

Mojo

My friend D. and I were at the bar when she turned to me and said, "I'm telling you, girl. You got mojo." For a split second I wondered, *who the hell is Jo?* And then I got her drift.

Mojo: black magic, supernatural charm.

I considered her proposition. Certainly, I'm predisposed to superstition. As a child, I performed near neck-breaking stunts in order to avoid sidewalk cracks for the sake of my own mother's back, and as an adult, I've been known to avoid black cats, broken mirrors, and orphaned pennies that are face down on the street.

My ex-girlfriend had a habit of saving me from the dreadful mistake of walking around a pole on the opposite side from her. At the last possible moment, she would grab my arm, pull me to her, and exclaim, "Don't split the pole! It's bad luck. Our fates will be separated. You'll create a serious breach in our relationship." After she left me for a skinny blond chick with bad teeth, I surmised that I'd split all those random poles in our path perhaps one too many times.

So, I believe in the mystical and unforeseen, especially when it comes to love. But D's assertion that I possessed mojo was an entirely new supposition, which had a kind of world-view-changing effect. Up until this moment, I'd been seeing the world as a series of disasters and good fortunes, sometimes avoidable or unattainable, but always hovering there on the wings of causation, just waiting to happen. What if I didn't simply create my own luck? What if, instead, I possessed supernatural, psychic powers over people and events? What if I, truly, magically, controlled my own fate?

I was swilling on this notion of my magical powers, and it tasted a lot like my beer, when I realized that D's mojo comment was simply a nice way to tell me that she's mystified by my unlikely appeal to women.

She clarified, "Yeah, I don't know how you do it with the ladies, but chicks just dig you. And don't get me wrong. I mean, you're cute and fun and all, but I just don't get it. It's got to be mojo or sum'um."

D's compliment aside, I was poised to object to the entire premise and launch a defense that centered on my recent difficulties in getting a date, when the waitress suddenly appeared and made D. seem like a prophetess.

"Someone's got a crush on you," the waitress said, as she surveyed me.

"Who?" I asked, looking around the bar.

"I can't say yet, but she thinks you might be too young. Are you over twenty-one?"

D. had a good laugh at that one and assured the waitress on my behalf that I was well past the legal drinking age.

It took only two more waitress-mediated queries before an attractive, dark-haired woman approached our table and introduced herself, "Hi, I'm Madam Fortuna."

Not really. Her name was something like Rachel or Leigh or Clare. But when she first introduced herself I couldn't help but notice that she was wearing dangly, gold earrings, with coin-like baubles at the end. They weren't huge or tacky or unattractive, but they induced in me a sudden vision, both strange and familiar, as if I'd seen her previously in a past life or maybe just on TV.

Her head was covered in a colorful scarf; her gold-coin earrings reflected the dim light. Before her was a murky crystal ball. Low-voiced and knowing, she spoke to me: "You're going to meet a dark-haired stranger."

That's when D. skedaddled, and Madam Fortuna and I ordered another beer and got to the business of getting to know one another.

Now, I wasn't exaggerating about my difficulties in getting a date. Up until Madam Fortuna's appearance, I'd been trying my luck with a woman whose sexy, cat-like way of sashaying across a room always produced in me the sudden urge to pounce on her in my own cat-like way. Thus, I named her Sex Kitty.

For the last two months, my relationship with Sex Kitty had reminded me of the one I had with a professional carnival worker who I met on Long Island. Like Sex Kitty, Sex Carny was sexy, but she had rough edges and big hair.

"Knock three down, and take home a prize. Knock three down, and take a prize home. Knock three down and take me home," she barked as I sauntered past her booth. I blew ten bucks trying to knock down those damn milk bottles. Despite her flirty smile and a well-placed hand on my arm, the only thing I took home that day was a stuffed parrot.

Things with Sex Kitty had been like that. I kept throwing my best pitches, she kept handing me stuffed animals. But the lethal blow fell one night as the two of us drank Amstel Lights and talked at the bar among friends. Our conversation spun around like a wheel of fortune at the fair, at first quickly and then slowly, click, click, clicking along until, quite undeniably, there it was: "My friends were asking if we were going to date and I told them..." The buzzer sounded, the audience groaned, her words were lit in neon: "...we're just friends." Thus, tragically, my hopes died at the lips of Sex Kitty's "Just Friends" kiss of death.

So, when Madam Fortuna sat down at my table, bought me a Guinness and ordered herself an Amstel Light, it'd been awhile since I'd had a date, even longer since I'd gotten lucky and gotten laid. I wore my desperation like a white, well-pressed shirt in a dark room, and I immediately noticed that my standards for a potential date had morphed into vague descriptions like "clean" and "nice."

Luckily, Madam Fortuna was both clean and nice, and after a half-hour of polite and easy banter, I determined that I liked her well-enough to ask her out. Plus, thanks to my new D.-inspired consciousness, I was now cloaked in mojo.

I had one phone call, two voice mail messages, and a week to conjure the possibilities that might unfold with Madam Fortuna. The date was set for Friday, and the next few days moved like a boring book with a long plot, until the night before, when Sex Kitty called.

Funny, that Sex Kitty. She was phoning me more often than seemed necessary for our "just friends" status, and after a meandering conversation in which she invited herself to my house, I began to suspect that the wheel of fortune was taking me for another spin.

So, the night before my date with Madam Fortuna, I was sitting on my couch with Sex Kitty, half-listening to her conversation and half-trying to conjure my magical powers. I lit a candle. I don't know why, except I figured that fire was probably an essential ingredient to any good spell. But nothing much was happening until Sex Kitty, rather nonchalantly, said, "And I told her that if you'd ever ask me out, I'd say 'yes.'"

I was a novice magician. I had untapped talent, perhaps, but skilled precision, definitely not. I swept my cloak of conversation over Sex Kitty's come-on, and it quickly vanished into thin air. The disappearing act was perhaps forgivable, but body contortionist that I am I immediately put my foot in my mouth and garbled around the flesh, "I have a date tomorrow night." Needless to

say, Sex Kitty became Cold Kitty, right before my very eyes, and I was left alone for the rest of the evening to dwell on the feeble nature of my so-called supernatural powers.

Not one to succumb to initial failures, I plowed ahead on my date with Madam Fortuna, eager to try out some new spells and sleights-of-hand.

After sushi and drinks at the bar, we went back to my house to get stoned, and I immediately offered her a beer. "I bought you some Amstel Light," I told her. "I noticed you were drinking it at the bar."

"You bought me beer?" she asked.

"Yeah, I thought if you wanted to come over, I should have the beer you like. So..."

"Oh," she said as she took the beer from my hand and began to guzzle it.

I was shocked when she set the beer on the table and more than half had vanished. That's when I noticed that Madam Fortuna was already quite drunk, and from the way she was sucking on the bong, her destiny for the night was also to be completely and utterly stoned.

So, I decided not to light the candle, knowing that I probably didn't need much magic. But the mojo must have been strong in me that night because before I'd gotten a turn at the bong, Madam Fortuna had switched seats and was sitting on my lap. Not one to question the sly hand of fate, I immediately began to make out with her. She, in turn, whispered a few pornographic prophecies in my ear. I was trying to determine the best way to make us disappear from my couch and reappear on my bed, when Madam Fortuna, suddenly and unpredictably, stopped.

"So, you're not looking for anything serious," she said.

I blinked at her. "No, I'm not." I replied.

That's when she launched into a well-rehearsed monologue about how she'd had a lot of one night stands and how she was holding out for sex with someone who was interested in something serious.

Not one to press the issue, I supported her argument. "Yes," I agreed, "You should wait until you've found someone really special."

And that's when she kissed me again and pulled me down on top of her on the couch. Though admittedly confused, I decided that the enigmatic ways of mojo weren't to be trifled with, and I, quite predictably, went with the flow.

She'd performed a disappearing act with both my shirt and hers when she asked if I wanted to move to my bedroom. Thinking that finally this was the moment to bring out all my

magical props, I quickly gathered our drinks, some candles and the CD player, as she slipped into the bathroom.

Now, I don't know what mystical events unfolded in the bathroom, but when Madam Fortuna reappeared, she was wearing all of her clothes again, gathering her purse, and saying that she was going to go home. I should have known to take a final bow and let her leave, but instead I pressed both a conversation and my luck.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"What do you mean what's going on? I told you I'm not interested in having sex unless it's with someone who wants something serious."

"Yeah, you said that, but then you started making out with me again and wanted to go to the bedroom. So, I guess I'm a little confused. What happened?"

"Oh," she replied. "I changed my mind."

Such are the winds of Madam Fortuna, which quite suddenly blew fierce and cold. "I mean, it seems like all you're interested in is sex anyway. It's like you're some kind of Rico Suave with your music and dim lights and smooth ways. You even went out and bought my beer because you were so sure I would come back to your house."

Magically, at that moment, which was a quarter past two o'clock in the morning, the phone rang.

It was Sex Kitty.

"What'cha doin'?" Sex Kitty asked, as if her unexpected phone call at that time of night was completely normal. "Omigod," she continued before I could answer, "Are you still on your date?"

"Yeah."

"I hope I didn't interrupt anything."

"No," I lied.

That's when Sex Kitty launched into a story about how she'd just been kicked out of a bar for ho-fighting with two chicks twice her size.

"And then the bitch threw her drink at me!" she exclaimed. "I'm soaked in beer! My halter top is completely drenched!"

Now, I was a novice magician, but I was learning quickly. "Really," I replied. "You're halter is soaked with beer. You should come over and show me."

Admittedly, if I'd had more time and if Madam Fortuna wasn't sitting in my living room, I might have managed to come up with a better enticement, but Sex Kitty, no doubt under the influence of my psychic abilities, simply replied, "Okay, I'll be there in a minute."

That's when I heard my front door open and then close. I hung up the phone, ran into the front yard and chased after Madam Fortuna who was already getting into her car. Seeing my distress that she was leaving without saying goodbye, she kissed me a few a more times and told me not to feel bad, which luckily I didn't.

From my front porch, I watched as Madam Fortuna drove away in her car towards her sexual destiny with someone else, and then I congratulated myself on my newly harnessed powers when Sex Kitty drove past her and pulled into my driveway.

Sex Kitty sashayed across the yard and into my house. Sure enough, her halter was wet, clinging to her skin and accentuating her breasts. I was thinking about how best to perform my second act for the evening when, in a mystical fashion, Sex Kitty peeled off her top and asked, "Could you loan me a shirt?" She smiled a brazen Sex Kitty smile.

"Sure," I replied. "Would you like a drink? I've got Amstel Light."

"Omigod, you got my beer!" She exclaimed. "That's so sweet!"

"Yeah," I said, smiling.

I didn't pretend to understand the fickle finger of fortune nor the mysterious and supernatural ways of love, but that night, when I finally kissed Sex Kitty and settled against her now t-shirted breasts, I knew D. was right. Definitely, there was mojo going on.