

Surviving Magiford
A Gate of Myth and Power Short Story
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When I first moved to Magiford—approximately three years before Noctus, King of the Mors Elves, decided he wanted a pet—I knew I needed to establish safe zones in the city.

Since I was on my own, I was an easy target for all supernaturals. I needed places I could escape to—areas that I knew were safe.

Originally, I thought the wizard neighborhoods would be my best choice.

Wizards lived in giant, magic Houses that were built among human houses. Their neighborhoods always boasted manicured lawns, well maintained streets, and gorgeous houses with beautiful architecture.

On the whole, Wizards were a kinder sort of supernatural. There were, of course, some bad apples. But wizards were way less likely to chase me down for the fun of it, and most likely wouldn't even notice me, or would assume I was a House-less wizard.

I enjoyed strolling through the area, admiring the regular, human owned Tudor houses and colonial style homes that were intermixed with the wizard Houses.

The only thing I didn't like was how *big* the lawns were—it made it harder to slink from house to house in my cat form. That meant I was a lot easier to spot than I would have preferred.

But it's not like anyone prowls the human neighborhoods, I reasoned as I slinked across a lawn of what was definitely a wizard House—my paws were tingling from the magic that radiated up from the ground. *If I pass for a cat, I don't run into any trouble. All in all, this is an excellent area to escape to when I'm getting chased. Werewolves don't roam these parts since no Packs own this territory, and Seelie and Unseelie fae wouldn't follow me here.*

I idly twitched my tail as I strutted past the House—a beautiful Victorian style building with blue siding, white trim, and stretches of gray rock that also gave it a French Chateau flair.

Maybe I should consider putting on a collar, so humans stop trying to catch me because they think I'm a stray. No—that would make me more recognizable. My magic makes me hard to notice, but I don't think it works that well! Besides, I'd need Pat or Joy to put it on, and then I'd have to explain why it's necessary. That would be a terrible idea.

I was busy shivering at the thought, when the ground opened up underneath me. I fell down the hole, yowling.

Magic pulsed around me as the lawn sealed over my head, and the hole moved underground, pushing me along like a moving tunnel.

The House, it's the House doing this!

Dirt clods smacked me, and it was pitch black as I was shoved along.

I didn't do anything—I'm sorry! I'm not a regular cat, whatever feline wronged you it wasn't me! Please—

Abruptly, the ground parted in front of me to create another hole—revealing a lightbulb bright enough to make my eyes hurt.

I tried planting my paws, managing to grab onto the cinderblocks that framed the hole.

The House, smacking my back with the ground, kicked me out of the hole.

I sailed through the air, yowling, and landed on something *soft*. It was a man—he must have been just as surprised as I was with my sudden entrance given that he snapped off several angry sounding shouts in languages I didn't recognize. We tussled for a second as I tried to disengage my claws that I'd instinctively hooked in his clothes, but I was so scared my body wasn't listening to me. I was so frazzled it took a second for my senses to catch up with me before I felt the syrup-y, sticky magical sensation I associated with vampires.

He's a vampire!

I leaped off the vampire, my heart pounding so hard in my chest I thought it might explode.

I rapidly backed myself into a corner of the basement, hissing as the hair on my back and tail puffed up.

What is a vampire doing inside a wizard House?

The vampire, a tall man with red eyes that were so dark they were almost black, ran a hand through his dark hair. He pulled a dead leaf from his locks—managing to look handsome somehow—then knelt next to a door.

“Hate me all you want—I don't care what a House thinks of me. But if she gets attacked while on Medeis land without me, and doesn't survive, I'll burn you down, salt the gardens, and turn the lot into a cemetery for everyone I kill in retribution.”

It took me a second to realize he wasn't talking to me, but to the House.

What is he talking about? Is this House Medeis?

I knew most of the wizard families that lived in Magiford, but I hadn't gone so far as to memorize what their Houses looked like—an action I was starting to regret.

Wasn't the Adept of House Medeis linked with the Vampire Eminence, Killian Drake? But he's not Killian Drake—there's no way the Vampire Eminence of the Midwest would be squatting in a House basement—locked in by the looks of things.

The vampire ranted on as he worked on the door, but I didn't listen.

I was too busy peering around the basement, searching for an exit as my heart rattled around my body.

This is bad. Unless I want to risk turning into a human, I don't think I can make it out of the storm windows—I'll need thumbs to open them.

I'd gotten sloppy, assuming that because magic couldn't be *cast* on me, I was safe. Now I knew, just because magic didn't affect me, didn't mean magic couldn't affect the things *around* me.

Pat is going to kill me. I should have been more careful!

The vampire kept arguing with the House—which I carefully avoided listening to. I did *not* want confirmation that it was Killian Drake standing before me, with my dirty paw prints on the lapel of his suitcoat.

If he was—House or not—I was dead.

Something clicked, and the door swung open.

The vampire stuck a dagger in the doorframe—most likely so the House couldn't close him in again—then he glanced back at me.

Here it comes—punishment!

My back arched and my hair stood on end as every nerve in my body tingled.

“Are you going to take care of the animal?” the vampire asked the House.

A moment passed, and then one of the storm windows creaked as the House opened it.

I peeled my ears off my furry skull and shot out of the corner. I leaped onto the washing machine, and from there jumped through the storm window—being careful to tuck my paws as I sailed through the open window so I wasn't touching the wizard House.

Free, I zipped across the lawn.

It threw me at a vampire. A vampire!

My tail was high and stiff with fear as I sprinted across the lawn as fast as I could, aiming for the paved street.

Lesson learned—the wizard neighborhoods aren't safe at all!

Over the next few months I continued establishing safe places among the human restaurants, shops, and townhomes that had cats, but I knew I still needed a safe territory to roam.

It took almost a full year before I settled on the next area: the territory settled by the Night Court and owned by the renowned fae Queen Leila.

I wandered it for a few months, and by the turn of the new year, I was happily committed.

The Night Court is coming into esteem as Queen Leila is consolidating power—she's even the Fae Representative on the Regional Committee of Magic now! But what really makes this area safe is that she's a known animal lover, and her people are too scared of her to risk harming a stray cat.

“Cat.”

I ignored the call as I crunched my way across a light dusting of snow.

“I say, *cat!*”

Is he talking to me? But he shouldn't have even noticed me...

Spooked, I paused, crouching low to the ground as I looked around.

A tall fae lord—handsome, of course—wearing a black wool jacket with black slacks frowned at me from the sidewalk that led into one of the many fae McMansions in Queen Leila's territory.

When the fae lord met my gaze, he crouched down. “Come here, cat. I have obtained a bed, food, and toys. All I need is a cat. You may consider this your new home—just don’t ruin my furniture.”

W-what?

My eyes bugged in my confusion.

I’d seen a lot of weird things as a cat. A fae lord attempting to bargain with a stray cat took the cake.

The fae lord didn’t notice. He rested his elbows on his knees as he continued to watch me. “In return for your upkeep, I will require one photo shoot per year—for proof of *Pet Appreciation Day*.”

What is Pet Appreciation Day?

The fae lord stood up and retreated to the threshold of his giant, four-car-garage-home. He opened the front door, then stepped aside. “You may enter.”

That gesture set off all the alarms my instincts had.

Nope, no, nope. I’m out of here.

I turned tail and ran, scurrying across the lawn so I could enter a culvert, letting me cross under the street and pop out on the other side.

I didn’t stop there—no, my heart was pounding too hard for that, and even though it’d been over a year since the Wizard House threw me at a vampire, I hadn’t gotten over that trauma.

So I ran down the street, my tail bushy with anxiety.

I sprinted until I thought my little kitty heart would give out, and then I slowed to a trot, following the road.

When I finally slowed to a walk, I was in a different part of the Night Court territory—though I was still among the McMansions.

I should be safe here. But woah, that was weird. Did he realize I’m not a real cat? But he was talking about needing me for Pet Appreciation Day, and fae can’t lie.

I picked my way across a driveway entrance, shivering—not from the cold, but from the *weirdness* of the situation.

But I’ve never heard of Pet Appreciation Day, and that doesn’t sound like the kind of thing a fae would normally celebrate. I guess I’ll have to google it when I get home...

“Cat.”

I paused, one paw raised in the air. *You’ve got to be kidding me.*

Cautiously, I turned my head.

A fae noblewoman stood, wearing a luxurious cream-colored coat that felt to her ankles. A slight frown marred her otherworldly beauty, and she folded her arms across her chest. “I require a pet for Pet Appreciation Day, so I have a bargain for you.”

RUN!

I took off running, kicking up snow as I fled.

“Cat!” She chased after me, running in heeled boots without even slipping!

This is absolutely insane!

I yowled as I kept running. It took me two blocks and a detour through another house's yard before I shook her!

That's it, the Night Court territory is no longer viably safe. I'll have to find someplace new. Again.

I shook myself like a dog, ruffling my fur.

Forget that fae were attempting to bargain—a dangerous thing that always favored the fae and usually involved risking your life or livelihood in one way or another—the biggest problem was that they were *noticing* me.

I have to be forgettable and ignored. For my own safety. Because no one cares about me, except for my human family.

By summertime, I concluded that maybe I was safest hanging out close to the Curia Cloisters. The building was a neutral zone, and since there had been an “incident” involving a crazy vampire two years ago, they'd greatly increased the building's security, and had even added on a task force to handle supernatural investigations.

I encountered some...*problems* when first exploring the building. (Let's just say I hadn't been aware that the Cloisters had animated gargoyles that activated after the sun set, and I hadn't been prepared for said gargoyles to be interested in a *housecat*. My mistake.) But I was optimistic it could work.

It *had* to work. I was hoping to eventually get employed by the Curia Cloisters, after all. I might as well start surveying the area to figure out all the safe hidey holes I could escape to.

Cat Tails, the bookshop/café, was an obvious choice, but my conscious wouldn't let me even set foot in the building since Ms. Booker took our rivalry seriously, even though it was close to the Cloisters and would have been convenient given the several large cats that hung around the shop.

There were a few other businesses/buildings that I was able to successfully establish myself as an extra/unnoticed.

Fall came, and it was around then that I was forced to conclude that maybe the Curia Cloisters was a very bad place to hide in, specifically *because* of all the supernaturals.

“Thank you for your application.” The man offered me a quick smile before he took my resume and the filled-out application. “We're accepting applications for two more weeks, and then we'll begin making arrangements for phone interviews.”

“Okay.” I made myself smile, even though this was the...I don't know how many positions I had tried for at this point. I'd stopped counting after the sixth rejection. “Thank you for your consideration.”

He flashed me another smile. “Of course—good luck. Next in line, please?”

I left the office—which loosely operated as the HR for most of the Curia Cloisters.

This position actually dealt with accounting work, so maybe they'll finally consider me...but I'm starting to suspect that they keep refusing to because they don't know what I am and that makes them wary.

I clutched the strap of my purse and tried to swallow my emotions as I marched down the hallway, heading towards one of the Cloister entrances.

I'd tried registering with the wizards again the month prior, and had once again been sent to the shifters even though my DNA test—which had been redone multiple times—said I was pure human.

I was always getting the run around. *No one wants the responsibility of having to claim me, I suppose. But that's—*

“Is that...?”

My spine stiffened, and I felt eyes on me.

Two fae—a naiad and a dryad—fell into step behind me.

I couldn't tell what Court they were part of, but they had to be from one of the local Seelie or Unseelie Courts. Fae from landed Courts didn't deign to notice the small fries like me.

“I'm pretty sure it's her. But she's so forgettable, you know?”

Stay calm. They aren't necessarily talking about me. I'm unimportant. Maybe they're talking about someone in their Court.

“What kind of a cat does she turn into again?”

Maybe not.

“Black...or was it tiger striped?” The fae sounded bewildered—my magic at work, thank you.

Better shake them.

I turned a corner I wasn't planning to take, then sprinted as they lagged behind me.

“I thought she was a calico? Hey!” they shouted when they turned the corner and realized I was running.

The new hallway popped me into the main chambers of the Cloisters. I darted behind a giant cutout that showed the floor plans of a new apartment building going in downtown—one that was supposed to cater to supernaturals—and changed into my cat form.

As a cat, I scurried through the room, barely avoiding getting kicked by a distracted vampire, and run down by four laughing wizards.

When a tall, buff lady—a shifter, most likely—opened a door to the outside, I streaked out, leaving the Curia Cloisters with fluffed hair.

I twitched my tail, then followed the side of the building, heading for one of the parking lots located next to the side entrance I'd originally been planning to use. *I guess I'll head downtown and hang out at the Flying Curry just to make sure I'm safe.*

I trotted along the sidewalk, turning a corner that brought me to the parking lot I was looking for.

Maybe I need to rethink if the Cloisters are safe or not. Regardless, I'll keep this form for now.

As a cat, I was less likely to be noticed. Nobody watched things low to the ground. Except, maybe—*werewolves!*

A guy who looked remarkably bulky for a high schooler and a similarly muscled dude who looked a few years older than him stepped in front of me, tipping their heads from side to side in mannerisms reminiscent of their wolf forms. They were shifters—I would have guessed it from their bodies, but the furry sensation they incited in me was the big giveaway.

“Cute cat,” the younger of the two said. He tried to reach out and pet me.

I backed away from him, edging off the sidewalk and onto the grass. *Werewolves are the worst—the mean ones chase and chase and never give up, and the nice ones are too curious!*

“Doesn’t seem like she likes you much.” The second werewolf laughed as he also trotted after me.

“No way. Cats love me—well, all except Pip’s cats.” The younger werewolf lunged at me again.

I slunk along, keeping low to the ground with my eyes on them. *At least they think I’m just a normal cat.*

“Not anymore—you’re a werewolf now. Watch this.” The slightly older werewolf jumped, almost landing on top of me.

I hissed, and my hair puffed up, shedding in a small puff thanks to my ever-pervasive anxiety as I bound away.

“Woah, I’ve never seen a cat shed like that!” the younger teenager said. “Think she’s sick?”

The duo chased after me, and I kept shedding hair as I turned and started running across a grass covered divider used to bottleneck the parking lot.

“That’s wild,” the second werewolf said—not even out of breath as he kept pace with me.

“Hey, Pip!” The younger werewolf shouted as he waved to someone across the parking lot. “Watch—when we get close, this cat sheds puffs of hair!”

He sprinted, catching up with me and his wolf-bro.

I hissed as I ran, my fur already puffed to the max, but made it to a line of shrubbery that were planted in some landscaping beds.

“Jack, leave the poor cat alone. If it’s shedding hair like that it’s obviously stressed and anxious,” a woman shouted, her voice echoing across the parking lot.

Still hidden in my shrub, I shivered my appreciation. *Thank you! Whoever you are, you’re precious!*

“Fiiiine,” the younger one sighed as the two werewolves peeled off, heading back to their wonderful, thoughtful friend.

I waited for my heartbeat to slow down before I ventured out of the shrubbery, once again pointed downtown.

That’s it. Unless I want to turn into a hairless cat, the Cloisters are out!

My hair was still standing on end from the burst of adrenaline and anxiety as I trotted down the street.

It was a bit of a walk to downtown, but I was used to footing it across Magiford, so the distance was nothing.

No, I was most concerned that still, after all these years, I was only safe among humans—who were oblivious to what I was.

I wonder if I'll ever have a place among supernaturals? Where I don't have to worry, and I can just be safe and enjoy myself.

I didn't have an answer to that question, and I eventually gave up on the idea... until the following summer, when I met a podcast-crazy vampire, a Dale Carnegie devoted werewolf, and the King of the Mors elves.

The End