

The Cover Model's Contract

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The Cover Model's Contract by Crystal Brewton

The Cover Model

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To Chris. Thanks
for the inspiration
and the best of luck
in your future.

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Caesarius frowned at the paper in his hand. Ellen's Cove Publications had managed yet *another* delay. Another legal maneuver that would keep them out of court.

The growl was so quiet that he didn't even know he'd made the noise. He had been fighting with them for over a year now and had been taken around in so many circles that he was ready to just give up. They were a big time online publisher and he was just another 'pretty face' they used to sell their crappy, trashy and cheap romances.

And they were not above using his image without his permission. How many times did he have to demand that they stop using his pictures to sell books?

Caesarius looked at the letter from his attorney again. Apparently many, many times was the answer, while securing an injunction against him, which kept him from being on any other crappy, trashy and cheap romance covers while they were at it.

Ellen's Cove had all but ended his modeling career. He hadn't been in front of a camera in a year.

And it was *really* beginning to piss him off.

He calmly folded the letter and put it back in its envelope. The time had come for some top quality revenge. He wanted his career back and he knew just who to contact to make it happen.

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Caesarius's father had been missionary to a small African country that civilized nations didn't care about but spent good money to tour. The natives didn't care. Western dollars were always welcome and the ghostly pale white people who visited their country often had more of it than they knew what to do with.

What was shocking to the widowed Caesar and the son that carried a variation on his name was that the natives weren't grunting, dangerous animals in need of salvation. They first charmed the young missionary and his young son, then converted them. In return, Caesar taught young and old alike in the village right along with his own son.

The village witch doctor had only one child. She was his heart and, more importantly, his helper. She and Caesarius shared a birthday – ironically the same year, day and time – creating a bond between them.

So it was no surprise to anyone when the witch doctor insisted on a joining between the two of them. Not a marriage. A joining. Of their minds, spirits and, of course, their bodies.

Caesarius was a virgin when the ritual began and he knew that Kamaria was as well. They sat across from each other with a smallish pile of wood between them. Caesarius could barely see Kamaria for the pounding rain.

He knew what the ritual would entail. Senghor, Kamaria's father and the tribe's witch doctor, had told him. But Caesarius wondered anyway and translated the Swahili into English as Senghor shouted into the pouring rain for all the village to hear.

“I ask your blessings before all the tribe.” Senghor looked straight into the rain. “Join my daughter with this man.”

Caesarius almost looked around before he realized the man that the witch doctor was talking about was *him*. He was still young by Western standards. He'd still be in high school in the

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States, for example. But among these people, he was a man. An adult.

“The union will make the tribe strong.” Senghor continued to shout into the darker than dark sky above. “Give the sign!” he commanded.

When the lightening struck, Caesarius jumped right along with everyone else except for Senghor. He simply followed the strike with his eyes to the pile of soaked wood between Caesarius and Kamaria.

The dripping wet wood burst into flames before all of the villagers. If there was a collective gasp, it was drowned out by the rain that continued to fall in sheets. The fire *should* have been doused immediately. It should not have been able to start in the first place. Caesarius stared through the flames at Kamaria, who was staring right back at him.

“The gods have spoken!” Senghor's voice spoke into Caesarius's ear and he jumped. The witch doctor smiled at him. “My daughter has been given to you by the gods. Treat her well.”

Caesarius nodded once, not having the beginnings of an idea what to say.

Senghor nodded again and the rain stopped as if it had not been falling the whole day long.

Kamaria stood and walked around the roaring fire. She stood looking at Caesarius as if expecting something. He stared at her until her father spoke one final time into his ear.

“Take your woman,” he commanded.

Caesarius blinked, suddenly realizing what was expected of him. “But...” he protested, knowing his face was as red as his hair. “I don't...”

Senghor laid a hand on his shoulder. “You do,” he informed the stammering teen. “All men do.”

And suddenly, he was alone in the clearing, save for Kamaria and the roaring fire.

She was still looking down at him. Caesarius stood and looked at her. She smiled up at him. “I am *yours* now,” she said into the sudden stillness. “And you are *mine*.”

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Caesarius climbed the stairs to the second floor of his home, thinking about that night ten years ago. Kamaria had taken control of him that night. His mind, his spirit and his body. Her power over him was much like the power of the moon over the earth – all encompassing. After all, he remembered that her name did mean “like the moon”.

He found her in the attic, which was cool and comfortable despite the heat of the California summer. She had her back to him and was looking out of the tall attic window onto the lone road below.

The house was custom built and completely paid for. Caesarius was not angry about not modeling because he needed the money. He was rich and had been since before he had returned to the States with Kamaria three years before.

He was angry because he loved his job. Loved modeling. Enjoyed the looks he'd gotten and the fantasies he knew he was a part of as romance readers touched themselves at the words that his image brought to life for them. Being a fantasy lover to thousands of women...

He put his arms around the lover he had in reality and nuzzled her neck through her long, coarse hair. While it looked rough, it was the softest thing he'd ever touched, excepting maybe her skin. He ran his hands along her arms as he took a deep breath – her scent alone making him relax.

“The letter come.” Kamaria's voice was as deep as the ocean, yet retained a femininity that staggered Caesarius's mind.

“Yes,” he murmured, between nips of her neck. “Just like you said it would.”

“Is a year now.” She pointed out and turned in his arms. She looked up at him with her deep, fathoms deep black eyes. “The white law not help you.” A spark flared, then vanished in her

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eyes.

Caesarius sighed. “No, the law hasn't helped me,” he agreed. “And it *has* been a year. I promised you I'd give it a year and if nothing happened, I'd let you help me.”

Kamaria raised herself slightly and touched her lips to his. “I help you...” she whispered. “But first we need the power. Revenge need much power.” She ran her hands along his well muscled arms. “We make the power and we get you justice.”

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Ellen Standish sat at her desk and opened her email. She smiled when she saw that her cover artists had been hard at work. At least eleven graphics files were waiting for her. She knew that two of them featured Caesarius James, the artist she had bested in court yet again the day before.

She didn't even *try* and suppress the chuckle as she moved the mouse pointer toward one of the emails that she knew included his picture. Caesarius was one of the hottest cover models she had ever set eyes on. He would have been perfect if he'd only been a blond-haired and blue eyed stud, instead of a red head with green eyes, but graphics programs could do wonders these days. He was a blond on every cover once her cover artists were done with him.

His refusal to undergo a simple dye job and wear colored contacts had only been the beginning of the problems that Ellen and her company, Ellen's Cove, had with the sexy cover model. Another was his insistence to be paid on time and in full. Sometimes that simply was not possible, especially for a fledgling company, like Ellen's Cove had been for three years. Caesarius had been their very first cover model. He'd just come from some wild and uncivilized African country Ellen couldn't even find on a map.

Ellen had conned him into signing an exclusive five year deal with her company. She had been so proud of herself, too.

So when he'd become more trouble than his perfect muscles and nice crotch had been worth, she had dumped him, but kept him tied into his contract with her. She took the thousands of pictures she already had and ran with them, so to speak.

When he tried to sue, she realized that he was rich and could probably keep her tied up in court for years. And had, for a year so far. But she had some family money of her own that she put

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into her attorney, who delayed and delayed and delayed in court. He could do it for another two years as far as she was concerned. Just to keep Caesarius off of anyone else's covers.

She wanted him to herself. Especially since he had refused to do her in the bedroom... or on her desk... or in her car ...

She opened the first email to see what the cover would look like and gasped. The body of the email said "God this boy is HOT!" but the picture was a black square.

Ellen replied with, "Your picture is a black square. Fix it NOW. The book is due out in two days!"

She moved on to the next one and found the same thing. A black square. All of the covers with Caesarius were unreadable.

With a growl of impatience, she reached for the phone to call the artists who had messed up her pictures. Before she could lift the receiver, the phone rang. She picked it up out of reflex.

"Ellen's Cove," she almost snapped, knowing she sounded impatient and unprofessional.

"Free Caesarius..." came a deep female voice.

Hearing the name of the model that she was most upset with but still relied on did not help Ellen's temper.

"His contract expires in two years," she snapped, then demanded, "Who is this, anyway? His agent? Did he get a new lawyer?"

"I am his soul mate," the voice explained. "You free him or you pay."

Ellen scoffed. "Honey, you don't scare me. And you *may* be his latest fuck buddy, but I can assure you that you are no soul mate. No man as sexy as Caesarius is has a soul mate," she scoffed. "And your voice is so deep you have got to be a man and Caesarius is no faggot," she added, even though she had no idea whether Caesarius was straight or gay and didn't care.

"You will free him." This was not a request.

Ellen snorted. "Yea. In two years when his contract is up Not *before*." And she slammed the phone down.

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She could not believe what she was seeing. The heat reaching her was intense. Even the fire fighters seemed to be having a hard time getting close enough to put it out.

Another explosion made her and all of the other observers hit the wet and sooty ground as if they were under attack from an unseen enemy. The shock wave rattled the ground and the glass rained down on their heads. The fire was definitely out of control.

Beside Ellen, a gigantic woman in a bright pink moo-moo was crying and staring at the building in horror. She was Emily LaGrassi and she was Leonard LaGrassi's sister.

Leonard was in the burning building, which concerned Ellen, but not as much as the fact that Leonard was in the burning building with photographs, prints, and a computer filled to the brim with pictures of Caesarius James.

Leonard had been the keeper of all of the master files. He had been the main photographer for Ellen's Cove. So it was more than just Caesarius's pictures that were burning up, but all of her top cover models and their files – to include the calender of all of them that was due to be released in a week.

Ellen ignored the fat woman crying at her elbow for her brother and she reached for her cellular phone.

“Ann, tell me you have the backups that Leonard kept on his computer,” Ellen demanded when her call was answered, with no greeting whatsoever.

There was a pause that Ellen didn't like one bit. “Um, I was just about to call you,” Ann Calter replied, sounding almost frightened. “Can't you just get them from Leonard?”

“Leonard's *dead!*” Ellen screamed. “In a fire that took all my pictures and his goddamned *computer* with it... He was going to buy a waterproof safe to keep the backup drive in – next *month!*”

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She could almost see Ann cowering at the tone of her voice and found she didn't care. This was her *business* that was burning down fifty feet away from her.

"Oh..." Ann said, lamely. "Well I can't help you, Ellen. I wish I *could*..."

Ellen cut her off. "What do you *mean*, you *wish* you could help me?" she demanded. "You have the only other fucking *backups*!"

Ann cleared her throat, anxiously. "That's what I was about to call you about," she began. "I got a *virus* this morning. It wiped out my whole fucking hard drive. Everything. I've been trying all day to fix it, but ..."

For a moment, Ellen was completely speechless. "Who else has pictures?" she demanded.

"You said it *yourself*..." Ann all but whispered. "Only me and Leonard." Ellen heard her swallow. "We're just going to have to start over."

Ellen screamed so loudly that even the firemen fighting the fire heard her anguish.

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Ellen watched as the movers moved the last of her office furniture. She had never known it could happen so fast. First the fire and then the rest.

She'd tried to remain strong throughout. She knew it had to be Caesarius. Somehow he was behind it all. Probably some weird African voodoo curse he'd picked up while living among the savages.

The fire was only the beginning. After the phone call with the 'soul mate' had come the phone call about Leonard's place burning down. Then the virus that attacked Ann's computer and ruined everything...

Only the beginning.

The other cover artists had agreed to shoot more covers to replace the ones that had been lost, but Ellen knew that they weren't the hottest models. They were hot, but they weren't Caesarius James. Women didn't snatch up and buy the books whose covers they were on without a care about the words between the covers. They weren't mesmerized by the fantasy man on the cover so much that it didn't matter what sort of crappy writing graced the inside of the book.

And none of her authors were all that great, truth be told. They wrote the same old shit. Sometimes it was a hunk that was a vampire. Sometimes a werewolf or shapeshifter of some sort. Sometimes a Lord or Laird or some man from a fantastical history. Sometimes a cop or a fireman. The stories were all the same. Depressingly, predictably, disgustingly the same.

Caesarius's covers made them magical. Women would buy anything with Caesarius on the cover. They didn't care if he was a Laird or a cop or a wererat, as long as he was shirtless. Better even when he as damn near naked.

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But the books that had his cover on them weren't enough to keep the whole *company* afloat. And the boat began to sink.

None of the books she published after the fire sold. A few copies – probably bought by the lousy author and her mother – but no more. Authors stopped submitting. Even when Ellen would have taken whatever crap they bolted out, like she always had. Models demanded to be freed of their obligations to Ellen's Cove and Ellen had no choice but to set them free. There were no books for them to model for, anyway.

Six months later, here she was. No book sales, no authors, no models, watching movers repossess her office before the landlord evicted the company.

That wasn't *entirely* true.

She had *one* cover model left.

Caesarius James.

And *he* had cursed her.

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Caesarius laughed as Kamaria towed dry his long and unruly red hair. He pulled her into his arms and twirled her around, shaking his nearly dry hair as he did, making it even more wild looking.

He looked down at her and found himself, not for the first time, captivated by her dark eyes.

"I love you," he confessed, suddenly and for the millionth time, easily. "I love being yours."

Kamaria smiled right back at him. "And I love you back. Love to be *yours* as well." And she pulled him into a deep and passionate kiss.

The sound of the doorbell below interrupted the increasing passion between them. Caesarius groaned as he and Kamaria broke their kissing and caressing.

"Who is *that*?" he demanded, leaving the bathroom, entering the bedroom, grabbing a pair of jeans and slipping into them.

Kamaria laughed melodiously as she leaned in the doorway between the bathroom and the bedroom. "That is ukulunga," she announced with complete certainty.

Caesarius raised his eyebrows. "Justice?" he translated the African word. He nodded in understanding. "It *has* been six months..." he murmured. He walked over to Kamaria and kissed her soundly just as the doorbell rang again.

He walked down the stairs and opened the door. Ellen's eyes widened to see him standing tall and proud in a pair of jeans and nothing else, his red hair gleaming in the morning light.

"Ellen?" he greeted her, sounding only mildly curious about why she might be there.

"Take it *off*," Ellen demanded.

Caesarius raised his eyebrows. "I beg your pardon?"

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Ellen pushed her way into the house and marched into the living room. “This fucking *curse!*” she said, turning to see Caesarius closing the front door and walking calmly to join her.

“Curse?” he shrugged. “I don't know...”

“You know *exactly* what I mean and don't *tell* me you didn't do it!” Ellen hissed, her face turning red. “You lived in Africa for how long? Don't tell me those bush bunnies didn't teach you all about curses and voodoo and shit!”

Caesarius laughed out loud. “I lived in Africa from the age of five until three years ago,” he told her. “But no one ever taught me how to put curses on people. White people *can't* put curses on people. The gods have not so blessed us.”

Ellen swallowed so hard that Caesarius could see it, as if she were a man. “So you had it *put* on,” she finally said. “Now take it *off!*” Her voice suddenly took on a tone of desperation. “I'll do *anything*. See?” She took some folded sheets out of her purse. “This is your contract. I'm *releasing* you from your obligations to Ellen's Cove Publications.” She opened the sheets. “Just sign there.” She thrust the papers out at him as if they were a shield.

Caesarius took the sheets and read them over as he walked to the desk in the corner of the living room. Satisfied, he took a pen off of the desk and signed the release with his back to Ellen.

When he turned and offered her the sheets, she snatched them up like a starving woman. She breathed a sigh of relief to see he'd signed where he was supposed to.

“Now take it *off.*” she demanded.

“I *told* you, Ellen...” Caesarius began.

“You had *someone* put this curse *on* me and I want it *off!*” she screamed.

“Only death free you.”

Ellen turned and faced the voice she had heard six months ago over the phone.

“Ellen...” she heard Caesarius's voice behind her. “I would like you to meet my soul mate, Kamaria.” the smile and laughter in his voice was unmistakable.

Ellen gaped as Kamaria raised her hand towards her.

She tried to inhale and found it impossible.

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Her body grew cold as she fell to her knees before the African native.

“Revenge is best served cold...” the black woman whispered.

And Ellen was *very* cold by the time her heart stopped a moment later.



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About the Author

Crystal Brewton – also known as the Indie Author Extraordinaire – has crafted rich novels and stories on nearly every subject line, spanning from erotic romance to horror to sheer revenge. Some of her best-known tales include her popular *Cassandra's Cops* series, her science fiction piece *Caeli's Daniachew*, and the erotic short story collection *Rainy Day Confessions*. Brewton, who grew up in Chicago, currently lives in sunny California with her three children. *Caeli's Daniachew* was nominated for the 2006 CBS Parallax Award. View all of Ms. Brewton's works and much more online at www.crystalbrewton.biz
