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Bewitching

By Jill Barnett



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What's a duke to do when a carefully selected bride rejects him rather than marry without love? He salvages his pride by marrying the next woman who falls into his arms. Joyous Fiona MacQuarrie bewitched the Duke of Belmore the moment she appeared from nowhere and knocked him over...literally. Joyous MacQuarrie is a Scottish witch whose powers of white magic are not always easy for her to control. When Alec's pride makes him choose to marry her, Joy turns the life of the most serious and snobbish duke in England upside down. Too soon Alec finds his well ordered and controlled life a mess, because he married a witch--one who turns him to fire when he kisses her, who charms everyone around her, and threatens to destroy both their lives as scandal looms over her. Too late, Joy discovers she's desperately in love and not even the strongest magic can seem to turn her into a proper duchess, or make her husband love her. Passion holds them spellbound in an irresistibly funny and tender tale of two opposite but lonely hearts.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1813 Alec Castlemaine, a callous English duke who compares courtship to horse trading, faces rejection from his meticulously selected betrothed, who decides she cannot live without love. That same night, Joyous Fiona MacQuarrie, a Scottish witch with faith in fairy-tale endings, messes up a travel incantation and "zaps" herself into the duke's lap. Unbelievably, she explains away her sudden appearance, and the duke, wanting to salvage his pride, marries her immediately. After she reveals her powers on their wedding night, the duke forbids her to perform any hocus-pocus. Inconveniently, she can't always control her magic. When she sneezes, whatever she thinks appears. There is some self-righteous challenge to traditional representation of race and class. Joy hires a Caribbean cook named Hungan John despite protest from the rest of the household, although he ends up being little more than a happy, singing black man. Joy also helps Alec see that servants are people too. Barnett's (*Just a Kiss Away*) quirky wit is demonstrated when Joy says things like "Can't you shrink it a wee bit?" after they consummate their marriage, giving a twist to an otherwise standard plot.

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About the Author

Jill Barnett is the *New York Times* bestselling author of fifteen acclaimed novels and short stories. There are more than five million copies of her books in print in seventeen languages. Her work has earned her a place on such national bestseller lists as *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and *Publishers Weekly*. She lives in the Pacific Northwest. Visit her website at www.jillbarnett.com.

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From "Bewitching"

There was magic in the air, yet few could see it.

To the mortal eye there was nothing but a brash, bullying Scottish storm that blew like the Devil's breath from the gray swirling waters of the Sound of Mull. Lightning splintered the midnight sky, and thunder bellowed. Rain poured down from the heavens, and the sea crashed against the huge granite rocks of the coast, splattering white sea-foam up the sharp cliff on which Duart Castle stood.

For five hundred of its six hundred years, the castle had been the stronghold of the clan MacLean and host to their cousins, the clan MacQuarrie. But the Battle of Culloden Moor had changed all that. On that dark, dank moor some sixty-seven years earlier, Scot stubbornness had caused many a clan to lose its holdings. The MacLeans had lost their stronghold to the Sassenach -- Englishmen who cared not a wit for the braw, bold power of the place. The castle stood empty now, dark and abandoned.

Or so it appeared.

The skies bellowed and crackled, and the seas roared. To mere mortals it was only another storm, but to those who knew, to those of the ancient faith, it was more than just the heavens and the earth battling.

The witches were awake.

Now, there were witches, and there were *witches*. And then there were the MacQuarries.

'Tis a sad tale, that of the MacQuarries, a tale that had begun hundreds of years before this night. An ancient forefather of the current MacQuarrie had been summoned to the fete of the spring equinox in what is now the south of England. There, on a wide plain, stood a massive stone temple where the witches and warlocks met to demonstrate their powers. On that special spring it had been decreed that the MacQuarrie warlock would have the cherished honor of making those most precious springtime flowers -- the roses -- bloom. Other witches and warlocks had already walked into the center of the temple and used their magic to bring life back to a winterdead earth.

'Twas a sight to see that day when, in a matter of moments, green grass broke through the sodden ground. Wallflower bushes, buttercups, and dandelions spread a frosting of bright yellow across the fresh green that had magically sprouted. Soon the barren branches of birch trees were dripping with silvery spring leaves and tall elegant alders burst anew. Oak, ash, and elm came back to life with little more than the casting of a spell, the flick of a hand, or the flashing snap of a witch's magic. The scent of jasmine, primrose, marigold, and lavender filled the cool morning air, and suddenly it was spring. Birds and insects swarmed through the air and perched in the trees, and the melody of the lark, the hum of the bees and call of doves brought music to the land that had for too many cold, dreary months been silent.

Then it was the MacQuarrie's turn. The crowd parted as he made his way to the center of the stone temple. The room was silent, so silent one could have heard a blink, as each and every witch and warlock waited for that special moment. The MacQuarrie stood there for a long moment of quiet concentration. Then slowly he raised his hands toward the massive ceiling and with a snap of his fingers, let loose his magic.

No roses bloomed that day.

Instead an enormous explosion, the like of which no one had ever seen, blew the temple walls and roof into the sky. When the dust settled and the air cleared and the witches and warlocks picked themselves up off the ground, the temple was no more. Nothing stood except a few circles of stone arches.

Modern mortals look in awe at the ruins they call Stonehenge, but mention the name Stonehenge to the witches of the world and to this very day they shake their heads in dismay and mutter about the shame of the MacQuarries.

And it came to pass that in the year of our Lord 1813 there were only two witches left in all of Scotland -- a MacLean and, of all things, a MacQuarrie. So on this brash night as the storm battered the shore of the isle of Mull, as it rained on the crumbling ruins of a once-proud castle perched upon that jagged stone headland, as the mortals on that tiny island cowered by their fires and listened to the heavens wait, the MacLean and the MacQuarrie made magic.

Joyous Fiona MacQuarrie bent down to pick up the scattering of books on the tower room floor. Ten golden bracelets jangled like sleigh bells down her wrists and echoed in the tense silence of the room. She was thankful for the noise; it gave her a blessed moment's respite from the impatient, penetrating glare of her aunt, the MacLean. With her face turned away from her aunt, Joy grabbed another book, tucking it under her arm as she muttered, "'Twas only one wee tad of a word." She picked up another book, to the accompaniment of those same tinkling bracelets, but as they settled on her wrists she could hear a new sound -- a distinct, agitated tapping.

Her aunt's foot.

Joy peeked under her outstretched arm and winced. Her aunt's arms were crossed, and she shook her golden head in disgust. But worst of all, Joy could see the MacLean's lips move: her aunt was counting again.

Joy's heart sank; she'd failed again. With a defeated sigh she quietly returned the books to their ancient oak shelf and plopped onto a wobbly wooden stool after pulling it closer to the trestle table that stood in the center of the tower room. She rested a small chin in her hand and waited for her aunt to reach a hundred -- at least she hoped it would be only a hundred.

A slick cat with fur as white as fresh Highland snow leapt onto the table and wound itself around and through the three time-tarnished brass candlesticks whose tapers bathed the battered oak table in flickering golden light. As the cat meandered along the table its tail cast strange shadows across the nicked tabletop. Entranced by the patterns, Joy tried to make imaginary letters out of those cat's-tail figures, her mind wandering off on one of its frequent journeys of fancy. That was her problem. She was a witch with a wandering mind.

The cat, Gabriel, was her aunt's familiar -- an embodied spirit in animal form whose duty was to serve, attend, and in some cases, guard a witch. She glanced at her own familiar, Beelzebub, an ermine weasel whose coat was currently winter white except for wee spots of black on his tail and paws. The snowy fur covered a massive potbelly that made him look more like a plump rabbit than a sleek, almost feline weasel. He was at that moment, as at most moments, sound asleep.

She sighed. Beezle was the only animal who was willing to be her familiar.

Cats like Gabriel were proud, arrogant animals; they absolutely refused to be associated with a witch who couldn't control her magic. Owls were too wise to ally themselves with someone as inept as Joy. And toads, well, they took one look at her, croaked, and hopped away.

Plump old Beezle wheezed in his sleep. Joy watched his black-tipped paws twitch and reminded herself that at least she had a familiar, even if he was only a weasel. As if sensing her thoughts, he cracked open one lazy brown eye and peered at her as if calmly waiting for the next disaster. She reached out to scratch his plush belly and promptly knocked over a pot of cold rose hip tea.

Gabriel hissed and sprang out of the path of the spilled tea. Beezle didn't move that fast. Beezle seldom moved at all. The tea pooled like the tide around him. He blinked twice, looked at the tea seeping onto his white fur, and gave her a look not unlike the MacLean's before he shook himself, sending a sprinkling of tea in every direction. He waddled over to a dry spot and plopped back down with a soft thud, then rolled over, paws in the air, plump white and pink belly up, and stared at the ceiling. Joy wondered if animals could count. Beezle opened his mouth and let out a loud wheeze, then a snore.

Count in their sleep, she amended, drumming her fingers on the table.

"Whatever am I to do with you?" the MacLean finally spoke, having taken enough time to count to a hundred twice. Her aunt's stance was stern, but her voice held the patience that arose from what was almost a mother's love.

That love made the situation even worse for Joy. She truly wanted to hone her magic skills for her patient aunt as well as for her own pride's sake, and she was miserable because she couldn't get it right. She absently drew one finger through the dust on the table, then looked at her aunt and mentor. "Can one word truly make such a difference?"

"Every single word is of the utmost importance. An incantation must be exact. Part of the power comes from the voice." The MacLean took a deep breath and clasped her hands behind her. "The rest takes practice. Concentration!" She paced around the circular room, her strong voice echoing off the stone walls like bagpipes in the Highlands. With the suddenness of a wink, she stopped and looked down at Joy. "Now pay

attention. Watch me."

Standing to Joy's left, she raised her elegant hands high in the air, allowing the fine gold threads in her embroidered silk robe to catch the candlelight and glimmer like the twinkling of fairy dust. Joy caught her breath. Standing as she was, tall and golden with the midnight sky as a backdrop through the tower window, her aunt looked like a goddess. Her long straight hair, which hung in a gleaming satin drape past her hips to the backs of her knees, was the color of hammered gold. Her skin was as flawless as pure cream and appeared ageless in the muted glow of the candlelight. The MacLean's robe was white -- not the stark white of cotton or the ivory white of lamb's wool but the same shimmering white that the stars shone, that lightning sparked, that diamonds glittered and the sun glowed.

A breath of cold Scottish wind whistled through the tower room, making the candle flames flicker. The sharp smell of hot tallow mingled with the scent of midnight rain and the brine of the roiling seas that rode the whisper of wind through the room. Shadows danced a jagged jig up the granite walls, and the sound of waves crashing against the sharp coastal rocks b...

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Derrick Minor:

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Ronda Hagerty:

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