and then the thought was just gone. And she was somewhere within the shadows of distant memories and a walking death.

"You dare summon me?" The Tall One scolded coldly.

"Yes I do." Jesse dared to answer. He had no fear for he was safe within the drawn circle wearing the amulet he had spent months preparing for this encounter.

"You dare to play with me?"

"I did not call you to play."

"You are weak and to call upon me is a violation of the rules."

"No rules violated here. I wear the amulet, I drew the circle and recited the proper incantations. You must obey me now."

"I am not one of the workers you have scattering about here. There will be a price you know to command anything of me."

"I know that but I choose to command you anyway."

A facsimile of a smile crossed the leathery face. The Tall One was of the highest order of demon. He was around from almost the beginning of time itself. Born before man, he bore no resemblance to man save two legs and two arms. He was about twelve feet tall with reptilian-scaled skin. His wings were the texture of bat wings and spanned the breadth of his height, the tips raising to a good six inches above his head. He would do this weakling's bidding but not without a price. He never did. They all paid dearly and if this one thought he would not pay then he underestimated brilliance being ancient. There was always a way to collect damages. There was always a way.

"What is it you want? You have money. You have the woman you lusted after controlled. What more would you ask?"

"I want more money and power." The Tall One's brow raised.

"Power? What kind of power?" The desire for power. It got them every time. That and ego. And he had both.

"I want to have enough wealth to control the controllers in this city and eventually the country. I want to play." Play. He wants to play. Then he shall play.

"You want to play?"

"Yes. I want to see how much I can control for the sake of doing it and oh, let's not forget the wealth."

"Very well. Buy the next lottery ticket that will be in the many million-dollar range. Do this within three weeks. No later and you shall have your wealth and all the power it can buy. Now for the price."

"Okay."

"You will enjoy one year of sudden wealth and power from this day. At midnight on that day before one year and one day, I will come for you. Mind you, I will come you mind, soul and body and you will know what it is to be controlled, to be my worker."

"Agreed."

Jesse had no intention of being collected as payment for this deal. He was a master and would fool the demon at his own game.

It was a hot summer day when she got off the bus to transfer to the next. She lived in Manhattan got off the train from Manhattan in Brooklyn. She was still two bus stops away from her friend Nan's house. She got off the air-conditioned bus to get the second one and as she did the heat of that June day slapped her face harshly and then suddenly it happened. It snowed. Not flurries either, not that flurries would not have been strange all by itself but it snowed like a blizzard and as it snowed, her clothes chilled her as the snow melted against her overheated body. She glanced around and saw everyone around her were naturally just as puzzled as she and people who normally would have not spoken to each other suddenly commented about the weather to each other and then it stopped. Just like that. Her clothes were dry within seconds and then her bus pulled up. She was not in a rush. She was enjoying traveling through Brooklyn neighborhoods that, although as ethnically diverse as Manhattan, were smaller

and cozier. She noticed a nicely dressed older woman with two overstuffed shopping bags walk to the stop. A young man in a white jogging suit walked to the bus stop also and stood in front of the older lady. The bus was coming and for the life of her she could not understand why he was so anxious. It was a hot day but it was summer. Before anyone knew it, it would be winter again and the snow would not last more than a few minutes. Why couldn't people just relax, she wondered. He was constant motion, bobbing here and there, trying to anticipate exactly where the door of the bus would be so he could be first on the bus. His clothes was so white under the bright sun, she wished she had not forgotten her sunglasses.

She didn't know why she sat in the first forward row opposite the driver and next to him. She knew even less why she began talking to him. It was just something she wanted to do suddenly. No, had to do. Why, she did not know. After all, David was meeting her at Nan's. David. His average face and winning smile faded. She could barely remember his looks now. Why she went with him and never left she never knew. She'd had an apartment, hadn't she? And friends? And family? She disappeared on all of them and must have lost her apartment. Then these concerns would drift away into the fog that became her mind. Lost like the memories of the life she used to have.

Jesse was smug when he talked about a lottery ticket. It didn't bother Mary in the least. It was just another happening in the odd life she found herself living. But his clients stopped coming and suddenly there were only parties. Dinner parties, fund raisers, political dinners and he was the keynote speaker. She was always with him, beautifully draped in expensive antique dresses and jewelry. As

the months went by, she withdrew more and more into herself. Mysterious the press called her. She never knew it. Sometimes, during the parties, Jesse would lead her into a marbled bathroom and take her. Sometimes it was on the floor, another time he sat on the toilet yanked her panties down and made her straddle him to satisfaction. Inside, the part that had not died yet, cried. This did not go unnoticed. There were rules after all.

Upon getting home, while Mary went to bed to escape in sleep, Jesse was very busy in his "office". He poured over ancient volumes of books and wrote from them furiously. He was preparing for the showdown. He now had four months left and he was not going to lose all he had over a deal. Every deal had its loophole and he knew what it was. The key was the mind and the words. He must not speak with him and he had to stay focused.

The circle had to be of salt and saltpeter. He already had what he needed for inside the circle. The candles, matches, pentagrams and even the robe he had spent months consecrating. The amulet was never off his neck and it would protect him within that circle. It would be easy. There was only one minute in which he could be claimed. He only needed to be in control until one minute after twelve and he would be free to enjoy all he possessed. The rules did not demand the demon tell him this but the rules did not prevent him from finding out. Wealth, power, a beautiful woman and a lifetime in which to enjoy it all would be his. After this first confrontation, he might work on eternal youth. His will would be done. Jonah had taught him well. He was taught not to overlook anything and for this special night of conquering the demon, he had not.

Jesse was ready. He would make sure Mary was in bed and sleep early.

By seven o'clock that evening, her now lifeless looking eyes began to close. He walked her to their bedroom and although he had mesmerized her to drowsiness, he took her anyway.

By nine o'clock, the circle had been drawn with one spot open for him to enter so he could close the circle from within it. It was a large circle cast with salt in the massive living room. He spend the day moving the desk, sofas and coffee tables out into the hallway so it could be cast nine feet in circumference. He made a pentagram within the circle. He was to sit in the middle with incantations, candles, cauldron and matches ready to encircle himself within this circle of protection by one minute to midnight. He also had his magical robe within the circle, in the middle of the pentagram. He was prepared. He had not overlooked a thing including the power of illusion and how it could be used against him. He locked the windows, even though it was summer for demons could summon weather and he did not want that disadvantage. He was well prepared. Very well prepared.

It was one minute to midnight and Jesse sealed himself within the circle with the remaining salt. He walked counterclockwise uttering the ancient incantations. Nothing would be able to enter the circle to attack him now. He donned his robe and sat, cross-legged in the middle of the pentagram. He continued his incantations as he lit the two black candles with the altar matches. He ignited the saltpeter in the cauldron and, as it poofed, the clock struck midnight and the Tall One appeared.

"You think a silly circle can prevent me from claiming you?"

"Well, if it can't come and get me!" Jesse was defiant with confidence.

"Oh, I think one minute will be long enough for me to get you. I look forward to seeing you serve as you have made others do."

"Do you plan to bore me into submission?" Jesse taunted.

The Tall One pointed a finger at the circle and suddenly Jesse saw himself engulfed within a ring of flames, the fires breezing in toward him, lapping their heat at his face.

"You cannot fool me. This is your illusion--to make me feel and see fire so close to me that I will jump out of my circles and into your clutches."

"I see Jonah taught you well."

"And I taught myself the rest!"

"So you have, so you have. But, look down."

Jesse looked down to see all manner of scorpions, snakes and spiders all poisonous. He almost jumped but did not. Even as he felt the sting of their bites, he sat still. He felt the burning of poisons in his blood until it began to boil.

"Illusion! All Illusion! What I think I see and what I think I feel is all illusion!

Nothing can come into this circle so all you have is my mind to play with and I know that! You must be desperate to play at these predictable parlor tricks!" He closed his eyes, willing the pain to leave his mind for it was all in his mind anyway.

The broad face smiled, no grimaced and its scales wrinkled grotesquely. Jesse knew there were but moments left and he would be free to enjoy his wealth and power forever. Suddenly the room was cold and a bitter wind blew. Jesse opened his eyes to see the wind dispersing the salt hence opening the circle. His eyes opened with fear. How much time was left? Five seconds? Two? He knew

he could make time seem longer but he had not counted on weather control to destroy his protection. He looked around the room wildly. He had not left any windows opened that was the only way the demon could summon the winds, especially cold ones on a summer's evening unto him and command they destroy the circle.

"How did you do this? The rules are clear. You can deal illusion but the test is to remain within me!"

"Not so cocky now, are we?" The demon teased. "Yes, I am allowed illusion. All types of illusion and while you were focusing on the illusions within your circle you forgot to keep a part of your mind on the woman you imprisoned. You speak of rules! Even among entities such as myself, there are rules to protect victims. Or did Jonah forget to tell you? Or did you simply forget?"

Circle undone, the winds died down and the billowing curtains settled. To the side of the open window stood Mary.