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Spellbent



Par Lucy A. Snyder
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le: 2009-12-29Sorti le: 2009-12-29Format: Ebook Kindle

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Par Lucy A. Snyder : Spellbent before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Spellbent:

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn the heart of Ohio, Jessie Shimmer is caught up in hot, magic-drenched passion with her roguish lover, Cooper Marron, who is teaching her how to tap her supernatural powers. When they try to break a drought by calling down a rainstorm, a hellish portal opens and Cooper is ripped from this world, leaving Jessie fighting for her life against a vicious demon that's been unleashed.In the aftermath, Jessie, who knows so little about her own true nature, is branded an outlaw. She must survive by her wits and with the help of her familiar, a ferret named Palimpsest. Stalked by malevolent enemies, Jessie is determined to

find out what happened to Cooper. But when she moves heaven and earth to find her man, she'll be shocked by what she discovers and by what she must ultimately do to save them all. From the Paperback edition. Extrait Chapter One A Simple Storm- Calling Cooper woke me up before the nightmare did. He caught me square in the shin with a jerking kick and I bolted up, my heart hammering like a small demon trying to break through my rib cage. Already the dream had slipped from my mind, leaving nothing behind but my wrecked nerves. Cooper twitched and ground his teeth. Sweat plastered his curly black hair against his forehead, and his tattooed arm shook as he crushed the pillow against his chest. I wanted to hold him close, wake him up. I hated seeing the man I loved in that kind of pain. It didn't matter that he was the teacher and I, his apprentice. But I knew he'd lash out at anyone near him when he came out of the dream. So I wiped the sweat out of my eyes and scooted away from him on the bed. Cooper, I called. My throat felt like it was lined with steel wool, and I could taste pennies where I'd bitten the inside of my lip. Wake up. No response. My heart was slowing, finally, but my hands still shook as I wiped my eyes again. I'd never had nightmares before.

I started sleeping with Cooper. The first couple of times we'd both gotten bad dreams the same night, I dismissed it as coincidence. But after a dozen nights? It was pretty clear that the terror I saw in his fractured sleep mirrored the terror fading inside my own head. We were having the same damn nightmare . . . and lately I was having it whether I was sleeping beside him or not. He writhed and groaned. Cooper's white fox terrier, Smoky, was cowering under my computer desk, whining. The dog was giving me a scared look: Wake him up before something bad happens. I'd seen the dog take on creatures ten times his seventeen pounds when he thought his master was in danger; he'd once torn the ear off an ogreish no-neck who was preparing to brain

Cooper with a tire iron in a bar parking lot. But when the nightmare came on, fierce little Smoky was helpless. I could hear the rustling of my six-month-old ferret racing around in his cage in the corner. What's going on inside your head? I wondered, staring down at Cooper. I slid off the bed, took a deep breath, and let loose a shout that shook the floor: Cooper! He jerked awake, arms windmilling, punching the air, kicking the sheet off the bed. No, I won't, I won't, get away from me Cooper, calm down! You're okay, you're okay. What?

Where where am I? he gasped, staring around in the dimness. In our apartment. Remember? I climbed back onto the bed and crawled to him across the twisted bed clothes. J-jessie? he stammered, his eyes finally seeming to focus. Oh man am I glad to see you. He caught me in a strong hug and kissed me. His naked skin was slick with sweat, and beneath his usual pleasantly garlicky smell was the faint, sharp odor of brimstone. Smoky padded out from under the desk and hopped up onto the bed. Are you okay? I asked. Yeah. Think so.

Dream can't really hurt me, right? I can't even remember what it was all about. He laughed nervously and patted Smoky's smooth head. Serves me right for falling asleep when I didn't need to. You almost never get enough sleep. You go till you finally pass out from sheer exhaustion. Then you get REM rebound and a worse nightmare than you'd have gotten otherwise. I chose to ignore the little voice inside my head reminding me that I, too, had been going without sleep. When things got bad, I'd been taking sleeping pills to blunt the dreams.

But not very often; the drugs left me groggy and stupid the next day. Hmm, much sense you make, young Jedi, he said. But sensible man I am not. He stretched, his spine popping. I couldn't help but admire the play of muscles across his lean torso. He was thirty-eight but easily passed for thirty; there wasn't an ounce of fat on him. Some dumb relationship calculator I'd found online the kind that divides your age by two and adds seven years and tells you that's the youngest you can date said that I wasn't old enough for him. I know I'm immature in some ways, but inside there's a cranky old lady yelling at the damn kids to get off her lawn. She's been there awhile. I've decided to call her Mabel. When I was a teenager, most of the other girls got on my very last nerve all the stuff they obsessed over just seemed stupid and trivial to me. I mean, seriously, who gives a shit about what shade of eye shadow to wear to a pep rally? I'd rather skip the whole thing and read a book. I

thought Ohio State would be better than high school, but mostly it was just bigger. Maybe I'd have felt different about things if my mom hadn't died when I was eleven. After she was gone, there was nobody around to make me feel particularly excited about makeup and shoe shopping. I started the existential angst early, started feeling like I was way older than the other kids, and that never got better. The day I turned twenty-three, I felt ancient, even with Cooper there to celebrate with me. Cooper, on the other hand, is nothing if not bubbling with youthful energy. He could be fifty and would still be hotter than half the twenty-something guys I've met. Of course, most of the guys I've seen at OSU would only have six-packs if they bought them at the 7-Eleven. And the boys I've dated didn't have Cooper's brains, or his heart, or his guts. And his southerly anatomy isn't too shabby, either. Top that with him being the real thing when it comes to magic . . . well, whoever made the relationship calculator can kiss my rosy pink butt. What time is it? he asked. A little past nine the sun's just gone down. Cooper rubbed his face and scratched his chin through his short dark goatee.

How's the sky? Dry. The nearest cloud is in Indiana, I think. Well, then it's time for us to earn our rent money. He reached over the side of the bed to retrieve his jeans. Three thousand from the farmers for a nice little rainstorm not a bad payment for a night's work, huh? The doorbell rang downstairs. I'll get it, Cooper said, slipping on his Levis. He thumped downstairs. I peeled off my sweat-soaked T-shirt and pants, tossed them in the hamper, then started digging through the dresser for some fresh clothes. Everything in there was a hopeless jumble, but at least it was clean. A year back, Cooper pissed off a sylph and she nixed all his house cleaning charms; it took us forever to get our laundry moving again. As curses go that one was pretty minor probably the faery equivalent of writing on your face in Sharpie marker while you're passed out but there are few things more embarrassing to a modern witch or wizard than being forced to use a Laundromat. I heard the front door creak open, and then our neighbors' cheerful greeting: Hey, man, everything okay over here? I heard someone holler. Hey, Bo, replied Cooper. Yeah, we're fine, sorry if we disturbed you. Oh, ain't nothing, just making sure you folks is okay, Bo replied. Miz Sanchez brought me some of her tamales earlier cause I fixed her tire, and she told me to make sure you folks got a couple dozen. I heard a paper grocery bag rattle open. Hey, the smell's great, said Cooper. That was really nice of her. She's real grateful for what you two done for her little girl. I clearly remembered the afternoon Mrs. Sanchez was running from door to door, panicked to near incoherence because her six-year-old daughter had disappeared from the apartment complex's pool. Cooper knew enough Spanish to ask for one of the girls' dolls. After that it was easy enough to go back to the privacy of our apartment and cast a spell to track the kid's spirit to the other side of the complex. We found the little girl in a run-down garden apartment. Thankfully, she was okay; the creepy old pedophile who rented the place hadn't done anything more than feed her ice cream. Once the girl was safe with her mother and no one the wiser that we'd used magic to find her I called the cops on my cell phone while Cooper impressed upon the old man that he was never, ever to go near a child again. The old guy was so frightened by Cooper that he practically raced to the police cruiser like jail was going to be some kind of safe haven. Cooper can be pretty fierce when he gets angry. Tome, that's one of his sexiest traits. It's not just about being able to tear the house down; it's about being willing to do it in a heartbeat to protect the people who genuinely need your help. Anyone would've done the same, said Cooper. Please be sure to thank her for us. After a quick dinner of Mrs. Sanchez's tasty tamales and salsa, Cooper and I and the two animals piled into the Dinosaur. Cooper's big, black, much tinkered-with 1965 Lincoln Continental. Smoky hopped onto the backseat while I sat shotgun with my ferret in his walking harness and leash. Cooper talked to Smoky over his shoulder as he drove. The white terrier seldom made any noise as he replied telepathically. Familiars almost never seem to be talking to their masters, so the master's side of the conversations can seem a little schizophrenic if they don't remember to think instead of speaking out loud. I know of several witches and wizards who just can't keep their mouths shut; when Bluetooth headsets came on the market, a lot of chatty Talents ran out and bought them to reclaim some of their dignity. Yes, about midnight, Cooper said. What? No. You have to pee? You should have said something earlier. No, you'll just have to wait. With a heavy, long-suffering sigh, Smoky lay down on the black leather upholstery and covered his snout with his paws. I felt my cell phone buzz in the right thigh pocket of my cargo pants. I pulled out my phone and flipped it open. Hello, vibrating pants, I said into the receiver. The woman on the other end burst into laughter. Jessica, you are such a weirdo sometimes! No one still called me Jessica but Mother Karen, an older white witch I had met through Cooper. Pot, kettle, black, Karen. How are you? I'm fine. What are you two doing to night? Were off to drown some farmer's sorrows. Calling a rainstorm? Good girl, my morning glories are starting to wilt. Well, I was doing some baking to night and thought I'd invite you two over if you were free. Who's that? Cooper asked. Mother Karen. She's baking. Ooh! Cooper's eyes lit up. I want me some haish brownies, he said in his best hillbilly accent. An summa thet cherry pah! Karen heard him and laughed. Tell that man he is not to so much as sniff my cannabis brownies ever again. Last time he got stoned he turned my kids into spider monkeys and they broke half the dishes in the house. But I will save him a cherry tart or two. You get pie, I told him. Las drogas es verboten. I never get to have any fun. Cooper pouted. Speaking of breaking things, did you want to ride with me to hapkido practice this week? Mother Karen asked. Yes, thanks. We're doing knife and sword defenses, right? Right you are. And remember, belt tests are in three short weeks. Oh, cool, I totally forgot! I was up for my purple belt; I figured it would be at least another year before I was ready for my black belt test, mostly because I kept missing class. Mother Karen laughed. Ah, to be young and still excited about belt tests. Meet me at my house around six on Tuesday? Okay, sounds like a plan. I said good-bye, turned off the phone, and slipped it back in my pocket. Then I realized Cooper had taken I-71 south toward downtown Columbus. I thought we'd be doing this someplace out in the country, near the

farms. Cooper laughed, a touch nervously, it seemed to me. I . . . just don't feel like being out in the boonies. I figured we could do this in the Grove. Any magic we work there will be amplified for miles. To most people, the Grove is just the middle of Taft Park. The park is made up of two dozen acres smack in the middle of downtown, extending from the east side of the State house to the Columbus Art Museum. The central dozen acres were old-growth forest, virtually unchanged since the first European explorers set foot in them. But to the city's Talents, the Grove is the focal point of a strong upwelling of Earth magic and is one of only two places of power in the entire state. It's home to some of the only enchanted trees left in the Midwest, and, as the occasional normal kid on a ghost hunt finds out, the Grove is a lot bigger on the inside than it looks on the outside. The Talented families in the city have worked hard behind the scenes to make sure the Grove stays wild and unmolested by developers and Parks Recreation officials bent on improving it. The problem was, if any of the vast majority of the populace who didn't know wizards existed saw us performing magic, Cooper would get into quite a bit of trouble with the local governing circle. A few people, like the farmers paying us to call down some rain, know Talents exist. But those few are put under a geas to keep the secret and not speak to outsiders about magic. In the wake of the medieval witch hunts which murdered a lot of harmless mundane women and almost nobody using actual black magic, Talent leaders had decided it was best that most mundanes knew as little as possible about the magical world. If we get a really good storm going, the skyscrapers will give better lightning protection, Cooper said. He put his right hand on my leg and moved his fingertips in a light, teasing circle on the inside of my thigh. Tingly. I have a feeling we're going to get things very, very wet to night, don't you? You just want to fuck me downtown where someone might see us, I thought, then found myself sitting there with a dirty grin on my face as my inner exhibitionist pushed my worries under the covers. Erotomancy was just the thing for working forces of nature. I lifted his hand and put it over my left breast so he could feel my nipple hardening beneath my thin T-shirt. Why, ah, have no idea what you are talking about, Mista Marron, I said. Ah, think you might be trying to take advantage of me. Ah, think you are planning to put that great big ol' cock of yours inside me and make me just scream. His fingers gently squeezed my nipple, sending a shiver of delight down my spine. Stop with the southern belle dirty talk . . . you know it gets me hot. Why, Mista Marron, isn't that what you want? What I want is to stop this car, throw you onto the hood, and take you right here by the side of the road. He had that certain horny-loony gleam in his eye; he wasn't kidding one little bit about stopping the car. He was going to do it do me right out there in the light of the oncoming traffic so the truckers could get a quick rearview mirror peep show at seventy miles an hour. And he'd be able to get us both off before the highway patrol showed up and if he couldn't, he'd be able to cast a mirage spell and make the cops and everyone else think the car was parked miles away from our actual location. You should stop this, I thought. Take his hand off your tit and put it back on the steering wheel. Instead I squeezed his hand tighter against my breast and said, I want you. It was the nightmare's fault this was happening. I knew he woke up so crazy with relief at finding himself alive with all parts intact that he wanted to send us both into orgasmic oblivion right out in the open where gods and monsters and mundanes could see us. I knew because I felt exactly the same way. Cooper had always been a bit of an exhibitionist, but I had warmed to it during the year of nightmares as my own way of giving the Darkness the finger. The Darkness could take us to dreamland and torture us, it could murder us in a thousand ways and leave us shivering on our sheets in confusion and terror, it could leave us psychically scarred, afraid to sleep, but it could not break us. We wouldn't let it. As Cooper's foot touched the brake, my ferret wiggled out of the crook of my right arm, hopped onto my chest, and nipped Cooper's thumb. Ow! Dammit! Cooper jerked his hand away. The ferret chattered at both of us, his little beady eyes glittering. I laughed. Guess he doesn't want us getting our freak on until it's rainstorm time. Just what I need, a weasel chaperone, Cooper grumped. But at least it's a sign of intelligent response. Is he talking to you yet? No, not yet. Should I be worried? I mean, I could've picked wrong. You got a good strong empathy buzz off him at the animal shelter, right? I pursed my lips. We'd gone to dozens of shelters and pet stores looking for an animal to be my familiar. Birds, snakes, rats, cats, frogs, dogs, rabbits, iguanas . . . my mind was reeling by the time we'd gotten to the Ferret Rescue League. When the attendant put the second slinky ball of fluff in my hands, I felt a strange warm humming buzz along my spine. And before I had a chance to think, I'd already said This is the one. Let's take him and go home. And honestly? I'd sort of been hoping for a cat or dog. The ferret was sheer adorableness, sure, but we couldn't let him out of his cage without him immediately finding the most damn inaccessible place in the apartment to dive into and hide. Like the bed springs, or the coils behind the refrigerator. Cooper finally had to cook up a ferret retrieval charm. However, the ferret was still a bit stinky. The musky oils in his fur took half a dozen hand washings to get off my skin. Cooper refused to do a

deodorantcharm on the grounds that a ferret ought to smell like a ferret, and I was Just Being Picky. So I became resigned to the ferret funk, and waited for the magic to happen. Yeah, I think I did, I said. But how do I know what something's supposed to feel like if I've never felt it before? Cooper shrugged. You just know. I've seen a dozen apprentices pick their first familiars, and so far things seem normal to me. I wouldn't worry about him yet. He isn't fully grown. Sometimes it takes a while for a familiar to awaken. Probably he just needs a little more exposure to magic. Cooper snapped his fingers and the radio tuner's face lit up, the dial spinning over to his favorite oldies station. Stairway to Heaven was just fading out. The DJ's voice broke in. Hope all you night birds have found your own little bit of heaven to night, even if it is too darn hot out. Don't you wish it was Christmas? A little Christmas in July? Here's some Doug and Bob McKenzie to make you think cool thoughts . . . The Twelve Days of Christmas lurched through the speakers. Cooper jerked and swatted the air.

The speaker's squealed as the radio sparked in the dashboard. The stench of scorched wiring filled the car. Jesus, Cooper, you didn't have to break it! I hate that goddamn song. The color had left his face, and a muscle in his left eyelid was twitching. I know. But jeez. He'd never been able to explain to me why he so disliked any version of the song, no matter how silly, but usually he could suffer through a few stanzas until he could change the station or leave the room. I'd never seen him react so violently to it before. *Revue de presse* "Gripping . . . marks the debut of a real talent . . . I couldn't put it down!" Sarah Langan, author of *Audrey's Door* "With a cast of unforgettable characters and relentless action and suspense, Lucy A. Snyder masterfully weaves a fantastical plot into a real-world setting, never once breaking stride." Deborah LeBlanc, author of *Water Witch* "Lucy Snyder hooks you from the beginning, delivering a strong protagonist and a fresh, engaging world of magic. I can't wait to see what she does next." Alice Henderson, author of *Voracious* "An exhilarating ride of magic and mayhem." Sphera Girn, author of *Mistress of the Dark* "In her thrilling trial-by-fire debut, Snyder's heroine Jessie Shimmer is transformed from young apprentice to first-class magical butt-kicker . . . the same transformation the author herself has undergone in the creation of this fully realized new urban mythology. I can't wait for book two!" Christopher Golden, author of *The Myth*

Hunters