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Jack's House

By Jay Lake

23 December 2002

This was Joshua's favorite time of year. The sun fell blinding white on the snowfields, and the dancing breeze swept ice crystals down from ultramontane glaciers. Little orange butterflies rose like fire-lit clouds from the dark forest verges to spread across the snow, each a spark of eye-bright warmth against the cold that always surrounded Jack's House.

The young Rat had window duty that day, eighth gable attic, staring through the rippled, bubble-filled glass across the snow to the northwest. He stood watch, lest the Master finally return, or Dogs attack. Fear was a function of proximity -- Cats often climbed the stairs to slaughter Rats in the carpeted halls; patrolling Dogs caught only those occasional, unwary fools who wandered outside; while the Master was a distant divinity, powerful for the most part in the threat of His absence. Always dreaming of the Cheese, the Rats feared little in this House other than Cats and Dogs.

Watching from his high window, Joshua saw Old Lenox the Cat stumble away from Jack's House. Old Lenox was a piebald tom who sometimes served as ambassador to the Rats, when the myriad wars demanded the occasion of truce. He had even done Joshua a kindness or two over the seasons. The tom carried a spear in one hand, a wineskin slung across his shoulder.

"Where are you going, old man Cat?" whispered Joshua. It was an old nestling's rhyme. He continued, lost in memories of warm seasons with his littermates among the shredded cardboard and wood shavings:

"All dressed up just like that.
I'm going out, little Rat,
To die by the light of day.
Every Cat must die that way."

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

You can never let anyone suspect, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest times, she had never really feared for him; he had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what women did to men, but she was a princess, and he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch," she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

[Archived Fiction Dating back to 9/1/00](#)

