

FB FREYA'S BOWER PRESENTS
TOIL & TROUBLE



AURELIA ABBOTT

Toil and Trouble

by

Aurelia Abbott



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Culver City, CA

Toil and Trouble: Witchy Woman and Every Witch Way

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Editor: Bella Tyler

ISBN: 1-934069- 25-6

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Freya's Bower.com
P.O. Box 4897
Culver City, CA 90231-4897

Printed in The United States of America

Witchy Woman

by Aurelia Abbott

Estella Morgan burst through the apartment door, dropping her purse and carryall bag just inside the threshold. She ran down the short hallway and cut left into her bedroom. She slammed the door behind her, knowing her roommate Christine would be hot on her heels, but she couldn't handle that now, not when she was already so out of control.

Closing her eyes, Estella fell backwards toward the bed, her mouth moving feverishly. The levitation spell caught seconds before she hit the floor. It was as if she was playing a game of Trust with her magical abilities. *At least this spell still works*, she thought bitterly. She hovered for several seconds before a knock at the door scattered her concentration, and she fell to the floor with a thud.

"Stel, let me in. What's going on?"

With a sigh, Estella stood and prepared a spell to open her bedroom door. Thinking better of it, she crossed the two-step distance and turned the knob. She opened the door, turning her back on Christine as she returned to the edge of the bed. "It's not safe to be around me, Chris. You should let me wallow in self-pity. Alone." Estella flopped onto the bed. The lamp on her nightstand began to shimmy. Seconds later, the bare light bulb exploded, raining shards of glass along the base of the lamp and the tabletop. "See?"

"You won't be like this forever," Christine offered, sitting beside Estella on the bed. "Maybe it's a PMS thing."

"Maybe it's a karma thing," Estella replied as she rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling. "Using magic for evil always comes back to bite you in the ass."

"Tell me what happened." Christine lay beside Estella, propping her head up with her hand.

Estella glanced at her best friend, but she didn't see accusations or implications written on her face, only concern. Sighing, she rolled to face Christine and began absently picking at the deep purple chintz comforter. "So I went to see Gavin, okay. I know I shouldn't have but I was just so damn pissed! What a *bastard*!" She slammed her palm onto the comforter; both of the feather pillows burst.

"Just calm down, Stel." Christine detoured several of the floating feathers, carefully depositing them onto the bed. Estella watched in awe, wishing she could control her abilities as seamlessly as Christine did. "You went to see Gavin..."

"Right," Estella continued, her attention focused once again on the comforter. "I went to see Gavin. I was just going to talk to him, you know, to find out why he...cheated...and *she* was there..."

"Jama?"

"Yes, *Jama*." Energy crackled down Estella's arms to her fingertips. She closed her eyes and concentrated, hoping to regain her center before anything else in her room blew up. When she opened them, she saw Christine's lips moving quickly and knew she was casting a protection spell. "I'm fine now, Chris."

"Then what happened?" Christine asked, making herself comfortable on the bed once again.

"I just wanted to *talk* to Gavin. I didn't care that she was there but when I saw her, I...I got mad."

Witchy Woman

“Exploding pillows mad?”

Estella offered her friend a pained smile. “More like now they’re both rats mad.”

“You didn’t!”

“Well, I didn’t *mean* to.” She stood and began to pace in a small circle at the foot of her bed, wringing her hands. “Jama kept interrupting me with that *squeaky* little voice of hers, and when I asked Gavin to ask her to leave, he touched her shoulder...The next thing I knew, two rats were scurrying around the floor.”

“Oh, Stel.”

Estella stopped pacing and looked at Christine. “Please don’t give me that look. My magic is royally screwed up because I let my anger get the best of me. Part of me couldn’t care less if they’re ever human again but the other part of me—a teeny part of me—feels *really* bad. At least Gavin will be afraid of me now. He always said my abilities were a joke. Who’s laughing now, rat boy?”

“How did you do it?”

“I don’t know,” Estella replied with a shrug. “I remember thinking he was a dirty, little rat. Lo and behold, he was!” The thought of Gavin remaining a rat for the rest of his life struck her as funny. What started as the giggles quickly escalated into a full-force romp. Christine left the bedroom, Estella’s laughter booming off of the walls, her bed shaking rapidly.

The situation wasn’t funny, but once she began to laugh, Estella couldn’t stop. For three weeks, she had kept Gavin’s behavior in the forefront of her mind. He had hurt and humiliated her; she thought it only fair that he was on the receiving end of *her* hurt. Now that he was a rat and essentially out of her life for good, she felt like a plague had been removed from her soul. Thinking of plagues made her laugh all the more, so much so she began to cry. Once the tears of laughter began, they quickly became real tears as she remembered how happy she thought she and Gavin had been as a couple, and how he had destroyed her by cheating on her with Jama. She *had* been dumped before, and by guys who were cuter and more interesting than Gavin, but for some reason, this break-up had affected her more than the others.

A chill ran down Estella’s spine and she closed her eyes, silently casting a calming spell. Her bed had begun to levitate; she couldn’t be certain what would happen next.

“Okay. I’ve made a few phone calls and I think we can fix this,” Christine said as she returned to the room.

“You can fix it?” Estella questioned as she opened her eyes and turned her full attention to Christine. Her bed dropped several inches, the wooden posts pounding back onto the carpet. “You can reverse the spell?” She wiped her tears with the backs of her hands and waited for Christine to continue.

“Oh, no. I’m not nearly as advanced as that.” She paused, and Estella leaned forward in anticipation. “But I know someone, who knows someone, who lives near a witch doctor.”

“And?”

“You’ve got an appointment in forty-five minutes.”

Witchy Woman

Something squished underneath Estella's shoe, but she didn't pause to inspect it. Christine had shoved her out the door with a badly sketched map and cab money, but not before reminding Estella she would have to go this alone. *That's okay*, she thought. *I did this alone, so it's only fair I fix it alone*. Now that she was on her way to meet with the witch doctor, she wished she'd begged Christine to come along for moral support.

She had never been in this part of town before; close to downtown and in the midst of a trio of homeless shelters. She crept down the sticky sidewalk to an abandoned-looking apartment building. No other soul roamed the sidewalks lining the main boulevard. Estella wondered if they knew something she didn't.

Pulling the note from her pocket, she saw she had the correct address. *525 Stoker. Fifth Floor*. Unfortunately, 525 Stoker was an ancient red brick building that had seen better decades. Its first floor windows were boarded closed, no signs of life in or around the building other than the sleeping person on the stoop. She pocketed the note and stepped over the sleeping form.

"Here t' see Medea du Lac?" An unknown voice called from the shadows as she stepped into the building.

Estella noticeably jumped. "Y...yes," she replied. She wondered if she could use her abilities in a pinch and cursed herself for not packing pepper spray.

"I take you t' her." A willowy child-like woman wearing a black lace dress, similar to something Stevie Nicks would have worn in her heyday, emerged from the corner of the first floor and began her ascent of the wooden staircase in the entryway. "You comin'?"

"I am," Estella said as she placed her hand onto the rickety banister. She prayed she was making the right decision and mentally recited a defense spell, just in case.

Holding onto the banister with both hands, Estella murmured a silent prayer of thanks when they successfully reached the top floor landing. She quashed the urge to kiss the dusty wooden floor beneath her feet and followed the woman into a small, dark room. "Wait and she come." The woman closed the door behind her, leaving Estella in almost total darkness.

She turned her palm toward the ceiling and began a luminescent spell, hoping she could conjure some light into the room. The darkness remained, and Estella sighed. Even the simplest spells didn't work. Her wait wasn't long as a thin redhead wearing a designer suit and high heels entered the room carrying a candelabrum. Light surrounded her, almost blinding Estella. She wanted to shield her eyes, to give them time to adjust to the light, but she couldn't turn away. The witch doctor smiled at Estella and directed her to sit at the round table occupying the center of the room.

"You're a witch doctor?" Estella asked as she sat down in a metal folding chair.

"You turn people into rats?" Medea retaliated in the next breath.

"Well, not on purpose. I'm not sure exactly what happened."

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, child. Ain't nothing like takin' revenge on someone that wronged ya. Human nature, ya know. It's damn tough turning the other cheek."

"Yes, it is." Estella gave Medea a small smile, feeling infinitely more comfortable with the witch doctor now that they seemed to be on the same wavelength. "Can you help me reverse the spell? I may hate his guts, but I don't really want him to be a rat forever."

"Maybe we can help each other," Medea offered, a sadistic grin darkening her pleasant features.

Witchy Woman

Christine was waiting for her when she returned from Medea's, just as she thought she would be. "Well?" Christine began when Estella closed the apartment door and dropped her purse onto the floor. "What happened? Did you see the witch doctor? Did she help you?"

"Not yet," Estella replied, collapsing onto the red-plaid futon. The television was fixed to the Sci-Fi Channel—one of Christine's favorites—and Estella gladly lost herself in a rerun of *Stargate: SG1*.

"What did she *say*, Estella? You look like you've seen a ghost." The futon cushion shifted when Christine sat down beside her. "What did the witch doctor say?"

Estella turned toward her roommate, a blank expression on her face. She hadn't believed it when Medea du Lac had explained and she still didn't believe it thirty minutes later. Was Gavin worth this much effort? Could she even pull something like this off? "She said she'd give me the reversal spell."

"Great!"

"But there's a catch," Estella continued, holding up her index finger for effect. "The witch doctor said I had to persuade a warlock from his black magic practice."

"How are you supposed to do that?"

"By seducing him," she added with a giggle. "And guess who the warlock is? This is the *best* part."

"Who?" Christine asked. The television screen began to roll, static bars distorting the picture while Estella's laughter grew.

"Jason Calhoun!" Estella clapped her hands together and continued laughing. A loud 'Pop!' echoed through the tiny room when the television screen imploded and began to melt onto the entertainment armoire.

"Jason Calhoun?" Christine questioned, pointing toward their apartment door. "*That* Jason Calhoun?"

"That's right!" Estella jumped up from the futon and ran to the apartment door, tapping her index finger against it several times. Jason Calhoun had moved into the apartment building several months ago. Estella knew little about him and had never seen him, though Christine had spotted him at the mailboxes and claimed he was unusually attractive, almost *too* pretty. Her comment had made Estella curious but never curious enough to knock on his apartment door and invite herself in for a date. "I've got to seduce our next-door neighbor and turn him from his black magic ways in order to return my cheating ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend to their human forms! Bubble, bubble, toil and trouble!"

Every Witch Way

by Aurelia Abbott

Estella Morgan stood in her roommate Christine's bedroom in front of the floor-length mirror, admiring her reflection. Doubts about this arrangement once again floated into her mind.

It had been two days since her initial meeting with Medea du Lac, the witch doctor. In exchange for returning her ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend from their rat forms back into their human forms, Medea had asked one thing: seduce a rogue warlock. It just so happened the warlock Estella was to seduce was her next-door neighbor, Jason Calhoun, who was rumored to be a pretty hot dish. She had questioned several female friends that lived in the apartment complex about Jason but all of them refused to divulge any information about him. If no one would gossip, Estella knew he had to be too good to be true.

Her cleavage practically fell out of the black v-neck t-shirt, courtesy of her Victoria's Secret push-up bra. The hem of her flared blue jean skirt lay just below her knees; Christine's black sling-back shoes completed the ensemble. She had painstakingly applied her make-up and styled her light brown hair, all in accordance with 'The Seduction Plan' she and Christine had outlined that afternoon.

"A cup of sugar?" she questioned Christine, who stood to Estella's left, her eyes closed and mouth conjuring. "A cup of sugar isn't a believable excuse. People just don't ask for sugar anymore. This is not going to work."

"It is." Christine opened her eyes as Estella turned to face her. "It's a very believable excuse if you're entertaining."

"Huh?"

Christine presented her with two identical coffee mugs. "You have someone here and you're making coffee, but you're out of sugar. That is a legitimate reason to go next door."

Estella made a face but accepted the mugs, and twirled to face her reflection once again. "Hi. Could I borrow some sugar? And then what do I say?"

"I can only get you in the door, Stel. What you do once you're there is up to you."

Estella placed one of the coffee mugs in the crook of her arm and knocked on Jason Calhoun's apartment door. Taking the mug with her left hand, she fidgeted in the hallway waiting for Jason to answer. "Hi. Could I borrow some sugar? Hi, I need some sugar? Sugar?"

"Honey."

She gave a small chuckle, embarrassed at having been caught in the act of rehearsing her opening lines. Luckily, Jason laughed too, his pearly whites beaming back at her. Estella quickly realized her friends had been right to keep silent about Jason. Surveying the rest of his appearance, she knew she was in way over her head.

He stood in the doorway, leaning against the frame with his left elbow. A white cotton t-shirt stretched across his broad chest, the sculpted muscles clearly defined

beneath the thin material. Her gaze dipped lower still, powerless to control her cat-like curiosity. Tight blue jeans hugged his thighs, and Estella was unable to silence the sigh that escaped from her lips. The image of herself straddling him flashed through her mind, surprising her. She had never fantasized about Gavin like this, and they had dated for several months. One look at Jason Calhoun, however, and her breasts were practically begging to fill his oh so capable-looking hands! The coffee mug in her right hand shattered, ceramic fragments raining down onto the hallway. She felt tiny shards burrowing into the palm of her hand.

“Shit!”

Jason disappeared into his apartment, and Estella tried to get her emotions in check. *He’s not that hot. He’s not that hot.* She shuffled her feet back and forth, her palm beginning to burn.

He re-emerged several seconds later with a blue plaid dish towel and gently wrapped it around her hand. “Let’s go into the kitchen.” She followed him willingly.

Their apartment layouts were similar: large front room and combination eating area, the kitchen separated by a short counter attached to the opposite wall. His apartment was cleaner than she’d imagined, given his rumored penchant for black magic. No trace of a spell tickled her senses which wasn’t a surprise considering her ability to decipher all things magical had been kaput since Gavin and Jama had become rodents. Still, Jason didn’t seem like a rogue warlock bent on black magic experimentation. He seemed nice...and very good looking.

“This might hurt a bit,” Jason said and Estella noticed several small slivers of ceramic in her palm. He held her wrist in one hand and a shiny pair of tweezers in the other. “I’ll try to be gentle.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Estella replied, her voice deep in the back of her throat. The timer on Jason’s microwave dinged and the door flew open.

“Just hold still okay.” He seemed unfazed by the microwave, but it seemed odd to Estella because she hadn’t noticed any appliances in use when they entered the kitchen. Shrugging it off, she watched as he took meticulous care to be gentle in removing the slivers from her hand. She wondered if he’d be so gentle and meticulous during sex. *Get a grip, gutter brain!* she cautioned, Jason’s fingers warm against her skin. *He’s not that hot. He’s not that hot. He’s not—*

“There,” Jason replied, snapping her from her thoughts. “Let me get some antiseptic spray and a gauze pad.” He stepped to a cabinet beside the sink and removed a first aid kit. Estella was all too happy to watch him walk across the room to gather the supplies. He returned to the counter with a slight smile on his face, and he began to clean and dress her wounds. Once the gauze pad was secure, he pulled her palm to his lips and gave it a tender kiss. “And a kiss to make it better.”

“Th...thank you.” Estella pulled her palm to her chest and cradled her right hand with her left.

“Sugar?”

“Honey.” She watched him laugh, tiny lines forming around the corner of his mouth. What she wouldn’t do to kiss those little lines—

“You came over for sugar, so I guess you still need some.”

Every Witch Way

“What? Oh, that’s right. Sugar. Thanks.” With a nod, he opened the sugar canister beside the sink and began spooning sugar into the remaining coffee mug. “My name’s Estella, by the way.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Estella. I’m Jason.”

Three hours later, just as she began to drift off, with visions of Jason Calhoun dancing in her head, a knock at the apartment door startled her. Christine lay on the opposite end of the sofa having fallen asleep in the midst of reading *Angel With Attitude* by Michelle Rowen so Estella was careful not to wake her up when she stood. She walked to the door and looked out the peephole, surprised to see Jason on the other side. “Jason,” she said as she opened the door, suddenly glad she hadn’t changed into her pajamas when she had returned to her apartment. “Here for some sugar?”

“Hi, Estella,” he replied with a laugh. “No, I actually wanted to come by and check on you. Has your friend gone?”

“Friend?” A swift kick to her shin jogged her memory. “Oh, he’s gone. I’d invite you in, but my roommate’s passed out cold on the sofa.” She felt Christine’s breath on her neck and hoped Jason didn’t notice the extra shadow moving underneath the door.

“That’s okay. How’s your hand?”

“It’s doing great thanks to you.” She turned her palm outward so he could see the gauze pad was still intact. “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate your help.”

“This may sound a little odd, Estella, but I had a really nice time this afternoon.”

“Digging glass out of my hand?” she asked with a laugh, cocking her head to the left. Jason laughed too. “Would you like to go out sometime? Maybe grab some coffee or a bite to eat?”

Christine elbowed her with so much force, Estella almost lost her balance, which would have propelled her straight into Jason. “Wow, Jason...” She straightened and pulled the hem of her t-shirt back down to cover her waist.

“If you’re serious about your...friend...tell me, and I’ll back off.” He stepped closer, his lips mere inches from hers. “But I think you and I could have a really good time together.”

“Uh-huh.”

“What about tomorrow night? Say, around seven?” Jason asked as he slowly inched away from her. “It’s been said I make great lasagna.”

“Seven will be perfect. I’ll see you then.” Her mouth agape with shock, Estella closed the door behind her, then looked at Christine. She waited several seconds—giving Jason time to return to his apartment—before dancing in a circle and flailing her arms.

“Careful,” Christine cautioned.

Estella saw her longing glance in the direction of what remained of their television. “We can buy a new T.V., Chris. Can you believe my luck? That was easier than I thought! By tomorrow night, I’ll have turned Jason from black magic, saved Gavin and Jama from living their lives as rodents, and the best part is, I get to have sex!”

“Seems a bit too easy if you ask me,” Christine said with a scowl.

Estella didn’t appear to notice Christine’s skepticism as she danced down the hallway to her bedroom, already excited at the thought of Jason’s naked body on top of hers.

"I never ever thought I'd commit a B & E, especially for Gavin's benefit!" Estella stood in the tiny hallway outside Gavin's apartment, Christine on her knees in front of the door. Estella jerked her head left and right as she attempted to shield Christine from view, certain they would be discovered by a nosy neighbor and arrested. "Hurry up!" she said in an excited whisper.

"You're the one that turned him into a rat, remember. I'm only here as the best friend." The door crept open. Christine stood and fanned her arm forward. "And as the person actually *breaking* the entrance."

"You know my magic is wacko," Estella argued as she stepped into Gavin's apartment. It had been almost four days since she had accidentally on purpose turned Gavin and Jama into rats, and she felt bad she hadn't returned to the scene of the crime to check on them. What if one had eaten the other? What if they were both dead? What if they'd been caught by an exterminator? She pushed those horrible thoughts to the back of her mind.

"Besides," Estella continued, pulling a Ziploc baggie containing a block of cheddar cheese from her pocket. "I should have come earlier. I can't help that I was busy trying to rescue them. I mean, I'm practically whoring myself to save their ratty asses. Gavin? Gavin, are you here?" She unwrapped the cheese and placed it on the kitchen floor. "Gavin? It's *Es-tell-a!*"

Pausing to listen for the sound of tiny claws clicking across the hardwood floors, Estella glanced at Christine. "Do you hear them? Or see them?" Estella tiptoed into the kitchen and glanced around the refrigerator and stove.

"Can't say I'm really looking, Stel."

"Well, let me look for a few more minutes. They have to be around here *somewhere*." Estella opened several of the kitchen cabinets and peered inside. "Gavin? Where are you?" After she had opened all of the cabinets with no sign of Gavin, she turned to Christine and pointed at the door. "Okay, I guess we can go. It's obvious he's hiding."

"Maybe he's afraid you'll turn him into a cockroach."

"Leave your wisecracks out of this," Estella replied, locking the door as she and Christine exited Gavin's apartment. "Maybe Medea picked them up already."

"The witch doctor?"

"She said she would help."

"But only if you turn Jason from the dark side."

"Which I'm going to do tonight."

"What if you don't, Estella? Gavin and Jama are going to be rats forever."

Estella paused as the pair reached the elevator. "You don't think Jason will sleep with me?"

"I didn't say that."

"I'm pretty cute." She ran her fingers through her jet-black curls.

"Yes."

"So why wouldn't he want to sleep with me? He said he had a good time last night." The elevator doors opened and both women stepped into the cage, Estella pulling the metal door closed behind them.

“He was tending to your injuries. Maybe he’s into blood.”

“You know what, Chris, I think you’re jealous. When is the last time you went out on a date? And now I’m going to get laid *without* having to mess around with the dating part.” They exited Gavin’s apartment complex and headed north toward their own apartment.

She glanced at Christine and could tell her best friend was irritated by her remarks. Christine was the calmer of the two, the one who planned and maintained a careful structure in her life. It was true Christine hadn’t dated anyone in several months and Estella knew what she’d said was a low blow. The two friends were the perfect balance of yin and yang, which was how they’d remained friends for the past three years. If there was anyone Estella trusted implicitly, it was Christine.

“I just don’t want you to get hurt, okay? There’s something about Jason, something I can’t put my finger on. A few days ago you were pissed off enough to turn your ex-boyfriend and his new girlfriend into rats. Now, you’re ga-ga about sleeping with some guy you only met *yesterday*. Just stop and think, that’s all I’m suggesting.”

“I can’t stop and think, Christine. I don’t have *time* to stop and think. I’ve got to sleep with this guy in order to make Gavin and Jama human again. And besides,” she paused as the two of them crossed the street, their apartment building in sight, “I’m not going to enjoy sleeping with Jason. Not much anyway.”

Knocking at the door of Jason’s apartment, Estella smoothed the bodice of her favorite black dress. Low-cut with a flared skirt, it not only accentuated her curves, but wearing it made her *feel* good. Good enough to seduce Jason Calhoun.

Jason answered the door wearing a white polo shirt and navy slacks. He gave her a wide smile, and Estella couldn’t help but smile in return. “You look amazing.” He touched her left arm and led her into his dimly-lit apartment.

The heavenly aroma of lasagna and fresh-baked bread wafted through her senses; her stomach growled loudly in response. “That was embarrassing,” she said as Jason closed the door behind her.

“There’s no need to be embarrassed.” He gently placed his hand in the small of her back, guiding her to the candlelit round table straight ahead. “I’m hungry too, Estella. Let’s eat.”

They spent the next hour and a half engaged in conversation. It was the best date Estella had ever been on. Jason made her laugh; the food, wine and atmosphere were perfect. She felt almost guilty that an ulterior motive had brought her to his door.

He began clearing the dishes and she refilled their wine glasses. “You have a nice apartment.” She swirled the wine gently before taking a small sip. “Our apartment layout is the same but, I don’t know, your place seems...different.”

“Maybe it’s because I live alone, and you have a roommate,” Jason responded, running water over the dishes and depositing them in the dishwasher. “This is all my space, my tastes.”

“Well, you have very good taste.”

"I'd like to think so," he said as he dried his hands and turned to face her. In two steps, she was in his arms, one of his hands on her waist and the other behind her neck. He pulled her tight against his chest and kissed her.

Estella shivered when their lips met. Desire coursed through her body, all the way down to her toenails. She wrapped her arms around his neck and returned his kisses with equal fervor. Within moments, they were sprawled on the kitchen floor, his fingers underneath her dress, inching her panties down her hips. She felt his erection still restricted by his slacks pressing against her thigh. She was glad to know he wanted her too.

Once her panties were lying on the floor beside her, Estella heard Jason's zipper and felt his hard shaft graze her inner thigh. He entered her in the next breath, and the sound of shattering glass boomed above them. Shards of plexi-glass rained down on top of them but neither seemed to notice. Thrust after thrust, Jason pushed Estella to sensuous, new heights; with each moan, more glass shattered in the kitchen. Clamping onto his shoulders, Estella tried to manipulate his angle by hooking her leg underneath his butt. Jason never stopped pumping his hips, and chills ran down the length of her body once his entry had shifted.

He gave her a rough kiss and fondled her breast through her dress. Arching her back off the floor, she ached for Jason to hit that most sensitive spot just one time. That would be all she needed to release the inferno building under her skin. She'd never had sex this chaotic before. It didn't matter that Medea had sent her to Jason to seduce him. Something else was at work here, something she couldn't pinpoint.

He pulled out quickly and unexpectedly, ejaculating onto her lower abdomen as he lay on top of her. Estella felt their hearts beating the same rhythm and smiled while attempting to regain her senses. Her entire body hummed. Energy crackled in her palms, energy that demanded release.

"That was...wow," Jason said after several minutes, his breath uneven. He kissed her and sat up to grab a towel from the counter.

"I'll echo that sentiment." Estella pushed her dress down over her hips and wadded her panties in her fist. Once they were out of the kitchen, she'd hide them in her purse, hopeful she might not need them for the remainder of their evening. She exhaled slowly, unreleased energy simmering just beneath her skin. Sitting up, she pulled her knees together and made sure her dress covered her bare hips in an effort to regain some modesty. "I...I don't know what came over me. I have this reaction when I look at you, Jason, and I want to...just throw you down!"

"I'm glad to hear that, Estella."

The silence that followed made her uncomfortable, Christine's advice ringing in her ears. "We made quite a mess," she said, pointing to the shards of glass littering the floor and countertops.

"*You* made the mess, Estella. That's what happens when you let your emotions get the best of you."

"Excuse me?"

"Chaos," Jason continued. "I love it, and I love that you can create it so effortlessly."

"I'm sorry. I'm not following you."

"You could be very powerful if you tapped into the enhanced abilities black magic could offer. I could teach you. I'd actually enjoy *teaching* you." He pulled her onto his

lap and snuggled his face against her neck. “Medea was smart to send you. You are almost too much for me to resist. Almost.”

“Excuse me?” Anger pulsed through Estella’s veins. She pulled away from Jason and quickly stood. “We just had sex five minutes ago—glass shattering sex, I might add—and you want to talk to me about black magic?” Her anger intensified, sending surges of energy all the way to her toes. With a shaky breath, she asked, “How do you even know I’m a witch?”

“We could have glass shattering sex all the time,” Jason replied, also rising. “And you just told me you were a witch, though I’ve known it for as long as I’ve lived in this building. Witches give off auras. Yours is the most powerful I’ve come across, except for Medea’s. That’s why I knew you’d be the perfect candidate.”

“The perfect candidate for what?”

“To join with me in black magic,” Jason replied, his voice calm and confident.

“Black magic is dangerous. It is a serious and overpowering call to everything dark and dangerous in the metaphysical world. It preys on you, feasts on your anger. It’s too dangerous to even attempt to control.”

“You used it to turn Gavin into a rat,” he argued. Estella’s mouth twitched. She stared at him. Despite the fact they were engaged in an argument, Jason didn’t seem at all angry. In fact, there was an eerie calm surrounding him, almost as if he was trying to bait her.

“That was an accident. I didn’t mean to hurt Gavin or Jama. And if I hadn’t let my anger explode, I wouldn’t be in this situation right now.” She carefully tiptoed through the kitchen and grabbed her purse from the sofa. “I’m leaving,” she replied without turning to face him.

“You think you can just walk out? You think you can leave me just like that?” Jason questioned and Estella flew backwards, away from the apartment door. She fell onto the kitchen floor, glass crunching beneath her. None of her bones seemed to be broken, though Estella knew escaping from Jason wouldn’t be as easy now that she had been launched across his apartment. “I don’t give up so easy, not when I’ve seen what I want. And I want you, Estella.”

He grabbed her arm and pulled her to her feet. His face rippled, magic he had so carefully placed to disguise his true self crumbling before her eyes. Estella grimaced, her stomach rumbled, and she covered her mouth with her hand. The attractive, smooth-talking Jason—the man she had been so excited to sleep with—was hideously ugly, his tumble into the black arts had darkened his very soul.

He’s a rat. He’s a rat. He’s a rat.

Jason wrapped her in his arms; Estella closed her eyes so she wouldn’t be forced to look at him. She frantically gathered her emotions, hoping she could remember what she had done to turn Gavin and Jama into rats. She felt Jason’s lips on her neck and froze. His hands crept underneath her dress once again, rough fingertips tapping against her thighs.

He’s a rat. A lowdown, dirty, little, black magic rat.

The room began to spin. Separate walls joined; furniture melded together. Faster and faster the room turned until Estella could no longer feel Jason’s presence. She couldn’t feel anything at all, except blackness enveloping her.

Every Witch Way

She awoke in her bed, still wearing her favorite black dress. Christine's face crept into focus and Estella quickly closed her eyes. "Am I dead?"

"No," Christine whispered.

"I have to be dead. I *feel* dead."

"You did good," a female voice on her left said. Estella opened her eyes, surprised to find Medea du Lac sitting on the bed.

"What happened?" She tried to sit up, but Medea gently pressed her shoulders back onto the bed.

"You got angry, child. Same way you got angry with Gavin but with more power behind it."

Estella saw Christine's shadow retreat and Medea's inch closer to her. "Huh?"

"Don't you remember what happened?" Christine asked and instantly Estella was transported back to Jason's apartment. She remembered sex on his kitchen floor with glass raining down on top of them. She remembered his proposal. His horrid-looking face flashed through her mind. She felt his gnarled mouth kiss hers, his fingertips on her thighs. Her bedroom began to spin.

"I'm dizzy."

Medea placed a cool hand to her forehead and slowly lowered it until her eyes were covered. "That shall pass. Just lie still and relax. Black magic a hard thing t' control. Hard on the body and mind." She saw only blackness for several seconds. When she opened her eyes, the room was stationary and normal, Medea still sitting beside her on the bed, Christine on her other side.

"Is Jason dead?"

"Yes."

"And Gavin and Jama are human again?"

"Yes."

"But I didn't turn Jason from black magic," Estella argued, rolling onto her side so she could see Medea. "He wanted to turn *me* to black magic, to use my abilities for..."

"You beat him, girl. Couldn't have done any better myself. You should rest." Medea stood up from the bed; Estella felt the motion as if she were on a waterbed, the waves rolling beneath her. Her stomach lurched and she bit back the urge to vomit. "You feel better in the mornin'."

Medea disappeared from her line of sight and Estella braved the nausea to roll onto her other side. "I have to ask you something before you go, Medea." When the witch doctor and Christine paused and looked at her, she continued. "Why Jason Calhoun? Surely there have to be other rogue warlocks, other witches dabbling in the black arts. What was so special about him?"

"A woman scorned, child," the witch doctor said with a smile. "Tis as simple as that." She gave Estella a quick wink before ushering Christine out of the bedroom and closing the door behind her.

"Hell hath no fury like a *witch* scorned," Estella mumbled before sleep claimed her, her mind conjuring rats of all shapes and sizes to scurry through her dreams.