

OLIVIA HARDY RAY



BOOK 2 OF THE
SALEM WITCH SERIES

THE **BLACK
WITCH**

THE BLACK WITCH

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The Black Witch by Olivia Hardy Ray

Originally published under Annabel Horton and the Black Witch of Pau

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The Black Witch

A Novel

BOOK TWO
Salem Witch Series

Olivia Hardy Ray



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Chapter One

*Geneviève Têtu, the Black witch of Pau
Whitechapel, London
1888*

The moon floated past my window like a round, celestial ship; it seemed detached from the sky as it beckoned me, this segregated, white, globular light. Clouds that looked like smoke nearly covered it, but it was still bright and full. I stood in the shadow it threw across my floor and whispered the incantations of conquest as I stared at it. Only when the moon is full could I do this. It kept me potent, this incantation. I have been whispering it many years, mostly for others, but tonight, it was for me.

Urbain has beckoned me, the great and most obnoxious Urbain. I was surprised to be his chosen one, but then again, I am the most wanting. He has given me a command I must obey if I know what's good for me. But I must admit, this command he has given me fills me with excitement, this command from the devil's disciple is most miraculous. I was titillated and beyond containment though I must also admit to feelings of weariness and a rather profound fear.

I reached for the windowsill and held fast to steady my nerves. For all the miracles I could manifest, there is still magic I cannot perform. The great Urbain was a far greater witch than me, but what would I owe him for doing his bidding?

I turned from the window to stare at this massive man, clothed in a Catholic priest's robe. What a joke that is! His cross was the color of blackberry jam and marred by scratches, and the starched white collar around his neck was so stiff I wondered if it irritated him. I closed my eyes and mumbled a prayer of gratitude, not to mention, protection.

"What are you mumbling about?" he asked.

The irritation in his voice surprised me. I am a witch. I do a lot of mumbling—incantations, curses, and dark prayers. I wanted to tell him that, but I held my tongue and met his eyes. I was impressed he had been patient, but I had become leery. Then again, it is my nature to be leery.

"I was calling upon my goddess," I said.

“You have no need of goddesses. You have only need of me. Will you honor my command, or do I have to strike you down?”

“No need for violence, Urbain.”

“You say that Annabel has come to your window. How do you know this? How do you know the face of Annabel?”

“I don’t, but the old man called her by name, and she was beautiful, so I surmised it. You told me that the old man was her husband, Michele Guyon.”

“Yes, but all the time travel he does has made him a blithering idiot.”

“So you said, and now he is in my dungeon as you commanded.”

“Yes, good move. Well, I imagine Annabel might have come to your window, though she certainly knows not whose window she stood before. I’m sure she thinks, from the bowels of her limited brain, that it is her love of music that beckoned her to you. I did not really think she would obey me, but I am pleased to see that I have power over her still.”

“I’m sure your power is greater than hers. She must be putty in your hands.” I kept my sarcasm buried behind my veiled smile.

“Of course, she is,” he said. “I wanted you to rest your eyes upon her and fall in love with her great beauty. But I had no idea she succumbed to my will.”

“How did you trick her then?” I asked. “How did you get the old man to my window?”

I had heard that the great Urbain was no match for Annabel Horton, but I would never tell him that. Annabel had the power of several of her wretched family members, quite competent witches, to ward off any threats from Urbain. Together, they could probably crush him the way Annabel’s magic had crushed our daughter, Jeanne Element, beneath the cross.

He looked away for a moment, but I saw the twitch in his cheek. He needed me for revenge. How cunning he was. Whose need for beauty was greater than mine? And the demon knew it.

“As I have always tricked her,” he said. “But that is not important. I wanted you to see what possibilities there are. Your doubt and hesitation surprise me.”

“I do not doubt you. I am merely thanking the Goddess Hecate for the magic you bring me. I am... how do you say it... *Joie*. I am with delight, Urbain.”

“I bring you no magic. It is power, the power of evil intent. I wish to destroy Annabel Horton, the way she destroyed our daughter, Jeanne.”

“Why choose me?” I asked, though I knew the answer. “There are so many you might have called upon.”

He shrugged. "And why shouldn't I choose you? You have the most to gain." He laughed wickedly, as if he were crushing a small dog under the weight of his hand.

"I am about to give you a great gift, Geneviève. You will be beautiful once again, the way you were when we first made love under the light of the moon," he said, standing in the shadow by my parlor window. "Do you remember?"

I nodded, though it was a memory I would have preferred to keep buried. He called it making love; I called it something else, violence against me, perhaps.

As he walked out of the darkness and took my face in his hand, I could see his blue eyes, shining like two icicles hanging from a rotting roof in the starlit night sky.

"What greater power is there than beauty?" he said.

"I am to be a pawn in your revenge," I whispered.

His great height overwhelmed me as he released my face. I could still feel his touch, like heat from the sun.

"I can take my exit," he said, "and leave you to your misfortune for all eternity."

I knew instinctively I should have let him go, but his offer was too prodigious. "No!"

He smiled again, benevolently. The cross he wore hung low, nearly to his stomach. His priest robes dusted the floor like drapes, falling in gracious folds. One could easily trust him, and how foolish that would be.

"I will do your bidding and take the risk," I said, "for there must be risk."

"There is, but if I succeed, it will be worth it."

"I will need a powerful, cogent potion to bring Annabel to me. But of course, I will do it. Annabel Horton will come to me of her own free will, and I will have her eating out of my hand." I showed him my imperfect teeth, and he returned a smile. His smirk was like a long road into hell. And if I defied him, that's exactly where he would banish me.

He handed me a music box. "Your bait. Sometimes potions are not enough."

I took the box and stared at it. "What is this? A box?"

"I have sent her music boxes over the years. She thinks they're from her husband. Women can be such docile fools when in love. She'll know you have her precious Michele if you give her this."

"Fine, where is she?"

"She lives in Brooklyn in the twenty-first century."

I was stunned. "Brooklyn?"

“It is in America.”

I stared at him in disbelief. “I cannot go there,” I said. “How in the Devil’s name will I get to America?”

“In the Devil’s name? Ha! You are funny.”

“But I cannot go to her. You say she lives in the twenty-first century? I cannot cross time.” I began to panic. “I’ll need someone else to give her the potion and your... uh... box.”

“Well, then send that fool of a priest,” he said. “He can go anywhere. She will follow him. Imprison her immediately or she will get away. Then summon me at the Church of the Holy Ghost at Nightingale Square and we will take her to Julian’s church for the exorcism. I will be forever in your debt, Geneviève.”

“And I in yours,” I whispered. I faced him on my settee, staring stoically. “What if she does not come?” My fear of him was far more obvious than I wished it to be. “Why should she go where Julian tells her to go?”

He let out a deep bellowing sound that hurt my sensitive ears. “She will think he comes with God’s intent. She trusts him.”

“I see.”

“Would you prefer to live as you are with the face of an ass? A chimpanzee? Or would you prefer to have men falling at your feet as they used to?”

I had no answer. It was obvious I ached to be beautiful, as any ugly woman would.

“I thought as much,” he said. “We can accomplish anything if we want it badly enough.”

And with one brief, perturbing glance over his shoulder, he was gone, leaving me to the impossible task of ensnaring a witch that could crush my soul. I stared at the dust he left behind and a shiver ran through my bones.

I was to trick the notorious Annabel Horton. For that I would need more than the fingernails of a beggar for my brew.



There is no one who would not fall prey to my magic. There has been only surrender to my spells, for no living soul was ever a match for me. They all succumb, be it ravenous desire or revenge, which is usually what people ask for, apart from wealth. My transformations are only temporary, but I have made a man an ass for a day. I have made women believe that the man at their side is Prince Charming. I have made men

weak and women strong.

I thrive at night. Spells lack effectiveness in the day, so I usually sleep then. I am naked and dark, like sable. I am soft like a pongee. I am sensational in one moment and vicious in the next. Do not ever trust me. I will turn on you, and though I have a face that evokes pity, do not fall prey to compassion. That could prove fatal. I am cryptic and ambiguous. Did you think only God could be so elusive?

Evil is as vast as good. The fact is they are both endless, but Annabel thinks evil is diminutive. Yet as powerful as I am, I know in the depths of my soul that I am no match for Annabel Horton. My magic comes from the earth, hers from the spirit. I must be incredibly careful.



I paced around my room, stopping at my balcony and looking at the pavement below where the auguries I let out in my breath settled on the stones and rose like mist.

It was dark beyond my sight and like an omen of doom, the darkness teased me. The streetlamps flickered, producing shadows that took on the eeriness of night. Footsteps were picked up like music, like heartbeats. You cannot hear them by day, but by night, they are perplexing, recondite, and often solitary. You wonder. Who walks there? Whose lonely, mysterious journey lingers beneath your window before moving on?

I lived on the outskirts of Whitechapel, an impoverished neighborhood in London, where the silent night takes on the onus of despair. I thrived on depression and weariness; the ever-present doom reflected my state of mind.

It was the fall of 1888. Desperation hung heavy over the city, but I loved the drama of it, the great verisimilitude of evil, even if it was only circumstance that caused it. The underbelly of festering calamity energized me.

A monster had begun to prowl our streets, like a beast craving blood. They called him Jack the Ripper. I called him a depraved amateur. He had the power of cunning, but even the Devil would reject him. He was base and from the dark matter and without purpose.

I could take him down with cay oil and a dog's testicles. I should visit Scotland Yard with my brew, I thought. God knows those fools need it.

While my powers are vast, I cannot take the body of others, as the infamous Annabel Horton can.

God granted her the ability to cross time, and she flits around eternity

like a blithering saint, believing she has *carte blanche* to rid the world of evil.

But the Devil gave me omniscience. I do not know if I shall ever die, but I know I have lived so long I am nearly prehistoric. The cross can kill me, but one must have great skill to use it effectively against me, and it must be gold. Urbain's wooden cross would never do.



I fell back into the soft folds of my couch and heard the door slam. Walter, no doubt. I never knew where he went or what mischief he got into.

His footsteps hurried in the night, clutching his prize, his offering to me—some poor unfortunate soul's ribs—no doubt stolen from the London Hospital Morgue. If I had not known better, I would have sworn he was Jack the Ripper, but Walter would not sully his hands with blood, and certainly not with death. Evil should belong to witches alone, not to mere mortals like this infidel, Jack the Ripper. But I can always use human ribs.

As handsome as he was, Walter often disgusted me. In his eagerness to impress me, he offended me with his relentless curiosity. We are not alike. He possesses a base cruelty. His mind is ill, the contents grossly offensive. Yet there is sex appeal in that. Unfortunately, Walter's sex appeal was tempered at a young age, and he is barely four inches long in the throes of passion. Still, he is a master of satisfaction.

I suddenly got a chill and shuddered. I threw back my head and sang. That was the only way for me to alleviate the tension Walter caused in me.

I am an opera singer, born with a gift so divine that only your great God could have bestowed it on me. Music, for me, is religion.

To be free of the malignancies of evil is a strange feeling, but it fills me with euphoria. When I sing it is the only time I am filled.

God is a euphoric drug, don't you think? Sometimes I lose all reason and seek out a church, throw myself before an icon of some pitiful bearded saint, and sing. God smiles as I lose myself in the song. God favors me then. Satan favors me when I am sane and not lost to the rapture of the divine. Yes, I, too, believe in things I cannot see. If the Devil is mine, there are moments in which God is mine as well.

I sang out an aria, "My Long Hair is Braided" from *The Amber Witch*, and the night was shattered by it, my voice resplendent. Do you know it? Probably not. My repertoire is large, but sometimes I like the old songs,

from way back. It is always an impulse to sing, and I always follow my impulses.

The wind was mysteriously silent, but it carried my voice out into the laconic, solitary night like an angel's harp. It soothed my soul. Yet I felt the Earth's indifference and my own.

Indifference is the definition of God. Why not? He does not speak and shows himself only in us, but we are blind to his face and his words. No amount of faith can relieve the pain of his temerity. But he is the same in heaven as he is here, all-knowing omniscience. Know that and it will not frighten you to enter his realm. Know, too, that heaven is here in much the same way that it is there, and death is not the chariot that brings you to it.

Ah, the night was as empty as the soul of Jack the Ripper. And yet, as the aria escaped from the very depths of my being, I, too, was consumed with what some call the spirit. The Devil cannot enter me when I sing. Perhaps that is why I became a singer, to be severed from him for just those moments. I become like you when I sing—hurting, lost, and eternally innocent.

God pities me, I think. Perhaps he, in his infinite wisdom, gifted me with a great voice to teach me that humanity is utterly complex or to compensate for my wretched fate. Who knows?

Well, I have honored him. I have only killed evil souls. In that way I am very much like the magnificent Annabel. It is no fun to kill the righteous, but oh, how I wish to take the ax to them when they are overly righteous. Who has use for them? But I keep my distance. Annabel might even be proud of me.

In my consumption of evil, I have learned this: humanity's complexity can be blamed on all that is dark. You see, in your world, evil can only be understood as a psychosis. When it is not understood as such, then it must be understood as a kiss from the Devil, whose mind is as normal as anyone's but whose soul is bereft. We are all kissed by evil, some more passionately than others. And if you believe in God, you must believe in the Devil, Lucifer. As God enters you, Lucifer stands at the portal of your soul and knocks upon the door. You are not the captain of your fate. You are a pawn in a universe of warring Gods, and you tip this way or that. Explaining that to Walter seemed to give him peace—an explanation for his insanity and twisted desires.

There is one way we are alike, Walter and me. In his disturbing and compelling art, he finds expression and the Devil steps away. When my great voice takes flight, it is the same for me.



You should know a bit about my past before you fear my future. I was born exquisite. When my mama gazed into my infant face, so perfectly defined, she assumed that I was destined for prostitution and left me on a hilltop to die. Beauty was my only offense. Oh, and being Black, which left me few options in Mama's mind. Even I could not be the bitch that she was.

An army of men heard my cries, took pity on my innocent flesh, and saved me. They rode their horses up treacherous terrain to clutch my shivering little body and took me to the Chateau de Pau in France.

I survived deep in the servant's quarters while I grew. A young attendant by the name of Marie could have no children of her own, so I filled her emptiness. I was adored and nurtured. She raised me and looked out for me, even after she realized I had supernatural powers, powers that made me rich, anguished, and dark yet sublime and eminent.

When I was eighteen, I found my real mother on her knees, scrubbing someone's boudoir floor. She was my first victim. I cut out her heart for my brew and offered it to Satan. She burned in Satan's breath, my bitch of a mother. She knew vengeance as few do. For my gift, Satan took notice of me, of my many gifts. I hear that he favors me among witches. Perhaps that is why he allows me my ambiguity.

With my special talents I soon became beloved by all of France. I was famous in Paris and set my new mama, Marie, up in luxury. Though I did not understand it, I did not forget her kindness when it was directed at me. Otherwise, kindness was too simple for me to grasp, and I used it to my advantage. I still do not understand those who find kindness a virtue. Power is a virtue, talent is a virtue, but kindness is a weakness of spirit. Do not think it was kindness that was the motive behind Mama Marie's love for me. It was need.

During my youth, my famous clients were the comtesse de Soissons, the duchesse de Bouillon, and the duc de Luxemburg to name but a few. They would come to me with their deepest desires, and I would make it so with simple little love potions, special liquids for political gain, and the dust of squirrels for money. Mundane tasks, really. They were too deficient to ask for more. Why not immortality? True, the payment due for such magic was vast, but what price would you pay to avoid death? Yet so few ask for it.

My darkest potions include the bones of toads, the teeth of moles, and

the hearts of humans, and sometimes other human parts are needed for special brews against my own kind. Those parts are stolen for me from the mortuaries or hospitals. But I will not sacrifice infants to the Black Mass as others do. La Voisin was stupid and greedy, and lost her life because of it. I would not let them behead me in the center of Paris as they did poor La Voisin.

No, I cushioned my talents with my arias. People thought me special and flocked from miles around to see me perform. Oh, how they loved my singing. Even kings kissed my hand. My gift of song probably saved my life when they went on their vicious little witch hunts and massacred thousands of us, none, I must add, as gifted a witch as me. Just think, an operatic singing witch. How amusing.

My beauty was not always a blessing. I kept my audience spellbound long enough to conceal my beauty. I often wore veils to cloak myself, so men would not take me against my will. This way, they could envision me however they saw fit, perhaps even as a homely woman.

Only the man I loved saw beyond my veil. But then the Devil saw fit to destroy my face, and in so doing, destroy my life. I often wondered if it was Urbain who set me on fire, for I had lain with him out of youthful naivety after I was taken by force and had no choice. The Devil gave me two daughters in our brief time together, daughters that I did not want. Not long after, I fell in love with Uri, deeply in love, for I am not immune to it. Had Urbain been jealous of my lover? Who knows? I often wonder.

I fled France after the fire that destroyed my face, so I would not break my Uri's heart or cause him to break mine. I have had endless lovers since then, though none has made a difference. *En bref, voila ma vie*, or as you say in English, that, in a nutshell, was my life.

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