

#1 NATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# MEG CABOT



# JINX

## Chapter Six

I blinked at her. Tory looked perfectly serious, leaning against the door. She still had on the black minidress, and her makeup was still perfectly arranged. Four hours of sitting in a hard plastic chair in a hospital emergency waiting room had done nothing to mar her perfect beauty.

“A what?” My voice broke on the word what.

“A witch, of course.” Tory smiled tolerantly. “I know you’re one, there’s no use denying it. One witch always knows another.”

I began to believe, not so much from what Tory had said, but from the curiously tense way in which she was holding her body--like our cat Stanley always does back home, when he’s getting ready to pounce--that Tory was serious.

Just my luck. It would have been nice if she’d just

been joking around.

I said, choosing my words with care, “Tory, I’m sorry, but I’m tired, and I really want to go to sleep. Maybe we could talk about this some other time...?”

It was the wrong thing to say. All of a sudden, Tory was mad.

“Oh,” she said, straightening up. “Oh, that’s how it is, is it? You think you’re better than me, because you’ve been practicing longer, or something? Is that it? Well, let me tell you something, Jinx. I happen to be the most powerful witch in my coven. Gretchen and Lindsey? Yeah, they’ve got nothing on me. They’re still doing stupid little love spells. That don’t work, by the way. There are people at school who are afraid of me, I’m so powerful. What do you have to say to that, Miss High-and-Mighty?”

My mouth fell open.

The thing is, I should have known. I don't know why, when Mom had told Aunt Evelyn about what was happening, and Aunt Evelyn had suggested I come stay in New York for a while, I thought I'd be safe here.

I should have known. I really should have.

“Tory,” I said. I couldn't quite believe this was happening. “No offense, but my head hurts...and I'm really tired.”

Now it was Tory's turn to blink, and she did so owlshly, staring at me as though I were one of those swan faucets in the bathroom that had suddenly begun to speak. Finally, she said, “You really don't know, do you?”

I shook my head. “Know what?”

“That you're one of us,” Tory said. “You must have suspected. After all, they call you Jinx.”

“Yeah, they call me Jinx,” I said, with a bitterness I didn’t attempt to disguise. “Because, like your little brother said, everything I touch gets messed up.”

But Tory was shaking her head. “No. No, it doesn’t. Not today, it didn’t. Jinx, I watched you. I was on the phone with my mom, and I came inside, and I saw the whole thing from the living room.” Tory’s eyes were so bright, they seemed to glow in the soft light from the bedside lamp. “It was like you knew what was going to happen before anybody even did anything. You shoved Zack out of the way BEFORE that bike hit the sidewalk. You couldn’t have known that’s the direction that biker was going to turn. But you did. Some part of you did know--”

“Of course part of me knew,” I said, frustratedly. “I’ve had plenty of experience. If I’m around, whatever is the worst possible thing that can happen, will happen. Story of my life. I can’t not mess something up, if there’s anything there to

mess up.”

“You didn’t mess anything up, Jinx,” Tory said.

“You saved someone’s life. Zack’s life.”

I shook my head again. This was unbelievable. This was what I had come to New York City to get away from. And now it was starting up all over again. My cousin Tory—the last person in the world I would have suspected of such a thing--was trying to start it up.

“Look, Tor,” I said. “You’re making a big deal out of nothing. I didn’t--”

“Yes, Jinx. Yes, you did. Zack says so. If you hadn’t done what you did, Zack would have been a pavement pancake.”

Suddenly, my stomach was hurting more than my head. I said, “Look, Tor. Maybe--”



daughter, who told Grandma, that her daughter's first daughter—it's only the oldest daughters, not the younger ones--would have the gift--the gift of magic. Sometimes it skips a few generations, I guess. Like you have Grandma's red hair, but neither of our moms has it.”

My hand went defensively up to my hair, the way it always did when someone mentioned it.

“Tory,” I said. “I really don't--”

“Don't you see? Our great-great-great—whatever--grandmother Branwen was talking about us. We're our grandmother's daughter's first daughter. Or whatever. We're the next generation of witches in the family.”

Oh, boy. I took a deep breath. The knot in my stomach had turned into a full-fledged bowling ball.

“No offense, Tory,” I said. “But I think you've seen

one too many episodes of Charmed.”

Tory sighed. “I guess I’ll have to prove it to you, won’t I?”

I eyed her worriedly. “How are you going to do that?”

“Don’t worry,” she said with a laugh. “I’m not going to make the mattress levitate, or anything.” She slipped off the bed and went to the door. “It doesn’t work like that. Stay here.” She slipped out into the hallway.

Great. So now my cousin Tory thinks she’s a witch. This was just so...typical. Of my luck, anyway.

Not knowing what else to do, I picked up the hand mirror and looked at my bruise some more. There was no doubt about it. It was a bruise, not a bump. It was butt-ugly and no way was it going to be gone in time for my first day at my new school. My exclusive new PRIVATE school in Manhattan. The

one that, every time I thought about it, made me feel like throwing up.

Oh, well. It's not like I was any beauty queen to begin with. What had Tory's friend Shawn called me? Oh, yeah. Red. Was that what I had to look forward to on Monday? People mocking me because I have red hair and I come from a traditionally rural state? Am I destined to be Cousin Jean from Iowa for the rest of my life?

Well, it's better than being called Jinx. I guess. Tory came back into the room, carrying a cardboard shoebox. She closed the door behind her, then brought the shoebox to the bed. There was something in the delicate way Tory was handling the box that made the bowling ball in my stomach feel like it was morphing into something even bigger. A basketball, maybe.

“If you open the lid to that box,” I said, “and something comes jumping out at me, I swear I'm

going to kill you.”

“Nothing’s going to jump out at you,” Tory said. “Don’t be stupid.” She sat down, and gently removed the lid from the box. I found myself leaning forward, straining to catch a glimpse of what lay amidst the white tissue paper, despite the fact that I was pretty sure I didn’t want to know.

And then Tory reached into the box and pulled out...

...a doll.

My insides heaved. I was barely able to make it out of bed and to the side of the toilet before every bit of kung pao chicken and spare ribs that I’d eaten an hour earlier came right back up.

How long I knelt there, heaving, I don’t know. But when I came out of the bathroom—feeling, I have to admit, a bit better. The basketball-sized jumble

of nerves in my stomach seemed to shrunk to the size of an acorn—Tory was still sitting on the side of my bed, the doll in her lap.

I tried to keep my gaze averted from it.

“Are you okay?” Tory asked, looking genuinely worried.

I just nodded, and crawled back under the covers. The sheets—they were way softer than the ones we have on the beds back home—felt cool and soothing to my skin.

“That was gross,” Tory commented.

“I know,” I said, my head sinking into the deep, down-filled pillows. “I’m sorry.”

“Do you want me to get my mom?” Tory wanted to know.

“No,” I said, closing my eyes. “I’ll be all right.”

“Good,” Tory said. “Anyway. About what I was saying....”

“Tory,” I said.

“Torrance,” she corrected me.

“Torrance,” I said, my eyes still closed. “Can we do this later?”

“I’ll be really quick,” Tory said. “Anyway. See this doll?”

I nodded, my eyes still closed. It didn’t matter, because I’d gotten a good look at it before my little trip to bow down before the porcelain god. It was one of the most crudely made dolls I had ever seen. Tory could only have sewn it together herself. It was stitched together from some flesh-colored material. It had on a white shirt and grey pants, and a red and blue striped tie. There was

something familiar about the outfit it was wearing. The strangest thing about the doll was that on top of its head was a weird assortment of what looked like real human hair, some dark brown, and some aggressively black, much like...

...much like Tory's.

There was pride in Tory's voice when she asked, "Recognize him?"

I had no choice but to open my eyes.

"I don't know..." I said. Then I got it. It was wearing a Chapman uniform. "Is that supposed to be Shawn?" I asked, in a small voice.

"No, silly," Tory said, with a laugh. She clearly didn't notice that anything was wrong. With me, I mean. "It's Zack. See the dark hair? I got him to let me give him a trim last month. He thought I was crazy! Then I took some of his hair and mixed it with

some of mine, and made this doll. As long as I keep our hair together, he can't fall in love with anybody else. It's a spell, see? A love spell. I got it off the Internet. Cool, huh?"

A love spell. Off the Internet. For a second I thought I was going to heave again. Fortunately, the wave of nausea passed.

"I thought you were going out with Shawn," I said, weakly.

"I am," Tory said. "But I've always had a thing for Zack—God, he's so hot, don't you think? Of course, he's been my neighbor since, like, forever. So for the longest time, he's barely seemed to know I'm alive. As a girl, anyway. I've just been chubby little Tory from next door. But things have been looking up since I discovered magic...and since I made this doll. I think he's finally starting to come around."

“He doesn’t,” I said, thinking about Zack’s comment—I don’t like to cop a buzz before dark—“seem like your type, exactly.” At least, not the type this new and—in her opinion, anyway—improved Tory would like.

“Yeah,” she admitted. “He’s pretty much more your type than mine—more into school than he is into partying. But, you know. That’s just because he needs me to liven him up. All that will change, when I make him mine.”

When I make him mine.

I said, closing my eyes again, “I don’t think messing around with witchcraft is a good idea, Tory.”

“Why not?” Tory asked, genuinely surprised. “It’s in our genetic destiny. And it’s working, you know. He hasn’t been out with anybody else since I made it. And he comes over after school, practically every day.”

I thought about what Robert and the others had said. It seemed to me that a far more likely reason Zack came over to the Gardiners' every day was not that Tory had made this doll, but the fact that Petra was here.

I didn't say so out loud, however. Out loud, I just said, "It seems pretty...I don't know. Stalkerish."

"Well," Tory sneered. "You would know."

I opened my eyes to shoot her a dirty look, but said nothing. What could I say? She was right.

In more ways than she knew.

"Whatever," Tory said, with a shrug. "Watch this."

Then Tory removed a needle that had been stuck to the inside of the shoebox, and drove it through the doll Zack's head.

“Hey!” I cried, sitting bolt up in my bed, my heart hammering. “What are you doing?”

“Relax,” Tory said. “I’m piercing his thoughts. See? Now he can’t help but think of me.”

I will admit, I half-expected to hear some kind of shrieking from Zack’s room next door. Fortunately, I heard only the burbling of the fountain in the garden below, and a police siren from somewhere in the city.

“Jeez,” I said. I watched as Tory rotated the needle around in the doll Zack’s cotton-stuffed skull. “I wouldn’t be so sure it’s you he’s thinking of. I’d guess he’s thinking of taking an Excedrin.”

“Zack hasn’t been out with anybody else since I made this doll.”

“You said that already,” I pointed out. Then,

reluctantly, since I wasn't sure how Tory would react, I asked, "But has he asked you out?"

"Well," Tory said, putting the doll back into the shoebox. "Not exactly. But I told you, he comes over every--"

"--day after school. Yeah, you said that, too." I shook my head. "Look, I'm sorry, Tor. But this...this witch thing? It's not a good idea. Trust me on this. Okay?"

"It's not a witch thing," Tory said. "And it's not an idea. It's a fact. I'm a witch. You are, too, probably, being a first daughter."

The acorn in my stomach turned into an orange.

"Tory," I said. "I mean, Torrance. I'm serious. Can we talk about this some other time? Because I really don't feel too good."

Tory put the lid back onto the box. "If you're

feeling anything, it can only be relief. That at last, you're not alone." Tory leaned forward, and laid a hand over mine. "You're not a freak, Jinx."

If only she knew.

"Gosh," I said. "Thanks. That's...comforting."

"I realize it's a lot to digest all at once," Tory went on. "And I'll admit, it was a shock to me, too. The fact is, ever since Grandma first told me that story, the last time we all went down to Florida to see her, I thought I was the one. The one Branwen was talking about, the granddaughter her gift would be passed down to. But there's no denying that, after what I saw today, you, Jinx, have the gift as well. And you have to admit, it is pretty likely that, after traveling down through so many generations, Branwen's prediction might have gotten a bit garbled. She must have meant Grandma's daughters' daughters. Not Grandma's daughter's daughter. Because Grandma has two daughters, and

they each have a daughter. So it must be both of us. We're both witches. There can be room for two witches in one generation, right?"

Not waiting for me to answer, Tory went on, "So all you have to do now is learn how to use it. The gift Branwen left for us, I mean. I can totally help you with that. You just have to come to one of our coven meetings. With our powers—yours and mine combined—there's no telling what we'll be able to do. Rule the school, for one thing. But why stop there? God, Jinx. We could rule the world."

I said, quickly, "No."

Tory looked surprised. "Why not?"

"Because." I took another deep breath. She was going to be angry. I knew it. But Tory's anger, I knew, was better than her finding out the truth.

"I don't think messing around with magic is such a good thing, you know? I mean, I don't know

much about it, but let's just say it really is true—our great-great-whatever grandmother was a witch, and passed her powers on to us. Is it really fair of us to use them to trap guys? I mean, from what I do know about witchcraft—doesn't it kind of mandate that practitioners use their powers for good instead of evil?"

“How is getting the guy you're crushing on to like you back evil, exactly?” Tory rolled her eyes. “Please. Don't even get me started on that respecting nature, worshiping trees crap--”

It was all I could do to keep from slapping her.

“It isn't crap,” I said, keeping my hands to myself, with an effort. “If you don't respect what you're drawing power from, Tory, that power's going to turn on you. And if you're using that power for something negative—like that doll of yours, the basic purpose of which is to rob Zack of his free will to like whoever he wants to like—then

negativity is all you're going to get back.”

Tory didn't look surprised anymore. Now she looked mad. Her pretty lips had all but disappeared, she was pressing them together so tightly. “Fine,” she said. “Fine. I'd hoped you'd be a little more open-minded about all of this. After all, it is your heritage. But if you want to be an unsophisticated hick your whole life, that's your prerogative. Just remember, Jinx. We're here, when you change your mind.”

She stood up, holding the box containing the doll of Zack, and walked away.

“In fact,” she added, when she got to the door. “We're everywhere.”

Like I didn't already know it.