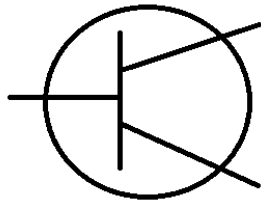


COPPER &
GOLD

JESSICA D. COPLEN

Copper and Gold



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The Periodic Tales of Minni the Witch

Copper and Gold

Copper and Cobalt

Copper and Mercury

For
The TechnoMage
&
The Spark

ONE¹

Okay, the wanton destruction of public property—that's on me—but momentarily displacing Delaware? Yeah, that... that was totally the dragon's fault.

Right, so, on Friday, I may have cut the power to New York City. It was an accident. I'd drawn enough electrical energy from the local power grid to crash it. Some kind of cascade failure occurred and, *boom*, there went Times Square. And I completely slept through the whole thing.

When I woke up Saturday morning, I could feel this excess of energy in my aura. Not magical energy, we're talking straight up AC/DC. Now, it's not unheard of for me to trip the breakers of my apartment, so I didn't think anything of it. But if I had stopped commiserating for five seconds, I might have put together that this was not a minor power drain.

Instead, I was more focused on the fact that I really didn't want to talk to anyone *at all*, ever again, or at least until Monday when I had to. So I grabbed an old iPod, completely ignored my phone, and headed to Central Park for a Saturday morning jog. I'm pretty much a regular in the park. I could probably run it with my eyes closed. No, that would actually be a horrible idea.

I was a few laps in when I decided to stop and catch a breather. As I shuffled through the iPod for something more mood specific—man I really need to update that thing—I saw the battery was getting a little low. I lightly rubbed my index finger across a sigil scratched over the Apple logo and started transferring energy to the battery. It was going to take a few minutes for it to charge because, you know, physics. I ended up walking off the path to lean against a nearby tree.

I really need to work on my situational awareness skills.

"Hey, girlie," a man said as he came from around the tree. He was a tall fellow, very cliché with a baseball hat down low and hands tucked forward in his wind-breaker. I'm pretty sure the words 'Captain Obvious' blazed over his head. "Nice iPod you got there," he said entirely too casually. "What is this, 2010?"

I stared blankly at him. "This a robbery?"

"You're a quick one." He flashed me a toothy smile, which was not at all comforting, mind you. "Hand it over and your phone."

"No phone," I replied as I pulled out the ear buds and slung the cord around my neck.

"You don't have a phone?" I'm not entirely sure if that was supposed to be a question.

I shrugged as I disconnected the cord. "Left it at home."

He scrunched his brow, genuinely confused. Considering he was one of those brick walls of a man, it was kind of comical. I would've laughed, but I'm pretty sure that's not polite etiquette in these situations.

"Who even does that?" he asked.

"Someone who doesn't want to check their messages," I answered flatly, holding the device towards him.

"I'll take that, too." He gestured to the copper, cuff bracelet I always wear on my left wrist. Then as he reached for the iPod, his fat fingers brushed against mine. It took no effort to send enough volts into him to make him face plant in the dirt. I did hold back on the amps so as not to kill him outright.

Voltage to amperage is a very important ratio.

What? I'm a witch. You really think I was going to let him get away with robbing me? Hell no. Giving him the iPod was just a way to hide my spell. The magical community has been able to hide their existence for centuries and we would like to keep it that way. We're just a bit paranoid, you know? Too many instances of our kind being lit on fire, drowned in ponds, hung from trees, smashed under really big rocks...

So, yeah, he went down like a sack of potatoes. A convulsing sack of Idaho russet potatoes... I kicked his foot and he

let out a groan. It was kind of pathetic.

Seeing as he was alive and breathing, I went back to the path and jogged the hell away from there. Mounted cops were heading in his general direction, so I'm sure he's fine. Probably.

Anyway, by now it was hedging close to noon. I was starving and in dire need of a shower. I headed out of the park and made my way to my apartment in Yorkville. That's on the Upper East Side of Manhattan Island. You already knew that, sorry. I'm used to having to explain it.

How do I afford an apartment in Yorkville as a low-level electrical engineer? Supplemental income and very careful financial wrangling. I also moonlight as a tour guide, which I find hilarious because I'm basically a tourist myself, seeing as I'm originally from Nebraska. But I like to think I do a fairly good job. I also speak fluent redneck, so that helps.

Oh, wait, sorry, I've been totally rude. I just invaded your space here and started talking your ear off without properly introducing myself. The name's Dominique Masterson. You can call me Minni. My oldest brother started calling me Minni since before I could walk and it stuck. As nicknames go, I kind of like it.

Minni the Witch.

Anyway, where was I? Oh yes, I stopped at my local Dunkin' Donuts because I may or may not be addicted to them. Waiting in line, these two ladies were talking about the blackout and how it was nothing compared to the outage of '03. Or at least I think that's what they were saying. They were speaking Spanish which I am barely conversationally fluent in. I thought about taking a class because people keep speaking it at me. They tend to assume I'm latina and some days I'm tempted to wear a nametag that reads, 'Soy Cheyenne.'

I could make out enough of their conversation to realize the full scale of the blackout. That's when I finally put two and two together and realized I'd done more than just popped a few breakers.

I grabbed some Munchkins and made a bee-line for my apartment.

Now, I've been told it's fairly standard for New York, but I grew up in a sprawling country farmhouse, so my apartment feels really freaking tiny in comparison. The whole place is basically a rectangle with sheetrock dividing walls that obviously weren't part of the original design. At least I have a separate bedroom and enough space in the bathroom for a stackable washer/dryer, so I can't complain too much.

Well, I *can* complain but other New Yorkers just give me The Look.

I went to my phone first. I had missed a call from Stacey, my BFF. She also left me like six texts. They could be summed up thusly: *You're an idiot, call me.*

I tried to think of a witty response and ended up with: "Something, something, I'm not an idiot."

No, that's literally what I wrote.

Three other missed calls were from Phil, my coven leader. The voicemails were broken up pretty bad with static, but I got that he wanted me to check my sender and call him right away. Why would Phil try to get a hold of me three times on something as unreliable as a phone? I figured it had to do with me blacking out the city and took solace in the fact that he hadn't actually shown up at my door. I mean, if it wasn't important enough to drag his butt all the way over from Brooklyn, then it couldn't be *that* bad.

Which, now that I think about it, should have been my second clue something serious had happened. You would think New York City losing power would be a pretty big deal.

His messages in my sender didn't really give me much else to go on.

What's a sender? Oh, well, I guess I can try to explain. I'm not really the best one to answer magic questions. I was an okay student. I mean, I didn't *accidentally* rip a hole in the fabric of reality or anything. They were controlled experiments, and my mom helped.

Now, a sending spell is where you write down a message and literally send it, via magic, to the intended recipient. Ideally you know their personal sigil, but if you can visualize them, then

the note should get there. It can appear in a mirror, in dirt, whatever's around. Most wizards have a specific book, called a sender, where their messages come to. What I'm really saying is that wizards pretty much invented emails and texting.

I'd also say wizards invented Twitter, but I'm pretty sure that was the Romans.

And yeah, I use witch and wizard interchangeably. Technically the term wizard is gender neutral while witch, warlock, sorcerer, and sorceress are gender specific. Everyone likes to use wizard these days because it sounds grander, thank you, Gandalf. Personally, I like being a witch.

Anyway, what was I talking about? Right, senders. I keep mine on my book shelf. It's just a cheap journal I picked up on clearance somewhere. I've etched some serious magical runes into the faux-leather cover which basically act as my SIM card. I keep the book in a dust jacket for the novel *Utopia* by Thomas More. This is my security measure to keep people from reading it. No one is going to pick up *Utopia* when they could read *500 Movies to Watch Before You Die*—half of which I disagree with, by the way.

Flipping to the last used page of my sender, there were three separate notes from Phil. I can't remember exactly what he wrote, but they went something like this:

Minni, You're not answering your phone. I scryed you, you're not hurt, so I'm guessing asleep. Call me immediately when you get this. – Phil

Minni, I'm getting reports of some serious magical mishaps. I'm pretty sure the blackout is a part of it. I need you to call me as soon as possible. This is important! – Phil

Minni, Seriously? You're jogging? CALL ME! – Phil

I grabbed my phone and dialed Phil's number.

"What happened?" was his greeting.

"I don't know," I told him and realized that was a bald-faced lie. "I mean, when the lights went out in my apartment I thought I only blew a breaker. I didn't even realize how much energy I was draining."

"What? Marcel break up with you?" his words were a note

below pure sarcasm.

I grimaced. "I broke up with him."

There was a pause; apparently he regretted the joke. At least I hope he did. "Sorry to hear that, but you seriously didn't notice the extra surge of power?"

"I was crying and tired." No point in pretending I know the meaning of stoicism in the face of relationship troubles. "I fell asleep only moments after the lights went out and slept till this morning."

"You drained New York City of most of its power grid... while you were sleeping?" he squeaked, causing static to crackle in the line. I may have the latest smart phone, but he used an old '70s style phone connected to an actual landline.

"Yeah, I guess I did..." I replied meekly even though it *was* pretty impressive. "Listen, it wasn't intentional, believe me."

"I know, Minni," he said softly. "It could've been a lot worse, so let's be thankful for that."

"Yeah." It was at that moment the revelation truly hit me. Within the space of twenty-four hours, I had broken up with my boyfriend of three years, blacked out New York City, *and* was nearly mugged. It always comes in threes.

"I've talked to several others." Phil took the hint and moved on from the subject. "A bunch of strange stuff happened around the time of the blackout. Eli went to light a candle but produced a fireball instead."

"What?" I blurted out. "He okay?"

"Yeah, Vivian was there and he managed to direct the fireball into a pool," he said as if it wasn't that big a deal. To be fair, it was Eli, and fireballs are kind of what he's known for. "I've gotten a lot of reports of similar events."

"How'd this happen?" That's me, asking the hard-hitting questions. "Do you think a wizard was doing something they shouldn't?"

"That would be my best guess." I could hear the wheels turning in his head. "You were home, right, when you zapped the power grid?"

"Yeah." I had a good idea where Phil was going with this. "You're gonna see if you can triangulate the point of origin?"

"That's the plan." Ah, yes, Phillip McCree, a good man always finding his way into the middle of whatever is going on, for better or worse.

"Well, be careful then," I said, thinking that this was probably the end of the conversation. I glanced around my apartment and spotted one of Marcel's rust-colored scarfs hanging over the back of the sofa. "Do you need any help?"

"Actually, yeah." The line started to break up. Phil could only use the phone for so long until his magic mucked it up. "Can you bring your laptop over?"

"Can do," I told him, but then looked down at myself still clad in my running clothes, complete with layers of dust and sweat. "Give me a chance to take a quick rinse in the shower. You at the shop?"

"I'll be at my apartment. Ryan is watching the shop."

"Alright, see yah in a bit." I hung up before we could accidentally get disconnected.

A smiling Marcel stared up at me from my phone's home screen. It was a selfie we took together in Central Park earlier in the year. The lighting was absolutely gorgeous. Marcel's dark features practically shimmered as perfect laugh lines framed his face. The copper tones in my auburn hair really popped, and you could even see my sectoral heterochromia.

Sorry, that's the technical term for these rust color spots on the brown of my iris. No one ever notices it until I point it out. Well, Marcel noticed it the first time we met.

I wish I could show you the picture because it was an amazing piece of photography. But in that moment, all it did was mock me.

It was so stupid, what Marcel and I argued over. He thought we should move in together, but I can't risk him learning I'm a witch. Living together would make it so much harder to hide it from him. Of course, I couldn't exactly give that as the reason for why I didn't think we should become roomies.

Words were had: some angry, some childish, most strangely incoherent. Marcel stormed out. I threw a sofa pillow at the door. Then I went to my room, collapsed onto my bed, and out of habit, I started absorbing energy. It's kind of my thing. All wizards have their specialty area, and while I'm not particularly strong offensively, I can channel, redirect, and reshape energies. Electric, thermal, kinetic, magic... if it's energy, I'm your gal.

Anyway, I started to pull in electrical energy as if I was inhaling Munchkins. The donuts, not the... Anyway, I don't know exactly why I do it. It just makes me feel better. Makes me feel whole. But that night, I somehow ended up absorbing more energy than I had any right to. Which meant I basically broke New York City for a couple of hours.

Not the worst thing I've ever done.

Not today anyway.