



CUT DRINA BITS

THERE WERE A COUPLE OF DRINA BITS THAT I CUT, ESPECIALLY THE INTRIGUING IDEA THAT HER GET WOULD CHOOSE THE NEXT T'BLACKTHORN HEIR...OF COURSE I CAN ALWAYS PUT THE **IDEA** SOMEWHERE ELSE.

Regarding pockets: Drina lifted her small pink nose and sniffed. "I don't need pockets. Whatever I want, my FamMan will get for Me."

Drina stopped licking her paw and looked at him. I fail to understand why this blood thing is so important. She lifted her pink nose.

Straif frowned down at her. "It's a difference between humans and cats."

She sniffed. Maybe. Maybe just some humans. Cats are more sensible. Having offspring who die is bad. Worse than having same bloodline.

Straif clenched his teeth. "You wouldn't understand."

Who does? No one agrees with you.

I am your Fam, connected to you. I do not run away, she replied haughtily. We are Family, yes?

"Yes."

Then you will get good mate and children, and I will have kittens. My kittens will be bloodline.

He stared at her, trying to grasp the concept. Marry who he would? Mitchella! His heart leapt at the thought. And he loved Antenn like a son. A HeartMate, and children.

I never wanted to have kittens, but I will, for you, Drina said generously. My blood is good. I will have strong kittens for your House and line.

Straif stared at her. Her Sire was Zanth, a Downwind feral, Lord and Lady knew who his forebears were. But he was a huge, tough scrapper. And his get was the prized line in all of Celta. Trying to imagine a poor or sickly kitten from Zanth or Drina boggled Straif's mind. And that hurt. That animals carried genes that were immune to the damned Blackthorn Curse and his Family was so weak that they always died out during every outbreak.

He tossed and turned until dawn, rose, pulled on a purple silken robe shot with silver threads, then paced down the long corridors to his ResidenceDen. On the way he noted that some had been painted, some wallpapered, an occasional alcove or two had actually been gilded\* with precious stones, and the wider ones sported\* the tapestries that had been found in the storeroom and lovingly restored by Birch weavers.

Entering the ResidenceDen, he noted again the comfort and elegance the room projected with it's new furnishings. He had the best of both worlds, he realized. T'Ash had had to build

from the ground up and was continuing to furnish his Residence with items chosen by himself and Danith, with no ancestral property. Straif knew that the loss of four centuries of heritage still stung at T'Ash.

Then there was Straif's cousin, Holm Holly, who even now was fighting a battle with his father, T'Holly, to remodel an attic storeroom into a conservatory with a lagoon pool. Straif shook his head at the memory of Holm fuming that he could barely move a stick of furniture in the Residence.

But he, Straif, now had the opportunity to purchase and furnish his rooms with a mixture of old and new, as he pleased. The ancient pieces, passed down through XX generations, had also held the strongest of spells

He entered the ResidenceDen and sat behind the reddwood desk. Straif ran a hand over the smooth wood, admiring how the sunlight through the gauzey curtains touched red highlights in the grain. He sniffed, the faint smell of lemon oil and the tang of reddwood itself combined to make him smile at the scent which he considered clean and masculine, appropriate for his Residence.

"Residence, contact the holo cache\* of T'Ash GreatHouse and request that D'Ash return my call at her earliest convenience."