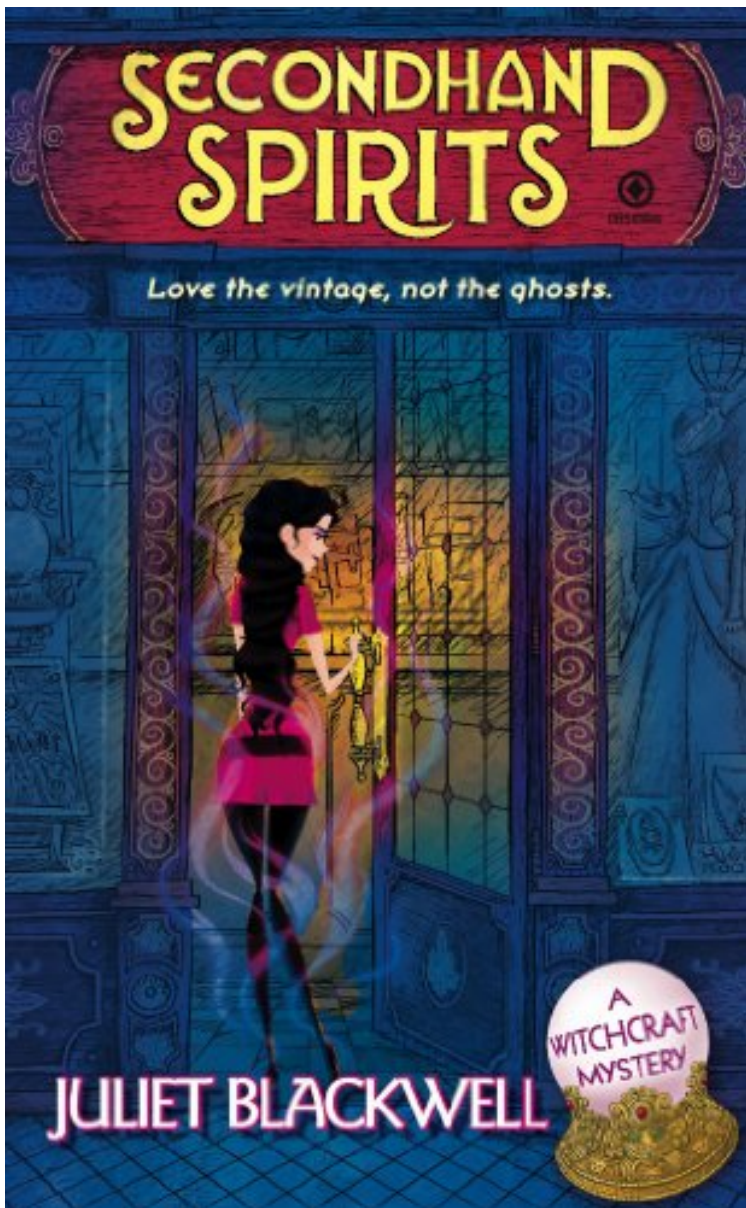


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Secondhand Spirits: A Witchcraft Mystery



Par Juliet Blackwell

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Prsentation de l'diteurLove the vintage- not the ghosts Lily Ivory feels that she can finally fit in somewhere and conceal her "witchiness" in San Francisco. It's there that she opens her vintage clothing shop, outfitting customers both spiritually and stylistically. Just when things seem normal, a client is murdered and children start disappearing from the Bay Area. Lily has a good idea that some bad phantoms are behind it. Can she keep her identity secret, or will her witchy ways be forced out of the closet as she attempts to stop the phantom?ExtraitPraise for the Art Lovers Mysteries by Juliet Blackwell Writing as Hailey LindBrush with DeathLind deftly combines a smart and witty sleuth with entertaining characters who are all engaged in a

fascinating new adventure. Sprinkled in are interesting snippets about works of art and the art world, both the beauty and its dirty underbelly. Romantic Times Shooting Gallery Linds latest creatively combines mystery, humor, and interesting art tidbits. The unique characters including aging art forgers, art thieves, and drug smugglers add depth to this well-plotted cozy. Romantic Times If you enjoy Janet Evanovichs Stephanie Plum books, Jonathan Gashes Lovejoy series, or Ian Pearss art history mysteries . . . then you will enjoy Shooting Gallery. . . . The book is a fun romp through San Franciscos art scene with some romance and a couple murders and car chases thrown in for good measure. Gumshoe An artfully crafted new mystery series! Tim Myers, Agatha Award-nominated author of A Mold for Murder The art world is murder in this witty and entertaining mystery! Cleo Coyle, national bestselling author of Espresso Shot Feint of Art Annie Kincaid is a wonderful cozy heroine. . . . 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Table of Contents Title Page Copyright Page Dedication Acknowledgements Epigraph Chapter 1 Chapter 2 Chapter 3 Chapter 4 Chapter 5 Chapter 6 Chapter 7 Chapter 8 Chapter 9 Chapter 10 Chapter 11 Chapter 12 Chapter 13 Chapter 14 Chapter 15 Chapter 16 Chapter 17 Chapter 18 Chapter 19 Chapter 20 Authors Note An Exciting Preview of A Cast-Off Coven An Exciting Preview of If Walls Could Talk An Exciting Preview of The Paris Key About the Author To Aunt Mem, my first (and favorite) witchy woman Acknowledgments As always, special thanks are due to so many. To my wonderful literary agent, Kristin Lindstrom, who has inordinate, obstinate faith in my writing; and Kerry Donovan, for her ongoing support and editing flair, and for encouraging me to explore my witchy ways. To the supportive, boisterous NorCal Sisters in Crime (yall know who you are). To Sophie Littlefield for always egging me on, and to Cornelia Read, James Calder, and Tim Maleeny for poker, dinner in bed, and long discussions of genre and mystery. I feel like Ive been invited to sit at the cool kids table. To the warm and welcoming Come as You Are (CAYA) coven in Berkeley, California; the wonderful staff of the Sacred Well on Grand Avenue; and to all those witches, sensitives, and sorcerers who spoke to me and wish to remain anonymous. Muchisimas gracias a todas las curanderas y brujas que me hablaron con confianza. To my mothers big, unabashedly Texan family for great expressions, bear hugs, and Southern food. To my sister Carolyn I missed you this go-round! Thanks for your unselfish help and laugh-out-loud suggestions. And to my sister, Susan, for her unflagging enthusiasm and novel suggestions. Thanks to Jace, Shay, and Suzanne for their read-throughs and critiques. To Anna for all your help. And special appreciation to Bee, Pamela, Jan, Mary, Chris, Brian, the entire Mira Vista Social Club . . . and a thousand kisses to my guy Sergio. And finally, a shout-out to Oscar, the suitably black cat, who insists that I will fall for his feline ways. Tis the witching hour of night, Or bed is the moon and bright, And the stars they glisten, glisten, Seeming with bright eyes to listen For what listen they? JOHN KEATS (1795-1821) Chapter 1 Witches recognize their

own. So I could tell this customer was . . . different . . . the moment he walked into my store. Not to mention the bell on the door failed to chime. He was gorgeous: golden hair glinting in the light of the amber sconces, eyes the blue of a perfect periwinkle, tanned skin with just a hint of whiskers inviting ones touch. Tall and graceful, he had the too-perfect, unreal beauty seldom seen outside a movie theater. And we were a long way from Tinseltown. This was San Francisco, where silicon referred to computer chips, not plastic surgery. Here, people were only too real in their endearing, genuine lumpiness. But what really drew my eye was the energy he emitted; to a witch like me, he was as conspicuous as a roaring drunk at an AA meeting. The stranger approached, the lightness of his step suggesting a talent for sneakiness. I waited behind the horseshoe-shaped display counter and fingered the protective medicine bundle that hung from a braided string around my waist. Lily Ivory? Thats me, I said with a nod. He placed an engraved business card on the glass countertop and pushed it toward me with a graceful index finger. Aidan Rhodes Male Witch Magickal Assistance Spells Cast Curses Broken Love Potions Satisfaction Guaranteed 145 Jefferson Street, San Francisco Male witch? My eyes wandered up, down, and across his muscular frame. Are you often mistaken for a female? This was San Francisco, after all. Rarely, now that you mention it. A glint of humor lit up those too-blue eyes. But most people dont realize men can be witches. Sure they do. They just call them warlocks. He winced. Warlock means oath breaker in Old English, and calls to mind the men who betrayed their covens in the bad old burn-the-witches-at-the-stake days. Some male practitioners called themselves wizards or sorcerers, but most preferred witch. It was a solidarity thing. There are as many different types of witchesthe good, the bad, the magnificently venal as there are familiars. Still, the vast majority of us are female. I had an inkling of the power of a traditional womens coven, but in my experience male witches were wild cards with a tendency to stir up trouble. Nothing about Aidan Rhodes suggested otherwise. Cute accent, he said. You twang. Its not my fault. I grew up in Texas. I know. I knew your father. Really. We worked together. Is that right? My tone was nonchalant, but my mind was racing. Aidan Rhodes was not overtly threatening, but if my father was involved, all bets were off. I glanced over at my coworker, Bronwyn, who was across the room preparing a concoction for a middle-aged client with a nasty case of eczema and a nastier case of an unfaithful husband. The womens heads were bent low as Bronwyn ground up dried herbs with a wooden mortar and pestle. They appeared absorbed in the task. Too absorbed. Aidan Rhodes, male witch, must have cast a cocooning spell. If so, they wouldnt hear a single word we said; indeed, wouldnt be aware of his presence at all. Its not every day someone like you moves into the neighborhood, much less opens a shop. Aidans long, elegant fingers caressed a pile of hand-tatted lace collars in the wicker basket on the counter. A retail store, though that surprises me. Unusual career path for one with your . . . talents. Is there a reason youre here? I asked, upgrading the man from a curiosity to an annoyance. I wasnt usually so abrupt with potential customers, but it seemed unwise to use the shopkeepers standard greeting May I help you? in case I inadvertently obligated myself to him. Theres many a slip twixt cauldron and lip, my grandmother Graciela had drilled into me. Words mattered in the world of spell casting, and a slip of the tongue could have dire consequences. As a matter of fact, there is. I brought you a housewarming present. Thank you, but thats not necessary. Im happy to do it. Im afraid I cant accept. Oh, but I insist. I said no, thank you. You dont know what it is yet. Thats not the Pleased ta meetcha. I whirled around to find a misshapen creature perched, gargoylelike, atop an antique walnut jewelry display case. He was small and bent, with a muscular body and scaly skin, a large head, a snoutlike nose and mouth, and outsize ears like a bats. His fingers were long and humanlike, surprisingly graceful, but his enormous feet had three toes and long talons. His voice was deep and gravelly. Im your new familiar, it said. Im afraid not; Im a so I turned to give Aidan a piece of my mind, but he was gone, the door slowly swinging shut. The bell had once again failed to ring. I swore under my breath. A so what, mistress? Excuse me? Before you started swearing you said you were a so. I wasnt swearing. Were, too. I blew out an exasperated breath. Im a solo act. I dont need a familiar. Youre a witch, aintcha? Ya gotta have a familiar. Says who? Its in the handbook. There is no handbook. Besides, Im allergic to cats. Im no cat. So Ive noticed. But Im probably allergic to . . . creatures such as yourself, too. Run along home to your master. Cant. Why not? Cause youre my master now, mistress. The creature attempted a smile, which took shape as a grimace. Im serious. Now scoot. The grimace fell from his gnarled greenish gray face. Had it been possible, he would have paled. You dont want me? Its nothing personal. I just dont need. Dont send me away, mistress! he begged, jumping down from the display case. Even at full height he didnt reach my belly button. He dropped to his knobby knees and clasped his hands, gazing up at me in supplication. Please dont send me away. Ill be good, mistress, I swear. I cant have a goblin in the shop! Im not exactly a goblin. Gnome, then. Not really a gnome, either . . . Whatever you are,

you'll scare away customers. How about a pig? A pig? With a sudden twist of his scrawny shoulders, he transformed himself into a miniature Vietnamese pot bellied pig. He grunted, wagged his curly tail, and darted around the counter. Hey! Get back here, you! Bless the Goddess, isn't he sweet! Bronwyn squealed, nearly knocking over a rack of 1950s-era chiffon prom dresses in her haste to cross the room. Where'd he come from? I've always wanted one of those! George Clooney had one, did you know? They're very smart. Bronwyn scooped up the squealing swine and held him to her generous bosom, where, I couldn't help but notice, he stopped kicking and snuggled right in, his pale pink snout resting on her ample cleavage. What's his name? I sighed. I had a million things to do today. Evicting a piggish gnome or a gnomish pig was not one of them. His name's . . . Oscar, I said off the top of my head, thinking of the Sesame Street character. The ugly little fellow seemed as if he would feel at home in a garbage can. But he's not mine. He's a . . . loaner. He's just visiting. Bronwyn and Oscar both ignored me. Oscar. Aren't you just a darling? Aren't you Bronwyn's wuvey-dovey piggy-pig-pig? She crooned to the creature in the high-pitched, goofy tone humans reserve for cherished pets and preverbal children. Oscar snorted and rooted around in her cleavage. Bronwyn chuckled. I sighed. A plump woman in her mid-fifties, Bronwyn had fuzzy brown hair and warm brown eyes. She favored great swaths of gauzy purple clothing, lots of Celtic jewelry, and heavy black eye makeup. The first time I saw her I couldn't decide whether she was a delightfully free spirit or just plain nuts. Shortly after I opened my vintage clothing store, Aunt Cora's Closet, she had approached me about renting a corner of the shop for her small herb business. I welcomed the company: Bronwyn was a so-so herbalist and an amateurish witch, but she had lived in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood since its hippie heyday and knew everyone. She would be my entre into a new and unfamiliar city. Besides, Bronwyn had been one of the first people I met upon my arrival in San Francisco, and she had welcomed me with open arms. Literally. Bronwyn was a hugger of the bear variety. Finding a safe place to call home wasn't an easy task for a natural witch from a small Texas town. For years I had traveled the globe, and finally came to the City by the Bay at the suggestion of a parrot named Barnabas, whom I'd met one memorable evening in a smoky bar in Hong Kong. The Barbary Coast, he'd said, gazing at me with one bright eye from his perch on the bar. That's the place for you. But be careful! Of what? I'd asked. The fog, Barnabas had replied, holding a banana in one foot and peeling it with his beak. Mark my words. Mark the fog. What about the fog? Mark the fog! Mark the fog! he'd screeched. Hey! Son of a bitch bit me! Whiskey! Whiskey and rye till the day that I die! Set up another round! Who's buying? That was the problem with parrots, I had thought as Barnabas waddled off to harass the bartender. They're smart as heck and never forget a thing, but they do like their booze. I can't normally understand animals when they speak, so I assumed he was either a shape-shifting elflike the pig currently snuggling in Bronwyn's ample arms or I had been drinking way too many mai tais. But either way, I took the incident as a sign. I packed my bags and headed to San Francisco, a city that is home to so many beloved lunatics and cherished iconoclasts that for the first time in my life nobody noticed me. Or so I hoped. The unsettling appearance of Aidan Rhodes the male witch and Oscar the familiar might make keeping a low profile a challenge. I watched as Bronwyn embraced the wriggling pot bellied pig with her typical unguarded, openhearted enthusiasm, wishing I could do the same. I didn't know quite what to make of my new housewarming gift. What might a male witch want from me? And why would he bring me a familiar, of all things? The door opened again, its bell tinkling merrily as my inventory scout walked in. Maya! gushed Bronwyn. Come meet our sweet little Oscar. Jumpin' Jehoshaphat, what is that? Maya recoiled. Twenty-three years old chronologically, but closer to forty on the cynicism scale, Maya had dark dreadlocks dyed bright blue at the ends, ears edged with silver rings and cuffs, and an aversion to makeup because, she'd explained earnestly, it was too fake. Why the bright blue hair didn't strike her as equally artificial I wasn't sure. Maya attended the San Francisco College of the Arts part-time, but her passion was visiting the elderly of her community and recording their stories for an oral history project. I had met Maya a few weeks ago as she sat on a blanket on the sidewalk, halfheartedly peddling the 1940s-era beaded sweaters some elderly friends had given her in their attempt to make a lady out of her. That quest was doomed to fail, but in the course of our conversation Maya and I discovered we had mutually beneficial business interests: Now she scoured her friends' closets and attics for inventory for my store, and I paid her a generous finders fee. I believe it's called a Vietnamese potbellied pig, I said. Apparently George Clooney has one. Had one, Bronwyn corrected me. Okay . . . Maya said. Why? A friend couldn't keep it, I said. It's only here temporarily. Sort of a foster situation. We eat things like that in my neighborhood, said Maya. Hush, child! scolded Bronwyn, clapping her hands over the pig's ears and whispering, Hell hear you. He's a pig, Bronwyn, Maya pointed out. In case you didn't notice. He's not deaf. And he's a special pig. I love my little Oscar oneeroo. Hey, whatever floats your

boat, Maya said with a shrug and an enigmatic smile. Today Maya was taking me to meet a woman who had lived in the same home for more than fifty years and who, according to Maya, had never thrown away a single item of clothing. That description was music to my ears. Hunting down high-quality vintage clothing was a competitive sport in the Bay Area, and elderly pack rats were my bread and butter. Besides, I was on a mission lately: I needed to find the perfect wedding dress. Not for myself, mind you. Me and romance . . . well, its complicated, to say the least. But Aunt Coras Closet was my first attempt at running a legitimate business, and I was so determined to do well that I wasnt above giving the Fates a nudge. On the last full moon I anointed a seven-day green candle with oil of bergamot, surrounded it with orange votives, placed malachite and bloodstone on either side, and, after scenting the air with vervain and incense of jasmine, I cast a powerful prosperity spell. Two days later the fashion editor at the San Francisco Chronicle called me with a fabulous plan: Her favorite niece was getting married, she wanted to outfit the entire wedding party in vintage dresses, and could I be a doll and help her out? As my grandmother always said, Be careful what you wish for. After weeks spent haunting estate sales, thrift stores, and auctions, I had managed to rustle up several options for each of the eleven bridesmaids, as well as a half dozen gowns that could be altered to fit the bride. But, anticipating bridal jitters, I wanted to have plenty of options on hand. Mayas lead on two more gowns, if they were in good condition, would bring the selections up to eight. Surely one would catch the brides fancy. The bridal party was scheduled to arrive tomorrow at two o'clock for a mammoth try-on session, and Bronwyn suggested I make the afternoon an event by closing the store to passersby and serving mimosas, which sounded like a good idea. I hoped. I wasnt what youd call an experienced hostess. In fact, as we used to say back in Texas, I was as nervous as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rockers. Lily, you ready to go? Maya asked. Sure am. I grabbed my 1940s cocoa brown wool coat from the brass coat stand near the register and pulled it on, securing the carved bone button at my neck. It was only four in the afternoon, but a wall of fog was creeping in, dropping the temperature a good fifteen degrees in the past five minutes. Late-afternoon or early-evening fog is not unusual for San Francisco since it sits on a thumb of land between an ocean and a bay. Still, recalling Barnabass warning Mark the fog I wondered if the weather had anything to do with Aidan Rhodess visit. Spooks loved the fog. The thought gave me pause. If Aidans witchcraft was powerful enough to command the weather, I would have to be careful around him. Go ahead and close up if were not back by seven, I said to Bronwyn, gently tugging on Oscars ear. And you behave yourself, young man, or Ill send you right back to where you came from. Dont you listen to her, Oscar. Oscar Boo. Mama Bronwyn wont let mean old Aunt Lily send you anywhere, she crooned to my would-be familiar as Maya and I walked out into the cool March mist. Shape-shifting creatures and meddling witches aside, the quest for really cool old clothes must go on. Chapter 2 When we exited the store we decided to leave my vintage cherry red Mustang convertible sitting at the curb, instead choosing to take the more practical purple van in the driveway. The graphics on the side read: AUNT CORAS CLOSET VINTAGE CLOTHING AND QUALITY ACCESSORIES CORNER OF HAIGHT ASHBURY BUYSELLTRADE ITS NOT OLD; ITS VINTAGE! I steered while Maya guided me across town. Along the way, she gave me the scoop on what to expect. The source is Frances Potts. Shes lived in her home near Hunters Point for fifty-two years, ever since she married Ronald. The Pottses lived together, one great big happy family, for years. Potts, Frances and Ronald, I repeated. Got it. Frances and Ronald had two daughters. They lost one as a child so sad; that just seems so wrong, doesnt it? but the other married well and has a couple of kids of her own. Anyway, the in-laws died not long after the little girl, some thirtysomething years ago, leaving the house to Frances and Ronald. Ronald died not too long after that; dont know from what. Mustve been pretty young, dont you think? Seems like. So its just Frances? She never remarried? Nope. And she inherited everything from her in-laws, including from her mother-in-laws sister, Bessie. And like I told you, Frances has never thrown anything out. My kind of woman. Where does she store everything? Cloth could last for hundreds, even thousands of years if it was properly cared for. But as one soon came to discover in the vintage clothing business, that was a big if. The basement. My heart sank. Basements were rare in earthquake country in a temblor the last place you want to be is belowground, where the trouble originates and those that did exist were generally small and only partly finished, with the rest left in its natural state of dirt. Damp dirt. Dont worry everythings hung up on racks; plus shes got a dehumidifier down there. She has a bunch of costume jewelry as well, mostly from the thirties. I think it belonged to her in-laws. Oh, and a swell collection of old Chock full o Nuts coffee cans. Maya and I shared a smile. One can never have enough of those, I remarked. Presentation de l'diteur Love the vintage- not the ghosts Lily Ivory feels that she can finally fit in somewhere and conceal her "witchiness" in San Francisco. Its there that she opens her vintage clothing

shop, outfitting customers both spiritually and stylistically. Just when things seem normal, a client is murdered and children start disappearing from the Bay Area. Lily has a good idea that some bad phantoms are behind it. Can she keep her identity secret, or will her witchy ways be forced out of the closet as she attempts to stop the phantom?