



JACK'O

- 1 year old – 2.5 months in shelter
- Loveable and friendly

First Place Winner:
“Jack’o’lantern”
by Olivia Bradbury

Midnight was fast approaching. Halloween was almost over for another year. The streets were now devoid of trick-or-treaters, some of the houses lining the road now dark as the occupants had turned in for the night. A woman sat on her front step, dressed in a witch's costume. There was something special about this woman: she really was a witch. And while real witches didn't dress in such a manner — not nowadays, anyway — on Halloween she liked to dress up so she looked as much a witch on the outside as she secretly was on the inside.

She supposed it was time to go inside. She sighed, sad that Halloween was over, but content with the night she'd had — with the trick-or-treaters smiling excitedly, the radio in the kitchen playing spooky songs, her house decorated just right. Her favourite decoration, as it was every year, was the pumpkin she'd carved for the occasion. Every year, in the weeks leading up to Halloween, she'd search for the perfect pumpkin and, a few days before the 31st, she would carve it. She did it freehand, so each year her pumpkin had a unique design.

This year, her pumpkin bore the adorable visage of a cat. Pointy ears, round eyes, a tiny nose, a little mouth—it was such a sweet face. She was very proud of her handiwork. But it saddened her that, before long, the pumpkin would fade away, and so, too, would the sweet cat she'd carved upon it.

With that thought, an idea occurred to her. She went into the house, then returned with a few vital ingredients—a vial of honey, a bottle of nutmeg, a handful of crushed maples leaves. She scattered these things over the pumpkin and then, sitting on the step, took the gourd lovingly into her arms and murmured an incantation. The pumpkin shone, and began to transform, and in a few moments it was gone. Instead, in her arms snuggled a sweet little cat, with fur as dark as night and eyes orange like the pumpkin from whence it came.

"Your name is Jacko, in honour of the jack-o'-lantern," she told him, voice soft. He gazed up at her with bright, attentive eyes. "I have given you life, and you will bring love to someone's else's. And they will love you in return."

She set the cat on the ground. He looked at her, and she saw understanding in his eyes. He gave her a slow blink, then turned and trotted off into the night to begin his journey. She watched him go. She could do no more for him—he alone would know what path to take. But she trusted his magical origin would keep him safe.

Jacko wandered for months, determined to find his destined family. Eventually he met some very kind people who took him in and gave him shelter, food, and kindness. They are not his fated family, but they are resolved to help him find it.

It's been a year since Jacko was conjured into existence by a kind witch's spell. He is a friendly and loveable little creature. He has been with his current caretakers for several months, and he is safe and cared for, but he excitedly waits, the witch's words still assuring him of his destiny. That one day he will meet someone, and they will open their heart to him. And when they do, he will grant them all his love in return.

When they do, they will be blessed with the warmth and light of the jack-o'-lantern.

