



Excerpt from “The Cat”

I'd have to say this Trevan fellow at least shows some interest in helping to build up this brand-new kingdom of his, more so than most of my fellow Shifterai have shown an interest in building up the City at the heart of our own land. In that much, he and I are more alike than the men who pursued me in the past. We both dream of making things better, of reclaiming the potential of our homes.

But where he gets the idea I'll just fall into his claims of Prophecy and Destiny... I don't fall for just anyone, and he's not even a real shapeshifter. He'd have to prove himself twice as worthy as the next-best candidate back home, just for that alone!

Her fingers had grown idle with the depth of her thoughts. Nudging them back into stroking his fur, Trevan wished she wasn't quite so introspective. Or rather, he wished she weren't so *quietly* introspective.

It was widespread knowledge among mages that the Gods had banned spells that could read another person's thoughts, for that was the last possible bastion of privacy in the world. There were potions that could drug a person's mind into suggestible compliance, and spells to control their body, but nothing that could permit a mage to read someone's mind. All he could do was wait and see if she deigned to speak again.

“I wish you could talk,” she stated abruptly, startling him. *He'd* been thinking the exact same thing. Her fingers raked the wrong way through his fur, fluffing it pleurably before she smoothed it back down again. “I'd ask you all about this silly idea of some Prophecy controlling my life. I'd demand all the details, so I

could analyze them minutely. I've gone through all of it in my head, what little I know about your human...well, I don't know if he's *your* human, but I'll bet you know more about him than I do. Even if you're just a cat."

She's thinking about me, Trevan realized with a blink. *Yesssss!* He purred and nuzzled her firmly in encouragement. *Think some more about me! Think positively! Think that I'm a wonderful man whom you'd love to get to know, and think about staying here happily on the Isle with me!*

Amara chuckled as the cat, being given more direct attention from her once more, went into a purring, pacing, writhing ecstasy against her fingers. He even licked her hand several times, his rough-raspy tongue tickling her skin. She scritchd her fingers through his ruff, rubbed at his ears, and stroked him from scalp to tail-tip. From the kneading of his paws, the purring of his throat, and the narrowing of his eyes, he was in feline heaven under her hand.