

Cat's Call

The Chronicles of Charlie Waterman

by
Natasha Duncan-Drake

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Series Page

Titles in "The Chronicles of Charlie Waterman" (In reading order)

Cat's Call
Cat's Creation
Cat's Confidence

Link to series webpage:

<https://www.wittegenpress.com/charlie-waterman>

Dedication

For my Papa, who has had one hell of a year, and my Mama, who had been there for him every step of the way through his illness. I love you both.

Acknowledgments

My thanks go to my sister Sophie and my husband Rob, without whom I could never do this writing that I love so much.

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1 AN INAUSPICIOUS BEGINNING

It was a beautiful summer's day. The sun was shining, there was the slightest breeze to keep the air moving and the park was calling Charlie's name. He hadn't said he'd definitely be there, but several of his friends had planned to meet up and kick a ball around.

He'd been helping his mum with some things in the morning, like the dutiful son he was, but now he planned to kick back and relax. It was his last summer before university. It was time to have fun. Glancing both ways up the road and seeing a gap in the traffic, he jogged across. The quickest route to the park was behind the Black Bull pub and down Baker's Lane, but, as he went to turn left, something caught his eye.

The old magic shop that had been there for years, but always seemed to be closed, had a sign in the window that actually read 'open' for once. There were many silly rumours about the shop: it was owned by a famous magician who only sold to invited guests; it was haunted by the ghost of a spurned magician's assistant which was why it could never be sold or let people in; it was a front for the local mafia. They got more ridiculous from there.

On impulse Charlie turned and headed for the door. He had almost worked there once, but circumstances had been against him. Of course, he, like everyone under twenty in the area, had always wanted to see inside.

The windows were full of brightly coloured scarves that gave an air of gayety, but the paint was peeling on the window frame, letting down the whole image. He peered in. It was dim beyond the scarves and he couldn't see anything. All a bit ominous. He hesitated and then laughed at how absurd he was being. He didn't believe in ghosts or eccentric magicians and he reached for the door handle.

After the brightness of outside, the interior of the shop was very dark. The first thing he had to do was stop to let his eyes adjust. The door shut behind him with a click and a final thunk. It made his heart beat a little bit faster for no reason he was willing to admit. Only after blinking a couple of times could he finally make out what was around him.

"You are not what I was expecting," a voice said from the other end of the shop.

Charlie could relate. The shop was nothing like he had thought. There were no tricks, just shelves and shelves of things that some people might think were actually magic. Charlie didn't believe in magic.

"You are too old," the voice continued.

Peering through the gloom and slight haze of incense that was tickling his nose, he finally made out an older woman standing at the other end of the shop behind a counter.

"Sorry," he said, "I thought you were open."

He was sure the sign had said 'open', but now he was second guessing himself. The urge to flee was high. For some reason the woman made him nervous. It probably had something to do with the penetrating stare she had aimed right at him.

"I've always meant to come in," he said, and he knew he was babbling, it was a bad habit. "I almost worked here once, when I was sixteen. Had a letter, but my bus broke down and I missed my interview. Um ... I'll be going then, sorry to have disturbed you."

The woman narrowed her eyes and made an odd humming sound. It was unsettling.

"No matter," she said just as he was about to turn away, "come in, look around, explore where your heart leads you."

The whole situation was getting weirder by the second. Clearly the woman had mysterious and eccentric down to a tee. Of course, now she had invited him in, Charlie couldn't just run away anymore. It would be rude.

He smiled awkwardly and escaped behind one of the shelving racks.

"How do you manage to get yourself into these situations, Waterman?" he muttered to himself.

The shelves were full of crystals and statues and all sorts of paraphernalia that held no interest for him whatsoever. Still, he looked around and did his best to pretend to browse. He didn't want to offend anyone, even if they were peculiar and burned really strange smelling incense. Come to think of it, especially then, because he had seen enough horror movies to know who not to annoy.

His footsteps sounded far too loud in the almost silent shop, and the smell of the place was making him want to sneeze, but he kept it up for a good few minutes. How long was long enough for propriety's sake? He had no idea. Wishing that there were rules to these things, he kept glancing at the door.

When he put his head round one of the shelves to see where the woman was, she was looking right at him. His heart skipped a beat. With yet another awkward smile he made his way to another set of shelves and prayed for deliverance.

He was slowly making his way back towards the door, past a floor to ceiling shelving unit, when something glinted at him. It made him stop because he was pretty sure there wasn't enough light in that part of the shop to make anything glint. As he stared at the dark shelf, whatever it was did it again. This time he could tell it was green.

He stepped towards the shelf before he even thought about it. Only as he reached one hand into the darkness did he pause. It was probably just a fire detector or an incense burner with a flashy light. He almost pulled his hand back, but then the flash came again, twice.

As the saying went, curiosity killed the cat, and Charlie was definitely a curious sort. Now he needed to know what it was. He reached into the shelf the rest of the way, right to the back where he thought the tiny light had come from, and his hand closed around something. He pulled it out before he could change his mind.

It fitted neatly into his closed fist, so he didn't think it was anyone's lost phone or something like that. When he uncurled his fingers a stab of disappointment ran through him. He had to have grabbed the wrong thing. In his palm was a small cat figurine, sitting up smartly like it was on duty. It didn't even look like it was painted, just made of brown clay.

Glancing back at the shelf he waited for the glint of light again.

A tickling in the palm of his hand made him look back down instead.

Shock lanced through his chest like cold fire, freezing him in place even as his heart beat madly. He swallowed hard.

The cat's eyes, which had been closed, contented slits in the clay, were open. The little creature's head was tilted up, looking at him, and its tail was gently twitching.

The cat gazed at him and he gazed back. It was all he could do.

Its eyes were hypnotic, even as a voice at the back of his brain screamed that this could not be real and something had to have happened to him. Those green orbs seemed to bore into his soul and freeze him solid.

Finally the cat blinked, but whatever held him did not release. He was left to watch as the tiny creature stood up and walked across his palm until its front paws were touching his wrist. A hysterical laugh was caught in his throat, because he could actually feel miniscule claws pricking at his skin.

His heart felt like it was trying to beat out of his chest. He had to gasp for tiny breaths that really weren't helping. Still he could not move.

Had he been drugged? Was he having a seizure? Were some of the crazy rumours about the shop true? Were they modern day slavers trading in teenagers? Was that why the woman thought he was too old?

His mind hummed with questions as he point blank refused to believe that what he was seeing was real.

When the little cat dug its claws into the delicate flesh of his inner wrist the pain definitely felt real. All he could manage was a quiet whimper as his body refused to obey any of the instincts firing through it. That was nothing, however, to the agony that shot up his arm as the figurine began to dig its paws under the upper level of skin. Blood trickled down over his wrist and it was finally enough to break his paralysis.

He threw his arm sideways, hitting one of the shelves behind him in his wild flailing. But he could not stop the pain. It was as if the little cat was glued to his arm. He tried to brush it off with his other hand, but that just hurt more and he finally cried out.

"Help!"

He didn't know what was happening, but he knew he needed assistance.

Stumbling backwards, he grabbed his arm with his other hand. His own flesh was betraying him.

The woman came round the end of the row and he held out his wrist desperately, but she did nothing. He wanted to yell at her, to demand she do something, but heat ran through his veins and took any breath he had away. His legs went weak and the room spun as he shuddered from head to foot.

"Help," was the best he could do in a tiny whisper as he fell to his knees.

His vision faded out, and then in, and then out again, even as he began to pitch forward. He never even knew when he hit the floor.

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