

# GOLD



Dancing, spinning all around  
Wounded now we've gone to ground  
But Deveraux power still remains  
And where we are, darkness reigns

An uneasy peace on Cahors lies  
We dare not dance 'neath moonlit skies  
We fear the dark that creeps outside  
Not half as much as the one we hide

Medieval France: Fantasma, Pandion, Jean, and Isabeau

*Thrum, thrum, thrum.*

Fate loosed Fantasma, ancient falcon, powerful familiar of House Deveraux, upon the wind. The bells around his talons jingled like a temple dancer's anklets as he soared high above the wooded lands of France. He smelled the heat of Pandion, the hawk familiar of the Cahors; if one could say that a falcon smiles, Fantasma grinned in lustful anticipation. The son of his master, Duc Laurent, would soon bed the daughter

of House Cahors. Perhaps Fantasme would take their familiar in the same way. Or *peut-être* he would simply rip her to shreds.

*Thrum, thrum, thrum . . .*

Below, the beaters threshed out the serfs, smashing the branches of the oak trees with poles in order to flush the unwilling sacrifices from their wretched hidey-holes. Other, lesser game would serve as for the great feast before the marriage of Jean de Deveraux and Isabeau of the Cahors—venison, pork, poultry. Ancient enemies, joined in matrimony—the result of decades of plotting, planning, and assassination.

The Deveraux asserted that a century before, Nicolette of the Cahors had poisoned Elijah, son of the most powerful warlock family in all of France, and buried his body in a ditch.

It was claimed in turn by House Cahors that Elijah had lured their witch princess to the festivities at Scarborough, and there had hacked her to pieces.

Neither claim was ever proven, but Fantasme knew that one hundred years later, history was about to repeat itself. A Deveraux and a Cahors bound together? More likely they would bleed each other in their sleep.

Below, fine young Jean raised his arm, his signal for Fantasme to return. Farther back in the hunting

party, Jean's mistress, Karienne, rode alone, knowing she would soon be sent away.

Thrum, thrum, thrum: teardrops on leather; heartbeats; and the sly chuckle of unseen forces, who were, once again, about to set the families at each other's throats.

In a castle some leagues beyond, the hawk Pandion jingled her bells in protest, hobbled to her perch when she would rather be searching for game. She smelled Fantasme in the wind, and she would sooner slice his eyes open with her talons than see him at the marriage.

Dressed in yards of black veils chased with silver, Catherine, witch queen of the Cahors, prepared her daughter, Isabeau, for marriage to Jean de Deveraux—steadied her with sacrifices, raising bloody hands to their Goddess, while Isabeau wept with fear and hatred. She would marry Jean, but she would not keep him long.

Unless the Deveraux revealed the secret of the Black Fire to the Cahors, the proud warlock dynasty would be murdered in their beds before the year was dead. Catherine had sworn it; and Isabeau was her mother's child, raised to obey no husband and lord, only her liege lady, author of her birth. Despite the presence of Isabeau's father, Robert, women ruled in

House Cahors. Men were for getting children, and not much else. Dispensable, and pitiful.

The Present: Jer, Without Her

“Holly,” Jer Deveraux whispered as he drifted in darkness. And loneliness. And in dreams. . . .

*Are you going to Scarborough Fair?*

*If we could turn back time; if we could go back; if there was something I could have done differently . . . The path not taken . . .*

His life was nothing but regret. There was no joy in it, only pain.

*If I could see her again before I die . . . but if I can't, I would rather die . . .*

*Holly Cathers. Holly of the Cahors. You have bewitched me. Ruined me.*

*By the Horned God, damn you, love me still. I beg this of you.*

*Thrum, thrum, thrum,* the beating of his heart, the fluttering of his soul.

Seattle: Dr. Nigel Temar and Hecate

It was hard to believe that it had all started with a cat. Not just any cat either, but the resurrected familiar of a witch. The zombie cat that he had found in the ruins of a house, hissing and spitting and trapped under debris, had been the greatest gift he had ever received.

He had taken the feline, and studied it. He knew little about magic but much about science, and with the cat he was sure that he could bring his greatest dream to fruition. A lifetime of searching, and the answers he needed were trapped inside the tiny feline body.

Perhaps most amazing of all, he had discovered that the creature could not be re-killed. No matter what happened, it revived, just as angry, just as miraculous. *Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought him back.* He had no idea what had actually killed it, although from the violent reaction to water dishes, he guessed it had something to do with drowning. However, the doctor knew it wasn't satisfaction that had brought the hellcat back. Months of study had finally paid off: Two days before, he had finally replicated the resurrection—but with science, not magic. Now he had two angry revived cats in his lab, and he couldn't be happier.

Around him Seattle smoldered in ruins. The destruction caused by Michael Deveraux in his battle with Holly Cathers and her cousins had ensured that the city would be years recovering, if ever. Thousands were dead or missing, victims of unnatural storms and fiendish creatures. Yet still people wanted to carry on as usual, lying to themselves, pretending that the stuff of their nightmares wasn't a reality.

But as he walked to his office in one of the few buildings left intact at the University of Washington at

Seattle, Dr. Nigel Temar's thoughts were not on the victims. They weren't even on the two dead cats waiting for him in his lab. Nor were they on the twisted metal debris that once had been classrooms, or the gaping crater where the chemistry building had once stood, or the hundreds of impromptu memorials set up to honor students who had lost their lives there.

No, his thoughts were on one student only. Kari Hardwicke had been one of his grad students, and hers was the only presence he longed for, hers the only absence he felt.

He entered his building and made his way down three flights of stairs to his basement office. He unlocked the door, flicked on the lights, and quickly locked the door again behind himself. An unearthly yowling met his ears, and he smiled at the cat that was throwing himself against the bars of its cage. The other one glared sullenly from its enclosure, still not entirely used to its seemingly uncomfortable life-after-death.

All those months working so closely with Kari, prepping lectures, grading papers, discussing mythology. All he had wanted to do was take her in his arms and share with her the real secrets of his research. He might have given into the temptation, too, if it hadn't been for her ill-timed affair with the brooding warlock Jeraud Deveraux.

Nigel was nothing, though, if not patient. He

knew how to watch and to wait. He'd known when the warlock's passion had waned. He'd watched Kari's vain attempts to recapture her lover's interest.

Then something had happened that he couldn't have foreseen. Kari had gotten involved in an age-old feud between the warring houses of Deveraux and Cahors. He had lost track of her a couple of months back, but he felt confident that he could find her.

He swept a place clear of papers on his desk and then gently set down a laptop, *her* laptop—which he had finally managed to locate, beneath a huge pile of rubble that had once been the tiny office she'd shared with two other teaching assistants.

“Kari, dear, you won't believe what I've achieved,” he whispered as he stroked the case a moment; then he opened up the clamshell and hit the power button. He hoped he would be able to show it to her soon. If only he could find her.

An hour later he had scanned all her documents, skimmed through e-mail, and even launched her Instant Messenger. Although there was an address book, he realized he didn't know what names he should be looking for. Finally he started hitting her Web site favorites.

It took a while, but he finally found the site he was looking for. It was a Wicca site, nothing too interesting, but it had a forum that Kari had posted in. He was

able to view a string of communication between Kari and a user named Circle Lady. Recognizing that name, he opened her Instant Messenger and fired off a note to Circle Lady, who appeared to be offline. Then he returned to the Web site and sent a message to her there.

A moment later, the Instant Messenger pinged, and he turned to it with a flare of hope. He was disappointed to see that the response was not from Circle Lady, but someone calling themselves English Rose. He sent a brief response.

*"Hi."*

A moment later English Rose accused: *"You're not Kari."*

*"No, but I'm looking for her,"* he typed without hesitation.

*"I'm looking for Circle Lady,"* came the unhelpful reply.

*"Maybe they're in the same place?"* he suggested.

*"Goddess forbid . . . Kari's dead."*

He stared for a moment at the screen as the words registered. His stomach twisted; his heart felt numb. Dead? He should have known, should have felt it. For a long time he stared at the screen.

And then the yowling of the cats penetrated his fog of grief. There were worse things than dying. There was *staying dead*.

*"Are you sure?"*

*"Yes, I'm sorry."*

*"How long ago?"*

*"A couple of days."*

*"Where is the body?"*

He waited for the answer to this most important question. It was slow in coming, and for a minute he wondered if English Rose had decided not to tell him.

*"It hasn't been . . . recovered . . . yet."*

He caught his breath. Blinked.

"Kari," he whispered. "Don't go. Don't leave." He realized he was talking to her soul. Or trying to. Did he believe in such things?

*"I think we need to talk,"* he told English Rose.

In the end she wouldn't give him her phone number, so he gave her his university extension and waited impatiently for the phone to ring. When it finally did, he was actually a little surprised that his caller did in fact seem to be from England.

Coy as she had been in giving him her phone number, he was not surprised that she didn't seem willing to reveal anything else. He took another deep breath. He needed her to find Kari, and if she was right and Kari was dead, then time was of the essence.

"I know Kari was in over her head. She was caught up in the middle of a coven war that destroyed half of Seattle," he said.

“It didn’t do much for London, either,” she snorted.

Nigel closed his eyes. So, London it was. He tried to stay focused, make plans, behave like a scientist. “I need help transporting her body back here . . . for a proper burial in her hometown,” he said.

“Then I suggest you contact the local authorities. However, you might want to wait a few more days.”

“Ah, yes, the business of recovering the body.”

“Yes, quite.”

He could hear the suspicion in her tone. Of course, if he’d known about dead bodies before the police and had not contacted them, he’d be suspicious of people who asked questions too.

He decided to gamble. Tenuous as the link was, English Rose was the only connection he had to Kari. “The problem is, you see, I need the body to be preserved as best as possible. The family wants an open casket.”

“Why don’t we drop the games,” the woman said.

He sensed she had made a decision about him. Or was willing to. “Gladly. You first. You could tell me who you are.”

“English Rose is as good a name as any. And you, professor?”

“Since I can only call you by your screen name, how about I give you mine. I’m generally known as Dr. Frankenstein.”

He could hear her suck in her breath. “I think I understand you, Doctor. What you want, however, will be tricky.”

“I don’t care how it is done. All that I care about is retrieving the body quickly. I can pay you well for your time and your services.”

“In that case, I think we can work something out. Although I’m more interested in information than in money.”

He had gotten her attention, that was for sure. Although the cat he had found had been clearly resurrected by magic, he had been fairly sure that most witches didn’t possess such knowledge of resurrection.

And now he was certain of it.

#### Outside Cologne, Germany:

##### Holly, Pablo, Armand, Alex, and the Temple of the Air

Holly thought that she must not have a heart anymore, because if she did, it would have broken long ago. She had walked away from everyone she cared about: Amanda, Nicole, Uncle Richard, Jer, and Owen, Nicole’s baby. Well, Jer had walked away from all of them, leaving without a word. Nicole had been giving birth to Owen, and Holly had been forced to choose her destiny.

Her cousin Alex Carruthers had invited her to join forces with him to rout out more strongholds of the

Supreme Coven, bitter enemies of both the Mother Coven and Holly's people as well. The Mother Coven, made up of female and male witches who worshipped the Goddess, had tried to force Holly to claim allegiance. After she had reluctantly acquiesced, the Mother Coven had twice failed to protect Holly's coven against attacks from their bitterest enemies, the Deveraux.

Because of that, Holly had chosen to go with Alex. Amanda, Tommy, Richard, and Nicole all wanted peace. And they deserved it. They had done their bit for Coventry, as it were.

Philippe, the French male witch aligned with the Goddess, would have been willing to continue the fight, except that he was in thrall to Nicole, and so his first loyalty lay with her . . . and with the child, who might or might not be his. Nicole had been with him, Eli Deveraux, and her now-dead husband, James Moore. James had betrayed his father, Sir William Moore, leader of the Supreme Coven in London.

James had thought he'd killed his father, but at the last instant, a hideous demon had pushed out of Sir William's corpse like a huge cobra. The memory chilled Holly's blood, and made her wish that she, too, had stayed behind with Nicole and Amanda. Together, her twin cousins and she were the three Ladies of the Lily, said to be very powerful. Of the three, she possessed the most magical power . . . pur-

chased at terrible prices. Parts of her soul were dark now, as dark as that of any Deveraux or Moore.

Of those who had fought beside her, only Pablo and Armand accompanied her on her new journey, with Alex. Her long-lost cousin was fair-haired and blue-eyed, such a contrast to Jer Deveraux. And in more ways than one: Alex loved Holly. It was obvious in every smile, every look, in how he checked to make sure she was all right after they attacked enclaves and strongholds of warlocks dedicated to the Supreme Coven. How he conjured wine and good food for her, and made pillows and a mattress out of thin air for her, expending valuable magical energy that he might need in their next foray against the enemy.

And speaking of energy . . .

*I need a vacation*, Holly thought grimly as they trudged along under cover of darkness somewhere in the German countryside. *Holly Cathers, you just defeated your archnemesis, the man who killed your parents and made your life a living hell. What are you going to do?*

Apparently she was going to start the whole process all over again.

She should have chosen to go to Disneyland instead. As the group began to move even more slowly and silently, she wondered if it was too late to change her mind.