



The Curse (Belador)

By Sherrilyn Kenyon, Dianna Love

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The third exciting novel in the popular *Belador* paranormal series, featuring a league of international warriors with extraordinary abilities who rise up to save mankind from supernatural terrorists.

Evalle Kincaid will fight to the death for her supernatural friends.

But when Sherrilyn Kenyon and Dianna Love's tough-as-nails heroine reveals her darkest secret, who among those she had trusted will be left standing?

With the freedom of an entire race hanging in the balance, Evalle has two days to make good on a promise that she suddenly has no hope of fulfilling when demonic Svart Trolls invade Atlanta. She takes a leap of faith, seeking help from the one man who recently put Evalle in his crosshairs—Black Ops specialist Isak Nyght. While trying to stop the bloody troll-led gang wars, Evalle unwittingly exposes a secret that endangers all she holds dear and complicates her already tumultuous love life with the mysterious Skinwalker, Storm. But when Evalle discovers she's the number one target in the Medb coven's ruthless plan to destroy all Beladors, the deadly Alterant is forced to make a game-changing decision with no time left on the clock.

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Editorial Review

Review

The precarious action and genuine emotion in THE CURSE will continuously leave the reader breathless (SingleTitles Books Reviews)

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About the Author

Sherrilyn Kenyon is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of several series, including the Bureau of American Defense novels *BAD Attitude*, *Phantom in the Night*, *Whispered Lies*, and *Silent Truth* and the Belador series that includes *Blood Trinity*, *Alterant*, and *The Curse*. There are more than 25 million copies of her books in print in over one hundred countries. She lives with her family near Nashville, Tennessee. Visit her website at SherrilynKenyon.com.

New York Times bestseller Dianna Love once dangled over a hundred feet in the air to create unusual marketing projects for Fortune 500 companies. She now writes high-octane romantic thrillers, young adult and urban fantasy. Fans of the bestselling Belador urban fantasy series will be thrilled to know DEMON STORM (book 5) is available and WITCHLOCK (book 6) will be available June 2015. Dianna's Slye Temp romantic thriller series launched to rave reviews with five books so far and more coming in 2015. Look for her books in print, e-book and audio. On the rare occasions Dianna is out of her writing cave, she tours the country on her BMW motorcycle searching for new story locations. Dianna lives in the Atlanta, GA area with her husband who is a motorcycle instructor and with a tank full of unruly saltwater critters. **AuthorDiannaLove.com** or Join her **Dianna Love Street Team** on Facebook and get in on the fun!

Belador Reading order:

BLOOD TRINITY (#1)

ALTERANT (#2)

THE CURSE (#3)

RISE OF THE GRYPHON (#4)

DEMON STORM (#5)

WITCHLOCK (coming June 2015)

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"..non-stop tense action, filled with twists, betrayals, danger, and a beautiful sensual romance. As always with Dianna Love, I was on the edge of my seat, unable to pull myself away."

~~Barb, The Reading Cafe

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The Curse

ONE



Answer me or accept death,” a female demanded.

The smooth texture of her voice was familiar to him, but not the dangerous edge in her tone. Storm floated in a timeless cocoon of peaceful darkness, content to stay here if not for that disturbing ultimatum.

“This is your last chance,” she snapped at him, fury powering her words. “I would never have thought you a coward when it came to facing pain, Storm. Speak now or prepare for eternity.”

Time. Pain. Death.

Understanding crept into his wavering consciousness. He focused on his body, or lack of one now that he identified this murky sensation as being suspended between life and death. He’d been here once years ago, as a teen.

Threads of awareness pulled together, weaving a tapestry until an image formed of the woman speaking. Kai.

Storm forced his heavy eyelids open to find her. His guardian spirit sat with crossed legs, surrounded by her favorite meadow, where he always met her. He sat in the same position across from her. Acres of wildflowers swayed gently in a soft breeze that swirled with the fresh scent of outdoors. Sunshine blazed overhead, showering golden light across Kai’s honey-colored skin and coal-black hair that fell past her waist, sliding over the butter-soft deerskin dress. She sometimes took the form of a shriveled crone. He preferred this younger Kai.

Still fighting his way through a haze of confusion, Storm found comfort in seeing the Southwestern Native blanket she used as a shawl. The colors of a sunset woven in the wrap reminded him of one he owned.

His thoughts bumped into each other, knocking loose a memory here and there. Such as, that this realm was always a sanctuary, a welcoming place.

It didn’t feel like that now.

Kai existed only in the spirit world. Storm didn’t recall initiating this visit. That was not normal. Something had happened to him, to his physical body.

He wasn’t here by choice.

She folded her delicate arms. Worry lingered in her doe-brown eyes. “I have given you all the time I can.”

Though simple, her words were weighted with a finality that washed away the last of his mental fog. He asked, “Am I dying?”

“Yes.”

“But I have a choice?”

“You do.”

“Good.”

“Perhaps,” she amended.

Less good. “How damaged is my physical body?”

“Your human form is close to expiring. I have fought to prevent your spirit from crossing over for three weeks, but—”

“Three weeks? Am I in a coma?”

“You were, but no longer.”

He searched his mind, poking at dark corners to open doors to his past. Nobody wanted to die, but he had a strong sense that he had a duty to stay alive, odd as that sounded. Why? “What happened to me?”

“You were attacked, mortally injured. Your spirit burst into my realm, pleading for me to keep you alive, shouting why you must return to the human world. It has been a battle to grant your wish to this point.”

Images sheared past the inside of his eyes. His body crashing into a brick wall. Bones shattering. Internal organs exploding from the force.

But not in his human form.

He’d been a black jaguar.

Strange. He’d refused to shift into a jaguar for many years. Why now?

A new image surfaced. Glowing green eyes on a woman who sent his senses into overdrive. An Alterant.

Evalle Kincaid.

He’d used his Skinwalker gift to shift into animal form for Evalle. To help her find other Alterants ... before Sen came to take her ... to the Tribunal trial. Sen. Liaison to VIPER.

More images. Sen grabbing Evalle. Storm leaping at Sen.

Sen attacking, wielding kinetic power. Slamming Storm into the brick.

A heartbreaking last look at Evalle’s horrified face. One brief rush of her emotions across his empathic senses ... Desperation. Misery. Had the Tribunal locked her away forever?

He had to find her.

One thing at a time. First he had to live.

He nodded, letting Kai know his memory had begun to surface. “Where’s my body?”

“Safe and hidden.”

“How did you manage that?” He didn’t think a guardian spirit could physically move bodies around in the

human world.

“I shielded your body from view until I could find help. Then I called upon one you trust. She moved your body to a place where she could tend your wounds. She has kept you alive, but you are not fully healed and now your body is weakening by the hour.”

Evalle. She’d be frantic about his dying, but if she was taking care of him, that meant she had walked free from the Tribunal. Finally, something positive. “But I still have the choice to live?”

“You have the choice to go back. Living will depend upon whether your Skinwalker gifts can complete your healing. If you choose to return, you must do so now.”

“There is no if. I have to go back.” He paused, to figure out exactly why he absolutely had to return. To fulfill a task—no, a commitment he’d made. “Something ... about Evalle, right?”

“Yes, you had dreams that the Ashaninka witch doctor who searches for you has followed you to Atlanta and intends to harm her.”

That’s right. The bitch who’d killed his father back in South America. His last dreams had shown her threatening Evalle.

Everything rushed back to him with a vengeance.

He would not let that insane bitch touch Evalle. “Can the witch doctor find my body where it’s hidden?”

“No.”

Relief shoved his worry aside. With Evalle tending his physical body she would be safe until he returned. She’d been watching over him for three weeks? With her so close he was ready to leap back into his body. He missed her in a way he never thought he’d feel about a woman again.

Missed kissing her. Watching her emotions flare.

He’d do whatever it took to return.

But Kai had said his body was close to expiring.

He asked, “Why haven’t I healed in three weeks?”

“You haven’t been lucid once in that time so you could draw on your gifts to heal yourself. Taking you to any type of hospital—”

“—would have been dangerous for me,” he finished. Because he could have shifted back and forth between human and jaguar form while he had no control over his body.

“Yes. If you had not remained on the edge of crossing over for so long, you would have regained consciousness and started healing by now. As it is, the woman has done all she can. You must return to your body or you will not survive.”

“Why didn’t you call me back sooner?”

She angled her chin to one side and frowned. Clouds appeared, blotting out the sun and draping her meadow in dark shadows, a sign he’d annoyed Kai.

He held up his hand and humbled his tone. “I meant no insult and certainly no criticism. I just wondered why I spent so much time suspended between life and death when it sounds as though I should have returned days ago.”

She relaxed, clearly comprehending his confusion. As the sun shone again, she explained, “You have forgotten our many conversations over these weeks. Every time you started to fade I pleaded, yelled, threatened, anything I could think of to call you back from the edge. Your spirit weakened and slipped further from my hold every day. Had you not answered this time ... I would not have been able to keep your spirit from disconnecting from your physical body.”

His blood chilled at how close he’d been to losing any chance of returning. “Thank you for fighting for me.”

She nodded. “I will always be here for you.”

“I should get going. Can I return on my own?”

“Not this time. I’ll send you, but you must prepare yourself for the pain.”

“I’m ready.”

“I hope so. And regardless of your physical torment, temper your words. She has been most patient.”

Not even pain could make him speak harshly to Evalle. He disregarded the warning and joked, “That’s saying something since patience doesn’t come naturally to Evalle.”

“Evalle?” Kai’s soft black eyebrows lifted in question.

“Isn’t that who you contacted?”

“You did ask me to go to her first, but I could not find her.”

“Then who did—”

Kai’s eyes flashed with fear. “You must go now, Storm. Your heart is stopping.”

In the next seconds everything in the meadow blurred into a wash of color and sound as if someone had flushed the world.

He knew the minute he entered his physical body.

Agony ripped through him.

A fist slammed his chest, with supernatural force behind it. Someone shouted at him. Cursed him. Heat roared across his skin. Nerves caught fire with renewed life, flooding pain everywhere. Perspiration streamed

across his face.

His heart beat. Again. The thud echoed in his ears every painful time blood pumped through the battered organ.

He grabbed at his chest, struggling to draw a breath. Blinding pain ripped through his insides. His spine wrenched forward as he curled into a ball of misery. Another cramp tightened his chest muscles, squeezing a guttural moan from his dry throat.

Had he really wanted to return to this? Every nerve in his body screamed.

Finally, slowly, the pain in his chest subsided to a throbbing ache, enough for him to draw a ragged breath and hear someone near him.

A soft voice chanted words that made no sense.

Long moments later, he uncurled until he sagged into the soft bed and let his arms fall to his sides. He licked his dry lips and tried to swallow, but couldn't draw a spit of saliva.

Opening his eyes, he found the answer to the question he'd been trying to ask Kai.

The woman standing next to him was definitely not Evalle Kincaid.

Adrianna Lafontaine's arms stretched out over his chest, hands turned up, eyes closed and lips moving as words danced off her tart-pink lips. Barely five feet tall with silky blond hair and a robust shape packed into that small frame, the Sterling witch turned heads everywhere she went.

But she wasn't Evalle.

He suffered a wave of disappointment almost as crushing as the pain racking his body. Kai had said she'd found someone he trusted. That was a helluva stretch, but he did have to admit he was alive, and safe at the moment, thanks to this witch.

When Adrianna finished her chant, she opened her eyes and looked down at him. "You decided to come back?"

He croaked out something that should have been yes.

She moved off to his left, then returned with a plastic bottle of water, lifting his head to let a few trickles fall into his mouth before she laid him back down. "I've pulled out every trick I know, but I've reached my limit, Storm."

"I know." He tried to look past her to see where he was, but the only light in the chilly, dark room was the faint glow from a lamp near his head. He managed to get out, "Where am I?"

"An underground space in Decatur I convinced someone to offer me, then to forget he'd done so once I got you inside."

She meant she'd used a spell or some other ability.

Over the next couple of breaths, he closed his eyes and searched inside himself for the power of his jaguar, relieved when he felt his animal presence stir to life. With a concerted effort, he forced energy to spread through his chest and limbs, flinching every time the energy struck damage. He had no idea how long he'd lain there, focused on healing, until he expelled a long sigh and paused to rest.

He blinked his eyes open, looking around. "Adrianna?"

She stepped into view and gave him another tiny drink of water. That's when he took in the unkempt look of her jeans and sweatshirt. Not her usual fashion statement.

Storm said, "Thank you for all of this."

"You're welcome."

Sterling witches rarely did anything without some form of compensation. He owed her and he paid his debts. "I'll return the favor when you need it."

"I know." Confidence had never been an issue for Adrianna.

"Who knows I'm here?"

"I told no one. I figured you wouldn't want anyone to know where you were since I doubt your guardian would have reached out to a Sterling witch if she'd had another option."

Adrianna made that valid point without any note of insult in her voice, just stating the facts. Spirits of the light, such as Kai, generally did not interact with witches who dealt in the dark arts. He still had one pressing question. "Do you know what happened at Evalle's Tribunal trial?"

"They released her the next day."

His sore lungs relaxed, expelling the breath he'd been holding. So she was free. "She knows I'm alive, right?"

"I doubt it."

"You didn't tell her?"

"I took a leave from the agency. I've been here with you for three weeks."

Storm lifted his hand to hold his forehead. "You should have told Evalle. She'll be worried."

"Let's get this straight." Adrianna put a hand down on the bed when she leaned in close, smoldering blue eyes dark with warning. "I'm Switzerland when it comes to you, Evalle, VIPER and anything else. I have my own set of problems that I've put on hold while I played nurse. Your love life is the least of my concerns. Are we clear?"

Kai's warning to temper his words stopped him from snarling. He didn't see how hard it would've been to just call Evalle and ease her mind, but he wouldn't unload his frustration on Adrianna. "I understand. I appreciate what you've done—"

“I’m sure you do and I want you to remember that when I call in this marker.”

Could she be as coldly calculating as she sounded when she’d spent three weeks caring for him?

His empathic senses roared back to life, detecting the determination of a war strategist. She had a goal of some sort—one that mattered as much to her as his protecting Evalle from the South American witch doctor mattered to him. He was sure of it.

Speaking of Evalle, he asked, “Can you contact her for me?”

“I don’t have a cell phone and I’m not about to go hunt down that Alterant.”

“Not even to just let her know I’m alive?”

“I told you, I’m not getting involved. And I have no desire to be stuck explaining to Evalle why I’m the only one who knows how you’re doing or where you’ve been for almost a month.” Adrianna gave a wry chuckle. “Good luck with that.”

“Evalle will understand.”

“If you really believe that, you’re not as bright as I gave you credit for.”

The witch might have a point. Evalle did have a volatile temper when it came to Adrianna. Ridiculous really, since Evalle had no reason to suffer jealousy, but a wise man would avoid mentioning that Adrianna had been here with Storm all this time. That might work if not for his Ashaninka ability to detect a lie, which came with a counter side—he suffered serious pain if he lied.

A gift that Evalle knew all about.

He was too exhausted to think on that at the moment. He needed to focus on healing fast and regaining his strength so he could get out of this bed. Right now, he’d have a hard time lifting the bottle of water on his own. “I’ll find her in a couple of days. What day is it anyhow?”

“Last Thursday in September. Think you’ll be fully recovered that fast?”

No, but that wouldn’t stop him from sucking it up enough to get behind the wheel of his SUV and track her down. “I’ll manage.”

“From what I hear, Evalle’s not the only woman waiting for you to call her back, Casanova.”

“What do you mean?”

“I hear there’s a female with a Spanish accent asking around about you.”

“What the—where’d you hear that?” He’d told no one, except Evalle, about the Ashaninka witch doctor, but she’d never say a word.

“From a Nightstalker. I heard about her while I was searching for intel for VIPER the week before you got hurt.”

“You traded for information on her?” he asked. The old ghouls Nightstalkers could take ten minutes of human form if they shook hands with someone who possessed powers.

“No. The Nightstalker tried to cut a second deal for intel on a woman with powers from South America who was interested in a Skinwalker who could shift into a jaguar.” Adrianna paused and looked straight at him. “I wasn’t aware of any Skinwalkers ... then.”

Adrianna knowing about his jaguar form wasn’t a problem, but Storm had kept that information from Sen.

Sen had brought him in as a tracker for VIPER, an agency that protected humans from supernatural threats, but Sen’s real purpose had been for Storm to catch Evalle in a lie, to get her booted from the team or locked up. Storm had decided to help Evalle instead.

The question now was whether Sen knew the black jaguar he’d crushed against that brick wall was Storm. Had he meant to kill me? A bigger concern shoved forward.

If Sen found out about the witch doctor, he’d have the perfect anonymous weapon for getting rid of Evalle, permanently, and all he’d have to do was point the bitch in Evalle’s direction.

And nobody—not even the Tribunal—would be able to prove that Sen had orchestrated the death of an innocent woman.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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