

Trick or Treat

By Jane Tesh

Witches Local #666

To: All Members

It has come to our attention that certain members of our order are becoming increasingly involved in dangerous interpersonal relationships with human males. We refer specifically to one Jonathan MacKensie. This man is neither warlock nor sorcerer and has no claims to powers, spells, or tricks of wizardry, yet several of our most promising members have experienced a form of enchantment which has led to their untimely demise. We therefore strongly advise that caution be taken with any human male, especially those of British extraction, and warn all members to avoid the Washington area this Halloween.

Fatalia growled and balled the memo up in her fist. It disappeared in a flash of yellow flame. What did they think she was, a fool? All humans were dangerous, not just this MacKensie fellow that had everyone in an uproar. All right, so he dashed a few. Susie Garlock was stupid to have tried again, and as for Vendetta and those others, they just weren't clever enough. Why not turn him into a toad and be done with it? Everyone was so damn cautious these days.

Well, nobody was going to tell her where she could and could not fly. If she felt like flying over Washington and sitting on top of the Monument, nobody was going to stop her. This was Halloween!

A quick glance at the ornate mirror hanging on the cavern wall assured Fatalia she looked splendidly wicked: wildly curling hair of midnight black and slanted eyes of a dazzling blue set in an exotic pale face. Her tattered dress reached well above her slim knees, revealing elegant legs. She snapped her fingers, causing little flames to dance in the air. Take that, Jonathan MacKensie. I'm not afraid of you. I'm not afraid of anyone.

The sky was overcast; she could not see the moon. Riding her favorite broom sidesaddle, Fatalia skimmed lightly over fields and farms, over mountains and plains. She rode idly, not really caring where she flew. If her broom subliminally headed toward the District of Columbia, she did not pull it back.

To her delight, the clouds thinned, and silver moonlight poured down over the city, illuminating the white buildings with an added glow. In fact, the sight was so spectacular, Fatalia didn't watch where she was going. She was skimming in low when her broom bucked, pitching her over headfirst. Surprised by the mutinous actions of an otherwise trusty steed, Fatalia didn't correct her fall until too late. She ran into a telephone pole and landed with a thud.

Her first conscious memories were of a pair of strong arms lifting her and a pair of warm brown eyes looking down in concern. Then there was the voice, pleasantly accented.

"Are you all right, miss? You took quite a fall."

She blinked, her vision clearing. Gods, he was handsome. Where the hell was she?

"Just lie back and relax," he said, and she realized she was on a sofa in some human dwelling. "I'll call an ambulance."

"No!" she said, startling him. "No, I'm all right, really. I don't need a doctor."

"If you're sure," he began.

“Yes, of course.” She struggled to sit up. “I just lost my breath, that’s all.” A few deep breaths and she willed the pain away, one of the simplest spells to do and obviously effective, for the man looked relieved.

“Well, I must admit you seem recovered,” he said. “Let me get you something to drink.”

While he stepped around to the adjoining kitchen, Fatalia checked her surroundings. A warm room in shades of brown and beige, quite masculine in decoration: art prints, books, records, a small TV, and what appeared to be bones, fossils, and other ancient artifacts. Besides the sofa, there were two comfortable-looking arm chairs and a glass coffee table covered with papers and folders. She ran her hand through her tangled curls, glancing toward the other room. Her host was a well-built man, about six feet tall, wearing a pair of jeans and a blue sweater. He was very attractive. Well, this Halloween was turning out just fine.

The man returned with a cup and saucer. Fatalia eyed him appreciatively as she took a sip. She thanked him for his help.

“Happy to be of service,” he said with a smile that shot through her like electric current. He sat down across from her. “What exactly were you doing up there?”

“Halloween,” she said, shrugging it off. “Just a prank. I’m sorry if I troubled you.”

He kept his smile. “Well, I must say you look better than most witches I’ve seen.”

To her amazement, Fatalia found herself blushing. Of course, he was talking Halloween, people in costume. She glanced down at her legs and blushed again. To cover her embarrassment, she took another sip of tea. “Thank you,” she managed to say.

“My name is Jonathan,” said the man. “Jonathan MacKensie.”

The hot tea sloshed as her hand shook. Eyes wide, she stared in horror as he jumped up, quickly wiping her hand with his handkerchief. “That didn’t burn you, did it?” he asked, concerned.

She shook her head numbly. Gods, demons, and creatures from hell! She swore. Of all the cursed luck! After the initial shock, she rallied. Weren’t you the one who said turn him into a toad and forget it? Okay, so he had a certain charm. Who’s the one with the real power here? Are you going to let a mere human male get the best of you?

“My name is F –Talia,” she said, easily covering her slip. “Talia Moore. It’s all right. I’m so clumsy.”

“I’ll get you some more,” he said.

This gave her a moment to compose her self and decide on a course of action. All right, she was here. She was in his house. He didn’t know she was a real witch. What if she managed to enchant him? This would be quite a coup. In fact, it might be worth a promotion in the ranks. Wouldn’t Amanita and the others be insane with jealousy if she, a mere beginner, only two hundred and three years old, took care of this little problem for everyone? She certainly didn’t sense any danger. She did sense an amazing attraction that had little or nothing to do with witchcraft as she knew it.

“Here you are,” he said, returning. “I didn’t fill it so full this time.”

Fatalia thanked him and was about to say something else when the doorbell rang.

“Excuse me,” he said. “Must be some trick or treaters.”

From her vantage point, Fatalia could see part of the foyer and the front door. She heard childish voices call, “Trick or treat!” and caught a glimpse of a bed sheet and a brown paper sack. The children were given candy, and she heard the clatter of their footsteps as they hurried on to the next house.

Jonathan came back into the living room. "I don't get too many on Halloween," he said. "Mostly neighborhood children. And a few of my students like to roll the yard."

"Roll the yard?" Fatalia said, puzzled.

"Cover it with toilet tissue. It's a standard college prank." He gave her a curious glance. "Come to think of it, haven't I seen you around the Georgetown campus? This isn't somebody's idea of a joke, is it?"

"Oh, my, no," she said. "I'm much older than I look. I was – that is, somebody dared me to see how high I could climb."

"But you could've been killed," he protested.

She smiled. "I'm the type who just can't refuse a dare."

"Where are these so-called friends of yours? Don't they care that you almost broke your neck?"

"I'm supposed to meet them later." She got up and strolled casually around the room. "You have a lot of nice things, Jonathan. What's this?"

"I got that in Kenya," he said. "It's a Masai tribal mask."

"And this?"

"A red figure Lekthos vase from the Greek Classical period. It's just a copy."

"You're a historian?" she asked.

"Anthropologist."

"Ah," she said. "I'll bet I know a group you haven't studied, professor. "Do you like the work?"

"Yes, very much," he said. "And what do you do, Miss Moore?"

"Talia, please," she said, running her finger lightly down the side of the vase. "I spend a lot of time in the air."

"You're a flight attendant, then?"

"Actually," she said, moving closer to him and looking up invitingly, "I can do all kinds of things." She put her arms around his neck. "But first, I'd like to thank you properly for your help."

Their mouths were almost touching when the doorbell rang. "I'd better see to that," Jonathan said reluctantly. "Wait right here."

He grabbed the bag of candy, planning to toss some out the door, but instead of costumed children, there was a werewolf on the doorstep, howling.

"Sorry, I'm out of silver bullets," said Jonathan.

"A Bud will do, buds," said a familiar muffled voice, and Benny pulled off the mask. "Happy Halloween, Juanito! Let's get crackin'! There are enough ghosts out here to keep Moorhouse happy for years. Whoops, see you have company, as usual. Well, this won't take long."

"What are you doing here?" Jonathan asked. "What do you want?"

Benny made himself at home. "Would I spend Halloween night without my fellow shadow chaser? This is our big night, pal! Hello, there. My name is Edgar Benedek, but you just call me Benny." He addressed this to the sexy brunette in the short tattered black outfit. "You are one hot lookin' witch," he said admiringly. "You can put a spell on me any time."

"Benedek." A firm hand on his shoulder propelled him back into the foyer. "Out."

"You promised Moorhouse you'd look into that haunted house tonight," Benny reminded, craning his neck for another look at the young woman.

"Yes, round about midnight. It is now eight-thirty. Do you mind?"

Benny grinned. "Do I mind what?"

"Leaving. Put on your wolf mask and go terrorize the neighborhood. I'll meet you there at twelve."

"Who's the girl?"

"I would like to have the opportunity to find out," said Jonathan, attempting to push his partner out the door.

Benny remained firm. "Uh, Jon-Boy, have you looked real closely at her eyes?"

"They're blue."

"Yeah, but check out the pupils."

"Will you go away?"

He finally succeeded in shoving Benny out. Fatalia was laughing when he returned to her. "Why was your friend talking about ghosts?" she asked.

Jonathan unwillingly admitted that he sometimes investigated reports of ghosts and other phenomena. "But there have been very few cases that did not have some sort of logical explanation."

Oh-ho, thought Fatalia. A true skeptic. "Have you ever run across any witches?" she asked mischievously. "Real ones, I mean."

"Right now I'm more interested in the enchanting young lady in my living room," he replied, his arms around her waist. She did have unusual eyes, dark royal blue with oddly catlike pupils. There was something tantalizing in her smile, promising delights.

Fatalia's smile was triumphant. It was all over now. This was where all mortals made a costly slip. No one could resist the age-old powers, the dark, wild passions, the. . .oh, dear. . .oh, my. . .

Alarm bells went off in her head. Danger! Pull back! Retreat!

Too late. She sighed and gave into his embrace, her hands sliding up to caress his hair, lips firmly attached to his. When she finally broke away, she was dizzy and breathless. If his friend hadn't bounded in, again gleefully interrupting, she wasn't sure what might have happened.

Jonathan turned with an exasperated growl, allowing her the chance to catch her breath. "Now what?"

"Things are hoppin', Jack! Wild pumpkins loose on Pennsylvania Avenue! You gotta come see this, buds. You're missing all the action – poor choice of words," he amended quickly, hands outflung.

Jonathan managed to control his temper. He gave Fatalia an apologetic smile. "We're not going to have any peace tonight until I take care of a few things. I'm very sorry. It shouldn't take long."

"Hey, she can come along," Benny said cheerfully. "There's room for three on a broomstick, right?"

Fatalia looked beyond his bright grin to a startling understanding. He knew. He knew what she was. Flustered, she replied, "I really have to go, Jonathan."

"Perhaps later this evening?" he inquired hopefully.

"I—well, maybe," she said, hesitant. "Thanks so much for all your help." She gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, feeling an intense heat from even this brief encounter. I've got to get out of here!

"Wait," he said, puzzled. "I don't know where you live, your phone number--"

"I've got to go," she said.

"Will I see you again?" he asked.

Fatalia paused in the doorway. She gazed at him steadily, wanting to remember every feature, every change of expression. "Next Halloween." She blew him a kiss. "Watch for me."

"That's what I call a close one," Benny remarked.

Jonathan was staring forlornly at the closed door. "What are you talking about?"

Benny slapped him on the back. "Never mind, Cassanova. Let's go round up some pumpkins."

Fatalia sat idly twisting one of her long black curls. She'd found her errant broom and flown back to the cavern, arriving long before the others. Lost in thought, she didn't respond until Amanita poked her.

"What's with you?"

"Oh," she said. "Nothing."

"Where were you? Did you go to the ball?"

"No," said Fatalia. "I cruised for a while. East Coast."

Amanita looked in the mirror and pursed her perfect lips. "Anything interesting?"

She shrugged. "The usual."

Amanita wasn't fooled. "So what was it?" she asked, smiling slyly. "Trick or treat?"

For a moment, Fatalia considered lying; then she smiled back. "Treat," she said. "Definitely treat." Next Halloween, Jonathan MacKensie. I'll be ready. Watch for me.