



REWITCHED

Believing in
yourself is
its own kind
of magic.

★ lucy jane wood ★

Praise for

Rewitched

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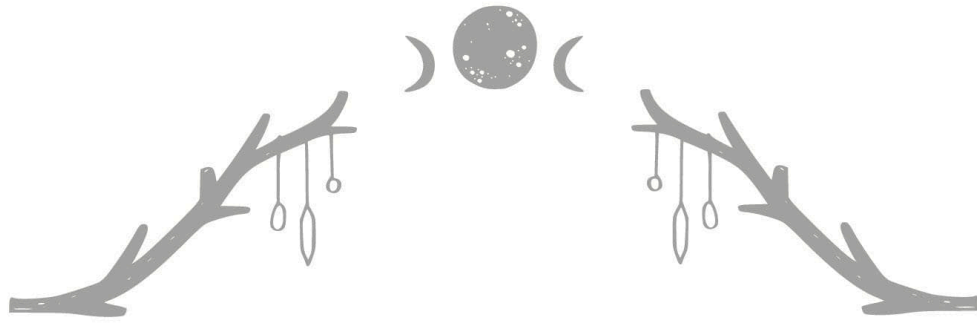
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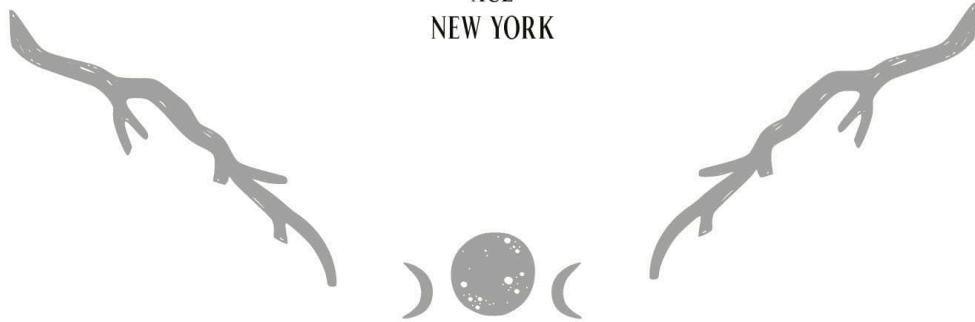
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Rewitched

Lucy Jane Wood

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For the girls who grew up on the wonder of witches, and knew that magic
would be found at their own fingertips

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1

Something Wicked



A WITCH WILL ALWAYS sense that she is in the presence of another born of magical persuasion. Before any introductions are made, before any actual magic is displayed, she will subconsciously register their arrival for herself. First a witch will feel it on her skin. The tingles kick in, like sherbet and static, dragging up the gooseflesh of her arms to a shiver. She'll taste a shift in the air as it becomes sharper, sweeter, almost coppery. Then comes the smell, distinct like earth and embers and crisp toffee apples, combining to a heady, rich scent of what can only be described as warmth and home. And above all else, the pricking of her ears, as well as her thumbs, will strike a match and fire up the coals of intuition. The very sound of a witch's footsteps will whisper that something is coming her way.

Unfortunately for Belle, such valuable insight into how things worked had proved largely redundant, because at 29 years, 363 days and a handful of hours old, she had yet to encounter another witch at all. Aside from her own mother, of course, and grandmother, who had passed beyond the veil a handful of years ago. There had been a brief, surprising and somewhat

awkward visit from a pair of coven leaders, too, who had stopped by on her fifteenth birthday to begin the long process of her endarkenment. But Belle had limited recollection of that, as she had found the whole thing entirely mortifying and hid behind her hair, blushing and willing it to end, for the majority of the ceremony. She had shared no contact with the coven at all since her powers were first instated and had been left to her own devices to explore the possibilities of magic, as was custom.

Growing up with her mother's peaceful, softhearted spells as part of the everyday meant that an intrinsic sense of magic was always nearby. There was no great moment of recognition, because it always was. The rush of magic that flowed from Bonnie and washed over Belle whenever she was around her mother was so normal, she barely even noticed the hit anymore.

Belle had long since stopped anticipating such a meeting with another witch. Their kind was rare these days, getting rarer with every generation apparently, and she had no intention of seeking them out for herself and inviting any trouble. She lived her life quietly amongst the non-wicche world, and that was more than fine with her.

"Belle, what have I told you about these loyalty cards? You dish out stamps willy-nilly, you're costing me a fortune."

Violet was an immaculate businesswoman. Her expensive suits were always a soft shade of blue or purple (a lifelong habit that came with a colourful name), her silver hair set and sprayed freshly twice a week. These days, she walked slowly but with purpose on an elegant silver cane and had always been the holder of an impressive vintage scarf collection. In all her years of working at Lunar Books, Belle was almost certain she'd never seen Violet wear the same one twice. Although still overseeing the goings-on, Vi had slowed down her appearances at the shop a while ago, popping in only once or twice a week to slide a finger across the dust, pinch everybody's cheeks and check that Belle wasn't doing anything as foolish as giving out two loyalty stamps instead of one.

"Vi," Belle called over her shoulder as she slid a stack of new releases into their temporary home, "it's two p.m. on a Thursday, and the place is packed.

I don't think you need to worry about me handing out paper bookmarks." She reached up on her tiptoes to the top shelf with a particularly chunky mythology collection, then politely shouldered her way back through the sea of customers towards her boss.

Violet gave her a slightly sheepish look as she handed over a couple of stray hardbacks. "Well, you know I don't mind, really. I rather liked how you used to put them inside every book as a little treat. But Christopher does say if we count the pennies, then the pounds will—"

"Christopher says a lot of things," Belle said. Violet's eyebrows shot up and Belle carefully reined herself back in. "Which is great, always love his input. Obviously." She cleared her throat. "Still just adjusting to him being around the place and making his changes."

"Changes that he says we should have made a long time ago," Violet reasoned.

"Right. It's just that his suggestions...Well, they don't necessarily add up to the Lunar Books experience that everybody has always come here for."

"I am well aware that you two have differing ideas about the future of this place. But you also know that if it were up to me, I would never have had to bring my son into the picture in the first place. What choice did you leave me with?" Violet shot her a loaded look from under a poised eyebrow.

Belle sighed. "Come on, Vi. We've been over this. Several hundred times."

"If only you'd stop being so selfish and grant the wish of a feeble old woman..." Violet wore a forlorn look but smiled as she leafed through a children's title about a boarding school with her exquisite red manicure.

Belle squinted in her boss's direction. "Nothing about you is feeble. You're a menace to society."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I am an innocent, ailing old lady who simply wishes she could leave her cherished shop in the hands of she who loves it most," Violet said. "You could run things as you wish, I could spend my afternoons at the theatre instead of nagging you about dwindling stock levels—"

“Are you ever going to give this up?” Belle interrupted with affectionate annoyance. She was secretly touched by how keen Violet still was to sell her the shop, having begun the crusade years ago to hand over the reins of her pride and joy.

“Not until we sign the papers. Which we will,” Violet said with a knowing nod, now examining the table of Autumn Reads and adjusting a book by millimetres to the exact angle.

“Which we won’t,” Belle corrected her. “I’ve told you a million times, there’s no way I could run this place on my own.” She passed the oak desk, tidying the greetings cards and small selection of seasonal bouquets that lined the till area as she went. They were loaded with miniature pumpkins and dusky bunny tails to mark the incoming start of October, a subtle *Floresco Bellus* incantation lacing the stems and keeping them remarkably fresh.

“Oh, how many times, Belle? You wouldn’t be on your own.” Violet audibly tutted this time. “You’ve got Jim and Monica here through the week and that new girl with the unfortunate nose ring at the weekends.”

“You know what I mean. I’m talking about taking the reins. Generally not my speciality. I sort of just...float around?”

“I haven’t done a damn useful thing around here since the printing press was considered modern technology. Every good idea for years has been yours.”

“But it’s still your baby. I’m just here making sure books come in, books go out, customers are happy—that’s about the long and the short of it.”

“And what more is there to it? You and I both know that you practically run the place single-handedly. I’m too old for all of this now, I have better things to do than recommend thrillers to the unwashed masses.”

“There’s nothing wrong with thrillers. You’re a snob, Vi. And you know what I’m like, I’d probably run it into the ground within a few months.”

“Less of the self-deprecation, please. I can’t stand it. You’re a highly capable, knowledgeable woman who I trust implicitly. You’ve worked your magic here for longer than I care to remember”—at this, Belle choked on the

air and spluttered out a coughing fit, earning a thump on the back from Violet—"mostly because it ages me dreadfully. You're just too scared to take a risk, and you care too much about what might go wrong." She pointed a sharp shining nail at Belle.

"You're very good at complimenting and insulting me all at once." Belle frowned, returning to her spot behind the till.

Violet leaned against the green marble countertop and pulled out a pocket mirror to move a single hair back into place. "It is a fine art." She smacked her lips together. "But if you continue to refuse to take up my brilliant offer, then you know I have no choice but to leave Christopher in charge of things. I don't trust outsiders for the job. If I'm to properly enjoy a retirement of luxury cruises and personal shopping, then Lunar needs to be in capable hands. And Christopher *is* capable hands."

"Of course," Belle said placidly, taking a breath to swallow her pride. "The man might not know a paperback from a pumpkin, but he does know his profits and losses."

Belle hoped that the music she'd chosen that morning was enough to hide the not-so-muffled sounds coming from the back office, where Christopher was taking it in turns to either roar expletives or guffaw pretentiously down the phone to an associate. She winced as she spotted a distracted customer turn their head towards the noise.

Profits and losses were seemingly *all* that Christopher knew, leading to decisions that broke Belle's heart a fraction more every day. In the two years since Violet had decided to step down and, albeit reluctantly, hand over the reins to her corporate son, he had been gradually chipping away at the ideas that Belle herself had implemented at Lunar since she had started working there almost ten years ago. Their precious small baked goods and coffee cart had been the first to go, with Christopher declaring that cappuccinos "turned the place into a mothers' meeting." Her annual harvest book festival with other local businesses had him laughing so profoundly that he'd genuinely slapped his knee. More worryingly, just a few days ago, she had overheard him discussing at volume how the younger members of staff were hanging

on to the payroll by a thread. This being the final straw, Belle had brought his questionable decisions to Violet's attention. But Christopher had quickly interjected, insisting that Belle was being dramatic, laughing it off, wrapping Violet around his finger as usual. Belle kept the reality of just how bad things had got to herself, like a cold hard pebble to carry around in her pocket.

"Somehow, I blinked and it's a modern world out there now, Belle," Violet said. "I sure as hell can't keep up with the times, but he will make sure this place does just that."

"This place isn't supposed to keep up with the times," Belle said. "It's supposed to exist in its own little bubble of cosiness that's entirely separate from the real world."

"If only," Violet said wistfully. "See you next week. I'll call you about those figures from August." She leaned across to offer Belle a kiss on the cheek, leaving her usual little smear of magenta lipstick behind, a brush of ever-so-slight whiskers and a waft of sugared perfume.

"See you, Vi," Belle said fondly, waving her off as she headed out to the shiny black car waiting to drive her home to her equally perfect townhouse. She was impossibly wealthy after a life spent on-stage as a theatre star of days gone by, before a vocal injury put a stop to things and recovery sent her to the healing world of books. Belle sunk her hands into the pockets of her denim apron embroidered with Lunar moons across the front, and her mind wandered back to its usual battlefield.

Taking Violet up on her offer, to actually buy Lunar Books from her, was a dream that always felt far too big. And every time that Violet broached the conversation and reminded her of the chance she was letting slip through her fingers like sand, she felt herself flinching away even farther.

There was so much that could go wrong. She was clueless as to what the process would even look like, and her meagre savings were too precious to throw at something that wasn't a guaranteed success, even though Violet had made her an overly generous, sentimental offer. Plus, there was the small matter of risking the job that she adored and had worked for, all the way up from Saturday girl to store manager.

Still, she dared to think about it all the time. Dared to imagine herself really doing it, rewarding herself with the bravery that had once been at the root of all her decisions. But she could never find quite enough courage to light the taper, to find out whether the explosion would be a controlled one or a wildfire. And so life had unfolded. The wheel stayed in hands that weren't her own, and she continued watching out the window as the road sped past.

A woman in a salmon pink cardigan reached the till, juggling an armful of picture books with a roll of rainbow wrapping paper and a toddler attached to her right hand.

"This is a lovely one, it might be my favourite," Belle told the little girl as she wrapped up the book on top of the pile in brown paper. "Did you choose this? You did so well." The girl nodded shyly, then promptly buried her face in her mum's skirt.

"Thanks for all of your help with finding the right ones. Should keep her busy for a while." The lady smiled gratefully.

"Of course." Belle rang up the total. "Sorry I couldn't stay with you longer. It's a bit crazy in here today. This weather makes everyone want to curl up with a book."

On perfect cue, a flash of bright lightning split through the bruised evening sky, cracking through the soft lighting that kept Lunar feeling warm and welcoming no matter the conditions outside. A loud thunderclap followed quickly behind, so intense that it rattled the top floor's stained-glass windows. The woman gathered up her shopping, stowed the books underneath her jumper and pulled up her child's hood before reluctantly heading out into the rain.



A BUSY EVENING unfolded. Life at Lunar, locally loved for its charm and indefinable specialness, swung chaotically from calm and quiet to

unstoppably busy. Belle would often receive a call on her days off from a frantic Jim, tearing out what remained of his halo of fluffy hair while attempting to simultaneously refill shelves and man the till. Their tiny team had been struggling to keep up with Christopher's schedules, each day understaffed and overcommitted.

Ringling up another customer, she glanced over at the kids' section. As always, it had been completely ransacked, despite Belle setting up a neat little *Libri Liberi Ordino* incantation for the soft books and toys to return themselves to their boxes when nobody was looking. It was safe enough magic to pepper about the place amongst the other incantations she had strung around. Children didn't question it if the odd picture book tidied itself away and, of course, adults never noticed.

Closing time grew tantalisingly near. While Jim and Monica dealt with the debris of the day, Belle was run off her feet with a queue of shoppers that remained as relentless as the rain outside. In the back of her mind somewhere, she registered the sound of the brass bell above the front door ringing for the millionth time that day. She rubbed at her forearms as a layer of goose bumps swept over her skin with the gust of chilly air from the open door.

"Would you be interested in taking home this week's Stellar Read? It's a really..."

Belle felt her breath catch short. A feeling like a warm wave breaking over the crown of her head, strangely pleasant but forceful, slipped over her from top to toe and almost sent her reeling in the swell. She gripped the countertop for balance. If she didn't know better, she'd have said...Well, she'd have said it was magic.

"Are you okay?" A customer gave her a concerned look.

Belle swallowed hard, then flapped her hands dismissively. "Oh, fine, fine. Sorry. A bit dizzy. Means it's time for another coffee."

She laughed dryly and composed herself, ignoring the potent feeling that had appeared one moment and washed away the next. It had been a long day. Sliding the stack of sold books into a bag with a hasty, stressed smile

that Violet would not have considered signature Lunar service, she called for the next customer.

The man waiting on the other side of the desk caught her off guard. She noticed his height first, tall to the point of feeling slightly looming. And he was—she couldn't help but also acknowledge—intimidatingly handsome. The kind of handsome that would have her reporting back to Ariadne when she got home and had her instantly wondering why she hadn't done something better with her hair that morning. He was wearing belted trousers, a rust-coloured shirt tucked in over a white T-shirt and round wire glasses, which he removed when their eyes met. He popped them into the inside pocket of a long black leather coat that hung across extremely broad shoulders, and a curl of shaggy, shoulder-length dark hair fell into his eyes as he looked down. A silver thumb ring glinted with an amber stone as he pushed it back, placed a hand down on the countertop and leaned ever so slightly towards her. She forced herself to break eye contact almost instantly, unable to hold it as her face flushed hot.

"I'm wondering if you can help me." He spoke with a deep honey voice, like burnt caramel, and a twang of a London accent. "I'm looking for something rather specific. A little special."

Belle blushed so fiercely that the tops of her ears prickled with heat. A strange, barbed sensation travelled to the ends of her fingers as she rested them on the counter, then in her pockets, before finally settling on grabbing a pen, sending ink splashing across the counter.

"Sorry, sorry." She hastily mopped it up with the end of her sleeve. "Sounds interesting. How special are we talking, exactly? Is it a gift?"

The sides of his mouth perked up almost imperceptibly. "It is a gift."

Belle quickly gathered her remaining composure, distinctly embarrassed by her own embarrassment.

"Great. That sounds great. You could take a look at our Special Editions section, there's some signed copies which might go down well for a present. Or we have some great popular titles on the Stellar Reads table if you're looking for a more recent—"

“Malleus Maleficarum.”

Belle’s face blanched from flushed red to stark white in a moment. She must have misheard. “Sorry, it’s been a long day, I think I’m going mad. Which is good.” She laughed politely, shaking her head clear. “Pardon?”

“Malleus Maleficarum.” Not saying I agree with the message, of course,” he mused. “That magic is evil or wrong. But tracking down witches is an interesting concept, don’t you think?”

Belle’s vision flickered. *Malleus Maleficarum*, the most notorious text from history on the origins of witchcraft, the infamous witch-hunter’s guide on how to spot a witch.

A coincidence. It had to be a coincidence. But then she felt it, as though a switch had activated something intuitive inside her. She forced herself to make eye contact with the man again, and it was instantaneous. Her skin turned to pure static. A coppery taste flooded her tongue. He leaned his forearms on the countertop, interlacing his fingers, and a scent of woody bonfire smoke and spiced sweetness hit her. Belle noticed the muscles of his jaw lock a fraction of an inch, the smallest flash of a knowing smile. Realisation hit with the weight of a wrecking ball.

A witch.

Jim dropped an enormous cardboard box of hardbacks behind the front till with a loud thud, and Belle snapped back to reality.

“Don’t mind me,” Jim chimed, sauntering back towards the cookery corner while he whistled at an unbearably high pitch.

“Interesting choice.” She let out a painfully awkward laugh, tucked her hair behind her ears, then inexplicably fired finger guns at the man opposite. Panic had now evidently taken control of all of her limbs. “Not something we stock, I’m afraid. Such a shame. Sorry. Thanks for popping in.”

“That is such a shame,” the man echoed.

It was only then that she registered his tongue poking firmly into his cheek, a deep dimple etched into the other side. His eyebrows raised knowingly, as though waiting for the penny to drop. He beckoned her to

match his lean across the counter, bringing his voice to a whisper just inches from her neck.

“I tried the Hecate House library, but it would seem their editions are all on loan. They said to enquire with a Belladonna Blackthorn. That she’d happily oblige and lend me her copy?”

No one ever called her Belladonna. She hated her full witch name with a passion and always had. So much so that not even her mum used it anymore; it was reserved only for when she was distinctly disapproving of something or other about Belle’s major life choices.

The world spun in slow motion, but Belle somehow managed to paint on something like a professional smile. Her first and only thought was simply to remove this man from public view. She had spent a lifetime protecting herself from this exact scenario, from the moment her magic would be revealed to a non-wicche world after everything she’d ever done to keep it a secret.

Monica shot a quizzical look across the floor in Belle’s direction, silently asking if everything was okay as the queue began to grow behind the man.

“Actually, of course.” Finger guns again. “Silly me, it’s through here, in the back...Right this way. If you’ll just follow...” She gave the man a desperate look, spun on the spot and said a silent plea to any forces who might be watching in pity. Anything to hide whatever this conversation was about to be.

Signalling to Monica to take her place, Belle shot to the rear of the shop towards the dimly lit stock cupboard piled precariously with boxes and cut-out characters from window displays. She frantically manoeuvred a large cardboard dragon aside and beckoned wildly for the man to follow her away from the customers. Mainly from the handful of women who had been surreptitiously lingering around him, watching his every move since he entered Lunar Books like he was the last slice of cake. The man followed her diligently but with an unmistakably mischievous smirk as he strolled nonchalantly behind, hands clasped behind his back.