

Witching Again!

by

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This is the third book in The Witch's Dog trilogy. It follows *The Witch's Dog* and *De-Witched!*

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Chapter 1 Broom and Big Roddy Go Home

The witch's broom, who was called Broom, and the witch's dog, Big Roddy, trudged sadly down the road. Once or twice Big Roddy glanced back over his shoulder, but no one was following them. Certainly not Cackling Carol, their owner. She was a witch – or rather she used to be a witch. That had all ended after she had been taken from her cavern by some well-meaning social workers and rehoused in a flat. Her neighbour, Flo, had introduced her to shopping and the cinema, and gradually Cackling Carol had been de-witched. She had forgotten all about her trusty friends, Broom and Big Roddy. So this morning, while she was out shopping as usual, they had left home.

And here they were, setting out on a new life together. But Broom was worried. Very worried. How was he going to manage to look after Big Roddy? Big Roddy was, well, so very, very big! He was going to take an awful lot of feeding. Up to now, Cackling Carol had always fed him. Occasionally Big Roddy had caught a rat (including a blue rat once that was a wizard in disguise, but that's another story). But that was about it. He wasn't very good at finding food for himself. Broom knew a magic trick or two, but none that would help in providing large dogs with an even larger amount of food!

Broom glanced anxiously at the huge, scruffy animal trotting along beside him. Big Roddy's tail and ears were drooping. Broom knew how rejected he was feeling. He felt the same. These interfering people had done something terrible to their mistress, Cackling Carol, to make her neglect her old friends.

Broom sighed. "This way!" he called to Big Roddy as they got to the edge of town. He decided to take them back to their old cavern. It would be nice to see the old, dusty place again. Living in a clean, sparkling flat had been almost unbearable. Broom needed cobwebs and dampness. Of course, it wouldn't be the same without Cackling Carol, but they could stay there until Broom thought of a better plan.

The sun was setting when they reached the edge of their old wood. They could hear animals rustling in the undergrowth as they searched for food. Suddenly a rabbit jumped out onto the path just in front of them. Big Roddy stiffened. He knew what a rabbit was. He'd seen pictures of them on some tins of dog food Cackling Carol had bought not long ago. Here was dinner!

With a mighty woof, Big Roddy plunged towards the rabbit. The rabbit turned and fled. Big Roddy chased after it.

"Oh no! Come back, Big Roddy!" shouted Broom, quickly setting off after his friend. "You'll never catch it. You'll get lost!"

At that moment, the rabbit reached its burrow and dived in. Big Roddy dived in too, but as he was so big, only his head could get in. Big Roddy gave a startled woof and tried to pull his head out. But it wouldn't budge.

He was stuck.

Broom arrived at the scene.

"And if you don't get lost," he sighed, "you'll get stuck in a rabbit hole. Oh, you silly dog. How am I going to get you out?"

Broom tried tugging on Big Roddy's tail with his bristles but that just made the poor dog yelp.

"Whoops! Sorry," apologised Broom.

Broom began to scrape away at the burrow entrance to try and widen it. When he realised what Broom was doing, Big Roddy helped by scrabbling away with his big paws. After ten minutes or so, Big Roddy was able to pull his head free. His ears were full of dirt and his nose was covered in mud, but apart from that he was fine. However, he felt very ashamed of doing such a daft thing.

"Come on," said Broom wearily. "Let's get back to the cavern."

They walked on through the old woods. Big Roddy began to sniff the air happily, recognising familiar scents. Broom perked up too. He saw the tree that had been struck by lightning. It had a hole in its trunk and Broom loved swooping through it. And there was the tall pine tree that Broom had flown into one day. Cackling Carol had bumped her nose and been very cross with Broom, he remembered!

Broom sped up and Big Roddy broke into a trot. Only a little further and they would be home. Big Roddy was looking forward to sleeping on his pile of cosy blankets and eating out of the shiny metal bowls that Cackling Carol had conjured up for him out of a couple of old saucepans. He started to wag his tail. Just a little further, turn the corner in the path and ...

Big Roddy and Broom stopped in their tracks. Their cavern! It had disappeared! The entrance was all boarded up. There was a sign saying: Danger, no entry.

"Oh Big Roddy!" exclaimed Broom. "What have they done to our home?"

Chapter 2 Home No Longer

The two friends stared in horror.

Broom soon collected himself. "Come on, Big Roddy," he said. "Let's have a closer look."

He flew over to the boarded up entrance. Big Roddy bounded along behind him, hackles up. How dare someone keep him from his lovely blankets and bowls! One of the planks was damaged at one end, leaving a small hole. Broom turned upside down and stuck his top end into it. With all his strength he began levering himself against the plank, trying to pull it off. A couple of nails popped out but that was all.

"Goodness me! They nailed this on tight!" gasped Broom. "Come on, Big Roddy. Lend a paw, please!"

Big Roddy inserted a huge, hairy paw next to Broom's head and, on Broom's command, he pulled with all his might. With a loud splintering sound, the plank of wood peeled away from the entrance.

"Well done us!" panted Broom. "That's a good start. We need to get a few more planks off so you can get inside."

It didn't take long to finish the job. Soon there was a hole big enough for Big Roddy to squeeze through, without leaving too much fur behind.

They looked around the cheerless cavern. It took Big Roddy's eyes a few moments to get used to the almost total blackness. He sniffed forlornly around the place that had been his first ever proper home. He had lived most of his life in a home for unwanted dogs before Cackling Carol had adopted him. The only scents of happy times that he could smell were very faint indeed. And there was no trace of his beloved blankets or bowls. The cave had been cleared completely by the social workers before they'd boarded it up. Everything was gone. Not a trace of their old life left. This wasn't home any more.

Big Roddy lay down sadly and put his head on his paws. Broom flew over and gently tickled his big furry ears with his bristles.

"I don't think I want to stay here, do you?" he asked.

Big Roddy shook his head firmly.

"I suppose we had better go and see Witch Matilda, then," sighed Broom. Witch Matilda was head of Cackling Carol's coven of witches. "Perhaps she'll be able to help us."

So, tired and dejected, they trailed out of the cavern and set off for Witch Matilda's cave, a long, long way away.

Chapter 3 Staying With Witch Matilda

It was a very bedraggled Big Roddy and a very weary Broom who eventually arrived at Witch Matilda's cavern. They approached it through a thick forest. Broom had only ever flown to Matilda's before, high above the forest. This time, of course, he couldn't fly since Big Roddy was too heavy for him to carry. The only way he could manage Big Roddy was if Big Roddy was shrunk in size, and they needed Cackling Carol to do that with a magic spell. So Broom had to keep leaving Big Roddy down on the ground and zoom up above the trees to check the route. He got lost several times. It was a horrid journey but at last they were there.

"Well, well, well, what a nice surprise," cackled Matilda ushering them inside. "Broom – and Big Roddy, the wizard catcher! Come in, come in, my dears. You'd better tell me everything that's happened to you. I heard that our Carol had been witchnapped. Goodness me, what a wicked world it is when witches can't be left in peace and quiet any more."

"I quite agree, Madam," said Broom politely. "But first, please could you give Big Roddy some supper. He must be starving. He's had nothing but a few berries all day. And I wouldn't mind a quick rub with some linseed oil if you happened to have any handy. The central heating in Cackling Carol's flat has done my old timber no good at all! If it's not too much trouble, that is."

"Of course, of course, my dear," nodded Matilda. She bustled off to make a tasty stew for Big Roddy and find the oil for Broom. But first she cleared the rug in front of her fire of cats so that Big Roddy could collapse there. The cats muttered angrily and hissed at the

huge dog, but he was too exhausted to care. He managed a feeble wag of his tail to say 'thank you' but the cats ignored it. Witch's cats really are very disagreeable animals.

Broom wandered over to talk to Matilda's broom while he waited for his rub down. He didn't have long to chat, however. Matilda was soon back with a bowl piled high with, well, something or other for Big Roddy that smelled very tempting, and a bucket of water. Big Roddy cheered up at once at the sight of the meal and emptied both containers in seconds. Matilda smeared soothing oil over Broom and listened in horror to his tale of what had happened to them all.

"To think our Carol would get her fingernails cut!" gasped Witch Matilda. "And her hair done! And even start wearing trouser suits. Oh me, oh my. What have they done to her?" Matilda shook her head sadly. "Never mind, my dears," she went on. "You can live here with me for as long as you need. There's plenty of room in my cave."

That was true enough. As befitted the head of a coven, Matilda had a huge home. Her cave had a long, deep passage that extended far into the hillside. At the very end of this passage stood a large earthenware jar. Its sides were very thick, but if you listened carefully you could hear someone shouting angrily inside it. That's because in this jar was Egbert, the blue wizard, the one that Big Roddy had caught not so very long ago. And after Big Roddy had caught Egbert, Matilda and the other witches had sealed the nasty wizard into this jar for a thousand years. It served Egbert right. He was a very, very unpleasant piece of work.

Chapter 4 Blooming Cats

It wasn't the same as their own cavern, but being with Witch Matilda was better than being ignored by Cackling Carol in the horrid, clean flat. However, the two friends still missed their mistress.

Big Roddy was particularly miserable. Matilda's seven cats were making his life wretched. They spat at him whenever he came near and lashed out with their claws. They always seemed to get his nose and it was getting very sore indeed. They sniggered and whispered amongst themselves. Big Roddy knew they were talking about him. He wished he could understand cat language. He tried to keep out of the way, but because there were so many cats and he was so very big, he was forever bumping into them.

Big Roddy lost his appetite and his tail hardly seemed to wag any more. Broom saw what was happening and sighed. He wasn't having cat trouble but he was finding Matilda's broom very boring company. The old broom droned on about dull things all day long. Broom tried to show interest and listen politely but it was a strain. He became almost as depressed as Big Roddy.

Witch Matilda noticed how unhappy Broom and Big Roddy were. She didn't realise her cats and her broom were mostly to blame, but she recognised that they were homesick.

"The time has come," she told her pet raven one night, "to find Cackling Carol. I shall have a meeting tomorrow night to discuss how." As she spoke she scribbled away busily on a dried frog's skin. "Here," she said, handing it to the raven. "Take this to all the witches in my coven. Extra beetles for supper for you."

The raven croaked with delight and flapped off into the gloom. It took him many hours, flying from witch to witch with the message, and he was hungry and tired when he returned. None of the witches had offered him any snacks. He remembered that Cackling Carol had always given him a treat whenever he called to her cavern. He hoped the witches would manage to get Carol back. She was the best of them all, except Witch Matilda, of course.

The meeting took place the next evening. Just after sunset, if anyone had looked very carefully, they would have seen large, witchy shapes flying through the shadows towards a thick, dark forest. Soon the witches were all assembled at Matilda's cavern. Witch Matilda called them to order by rapping a skull on her chair.

"Now, now, sisters," she screeched. "Settle down."

The witches, who had all been catching up with the latest gossip, coughed and muttered for a little bit longer but finally fell silent.

Witch Matilda stood up.

"As you all know, our sister Cackling Carol was cruelly dragged from her home and taken to some terrible, clean place where she was de-witched!"

There were gasps of horror.

"She has abandoned her broom and her faithful, wizard-catching dog. No witch in her right mind would betray her closest friends in this way."

There were murmurs of 'absolutely not' and 'disgusting' and 'how terrible'.

"We need to find our sister and rescue her. Now, how shall we do this?"

The witches began to offer suggestions.

"How about sending a plague of frogs into the town to scare all the do-gooders away?"

"Why not raid all the homes in the area one by one until we find Cackling Carol? We could send in spiders as spies."

"Let's cast a remote invisibility spell on her. If no-one can see her, they'll ignore her and she'll get really fed up. She'll surely want to come home again."

Broom listened but Big Roddy was too fed up to pay attention. He was beginning to think that he would never see Cackling Carol again. And besides, the cats were starting to tease him again. They took it in turns to sneak up behind him and stick their claws into his tail or his back. One of them even knocked Cackling Carol's witch's hat off his head! Broom had given the hat to his friend to wear when they'd run away from Carol's flat. She didn't want it any more, and it had cheered Big Roddy up.

Now Big Roddy was very cross. He began to growl. That just made the cats sillier. They got more daring and began to pull his ears and jump on his paws. The bravest, or stupidest, cat then stole Cackling Carol's hat and went tearing off down the passage with it.

That was too much. With an angry growl, Big Roddy hurtled after the offending animal. The other six cats joined in. They tossed the hat one to another. Big Roddy was frantic. Cackling Carol's hat reminded him of the good old days. He treasured it above anything else. Those wretched cats would wreck it.

Big Roddy did everything he could to catch the cats but they were too quick. By now they had come to the end of the passage where the big earthenware jar with Egbert inside it stood. The nastiest cat now had the hat in its mouth and was running round and round the jar, hotly pursued by Big Roddy and the other cats. Getting dizzy and dizzier, in desperation Big Roddy lunged at the cat. But he missed the cat. Instead he hurled himself onto the jar. Now the jar was big and heavy, but Big Roddy was even bigger and heavier. The jar tottered, then it teetered, then it swayed from side to side until suddenly ... SMASH! it crashed to the floor and shattered into a thousand pieces. Big Roddy froze to the spot. There was a flash of blue lightning and a blue whirlwind hurtled down the passageway towards the witches. Wizard Egbert was loose!

The cats didn't wait around to see what would happen. They just ran for it. Big Roddy was still too horrified to move. Then suddenly he became aware of Broom tugging at his tail. Broom had seen the blue flash and guessed immediately what had happened. He'd come to get his friend out of danger.

"Quickly!" hissed Broom. "We've got to get out of here and away from Egbert. Hold on to me as tightly as you can."

Big Roddy sank the claws of his front paws into Broom's bristles. The pair of them looked comical with Big Roddy running along on his back paws and Broom desperately trying to fly but only managing to drag himself and Big Roddy along a few inches above the ground. But there was no-one to laugh at them. Egbert had just turned all the witches and their cats to stone in revenge for them putting him in the jar. He didn't see Big Roddy and Broom escape into the night.

He laughed nastily at the sight of the witch and cat statues.

"Serve you right!" he cried. "No-one messes with Egbert and gets away with it. But I see that the one they call Cackling Carol isn't here, nor is her monstrous mutt, that Big Roddy. I shall have to find them. They're not going to get away from me."

And with that he stormed out of the cavern, sweeping his sapphire blue cape around him. His sapphire eyes glistened with hatred.

Chapter 5 Re-Witched

Meanwhile, someone else was searching for Big Roddy. This someone had neatly cut hair, a trendy outfit, a suitcase containing some scrubbed spell bottles and books – and a broken heart. It was Cackling Carol. She had just realised that Big Roddy and Broom had deserted her and she now knew why. She had neglected them and betrayed them. But she had vowed to find them.

Cackling Carol stopped and put the heavy suitcase down for a moment. Now, where should she look first? She thought for a moment or two. Her cavern of course! Surely they'd have gone there. Carol grabbed the suitcase and hurried towards the edge of town. She knew that she wouldn't be able to stay there long. The do-gooder social workers would come looking for her there when they discovered that she'd run away from her flat. She had to get there before they did!

Just then a red double decker bus pulled up next her.

"Do you want to get on, love?" called the driver. Cackling Carol looked up and saw she was standing next to a bus stop sign. Now, Carol had never been on a bus even though she had always really wanted to. She'd seen them around often enough when she'd been out shopping with Flo. But whenever she had suggested to Flo that they go for a ride on one, Flo had turned up her nose and said 'no'! Flo always preferred taking a taxi.

Carol was on her own now, though. And here was her last chance to ride on a bus. She had a bit of money left in her pocket so she struggled onto the bus with her suitcase.

"Where do you want to go?" asked the driver.

Carol didn't know what to say.

"Well?" The driver was sounding impatient now.

Carol pulled a coin out of her pocket.

"How far can I go for this?" she asked.

"Quite a long way," smiled the driver, taking the money and giving her a ticket. "That'll take you to the heath at the edge of town. Is that OK?"

That was perfect. It was in the right direction for getting home.

Carol dumped her case in the luggage area and clambered up the stairs to the top storey. The very front seats were empty. Carol plonked herself down happily on them to enjoy the ride. But it was terrifying! Every time the bus turned a corner, Cackling Carol was sure they were going to hit the cars coming towards them. The bus seemed to swing so far out! And when they approached a low bridge, Cackling Carol dived under her seat. She was convinced they were going to hit it! This was far scarier than riding Broom. Oh dear, she shouldn't have thought about Broom. A big fat tear trickled down her cheek.

Looking round for something to cheer her up, she spotted a button with 'push' on it. So Cackling Carol pushed it. A bell sounded. Carol pushed it again. Again the bell sounded.

"This is fun! thought Carol. She pressed it several more times until the driver's voice rose angrily up the stairs. "Stop pushing that bell, madam!" Carol stopped at once.

They were soon at the heath. Cackling Carol collected her case and climbed off the bus. The driver was quite relieved to see her go!

Carol set off. After walking quickly for a long, long time, Cackling Carol reached her woods again, just as dusk was falling. She dived into the woods. She pushed through bramble bushes and waded through bogs in her haste to get back home and find her friends. Her neat hair got tangled and scragged by branches. Her outfit got torn and muddy. She began to look more like a witch again. And as she battled through the undergrowth, she found that she could remember some of her spells again. She'd been too busy shopping and going to the cinema to think of them while she'd been living in the flat. She began to cheer up as she chanted some of the old magic words and phrases again. Witching was far more fun than watching films or waiting in queues at the cash till in shops.

Cackling Carol felt like a proper witch again. She turned a couple of spiders into lizards and felt even better. She spotted a tiny mouse being chased by an owl and, with a click of her fingers, made the mouse the size of a hare. The startled owl hooted in horror and streaked off. The mouse looked round in surprise but then trotted off happily enough.

Carol chuckled to herself. She was still chuckling when she reached her cavern. She stopped chuckling at once. Like Broom and Big Roddy, she was horrified to see it boarded up and abandoned.

She read the sign. "Danger, no entry. Danger indeed! How could my cosy old home be dangerous, I should like to know?"

Then she saw the hole that Big Roddy and Broom had made in one corner.

"What's this?" she wondered. She bent to have a closer look and caught sight of what looked like a ball of fluff stuck to the edges of the broken boards. She pulled it off. She recognised the feel of it at once. It was Big Roddy's fur! So he'd been here, and recently too. She was hot on the trail of Broom and Big Roddy.

"Hooray!" she trilled. She didn't stop to look around her old home, not that there was anything to see anyway. Grasping the handful of Big Roddy's fur, she recited a tracking spell. At once a glowing green path appeared, showing her where the former owner of the fur had gone. With new energy, Cackling Carol jogged along, her suitcase of bottles clanking alarmingly.

She soon saw that the path was leading to Witch Matilda's cavern.

"Clever Broom! Clever Big Roddy," she smiled. What a sensible thing to do, to go and see Matilda. With any luck they'd still be there. Carol started to run. The bottles clanked even more and then started to crack and splinter.

"Whoops!" exclaimed Carol, slowing down for an instant, then "Oh, who cares!" she shouted as she threw the case down. She could always get new bottles and spell books but she couldn't get a new Broom or Big Roddy. They were far more important.

She rushed on and reached the thick forest where Broom had had so much trouble. Carol plunged straight in, following Big Roddy's glowing trail. But as she got closer, she began to slow down. It wasn't just that she was getting tired from so much walking and running. (Cackling Carol wasn't very fit.) It was also that she was beginning to wonder if Broom and Big Roddy would be pleased to see her. Perhaps they didn't want to come back to her.

"I wouldn't blame them," thought Carol sadly. "I was really rotten."

She sat down on a sleeping badger and had a little cry. She didn't notice what seemed to be a blue shooting star career through the sky above her. But the star noticed her.

"Now, now, this will never do," Carol told herself firmly, blowing her nose on the sleeve of her silk blouse. "I will find Broom and Big Roddy and ask them to forgive me. And if they won't, well, I shall have only myself to blame."

She squared her shoulders and marched on until she came to the entrance to Witch Matilda's cavern. It seemed very quiet although Carol could see that a fire was burning inside.

"Matilda, it's Cackling Carol!" she called. "I'm a witch again!"

No reply. Not even a cat appeared.

"Matilda, are you there?"

Still nothing.

Cautiously Carol stepped into the cavern. She looked around. There were plates of beetle biscuits and bowls of fly jelly on the table. Obviously Matilda was planning a party. But where was everyone? Carol turned into the room where they had their meetings – and shrieked! There were all her sister witches, and their cats, but all turned to stone!

“There’s only one person can do magic this powerful,” Cackling Carol exclaimed out loud.

“Yes, me!” came a voice from behind her. Carol whirled round to see Wizard Egbert looking very pleased with himself.

Chapter 6 Cackling Carol Versus Wizard Egbert

Cackling Carol’s jaw dropped in amazement.

“Ha ha!” Egbert gloated. “You weren’t expecting to see me for another nine hundred and ninety-nine years were you? Well, surprise, surprise. Here I am now. And I was looking for you.”

“Oh?” said Carol in a very wobbly voice. She was horrified.

“Yes, and that monstrous mutt of yours. You two were responsible for me getting caught, weren’t you?” Egbert looked very threatening.

“No, it was just me. All my idea. My dog only did what I told him,” gabbled Cackling Carol. The least she could do was try keep Big Roddy out of trouble.

“Nonsense! The dog is as guilty as you are. I’ll find him, don’t you worry. I found you, didn’t I? Now, what shall I do with you. Something very nasty I think!” Egbert laughed unpleasantly and began to pace round and round Carol.

“Come on, come on, think of something, you silly witch!” Carol scolded herself. Now was the time to act, while Egbert was off guard.

Suddenly a spell plopped into her brain. Her favourite spell. It turned people into toads. It might work on wizards too. She shrieked out a few weird words and there was a fat blue toad hopping around her. But only for a few seconds. Egbert was a powerful magician. He quickly undid Carol’s spell by turning it back on her. Now Cackling Carol was the toad!

“I’ll squash you, you Cackling Toad,” grinned Egbert, trying to stamp on Cackling Carol. Carol leapt here, there and everywhere to avoid his big blue boots. As she did, she desperately croaked out a few more magic words. These made up the ‘turn into a fly’ spell.

Before her toady eyes, Egbert shrunk and turned into a fly. Carol the toad knew what to do. She shot out her tongue and wrapped it round the very blue bluebottle. But before she could swallow Egbert and so destroy him for ever, he reversed the spell she had cast on him. Carol found herself stuck with a full size Egbert sitting on her tongue. It hurt!

“Now I’ve got you, puny witch,” chuckled Egbert.

“Huh! No-one calls me puny and gets away with it,” thought Carol angrily. Summoning up her magic powers, she undid the toad spell just as Egbert reached out to grab her. He ended up with a handful of curly hair. He gave it a spiteful tug.

“Ouch!” cried Carol, loudly. “You’re a rotten bully, Egbert.”

She turned him into a cat. Egbert turned her into a mouse. Quickly Carol turned Egbert into a piece of cheese. Egbert turned Carol into a mousetrap. And so it went on, each of them turning the other one into lots of different things.

“This could be a long fight,” thought Carol to herself wearily.

Chapter 7 Broom and Big Roddy to the Rescue

Broom and Big Roddy weren’t far away. They were hiding near Matilda’s cave, hoping that Egbert wouldn’t find them. They huddled together.

Suddenly Big Roddy sat upright, pricking his big floppy ears as much as he could.

“Get down!” hissed Broom. “Egbert will see us!”

But Big Roddy wouldn’t. He began to whimper excitedly.

“What is it, Big Roddy?” asked Broom. “What can you hear?”

Big Roddy had heard Cackling Carol say ‘ouch’ as Egbert pulled her hair. He was sure it was Cackling Carol. He hoped it was Carol. No, he was positive it was Carol.

He stood up to find his mistress.

“Where are you going?” gasped Broom, grabbing Big Roddy’s tail to stop him. Had Big Roddy gone nuts? Why did he want to risk getting caught by Egbert? Broom himself would only risk such a thing for Cackling Carol but ...

“Good gracious!” cried Broom, suddenly understanding. “You heard Cackling Carol didn’t you? Clever dog. Come on, let’s find her – before Egbert does, if we can.”

Big Roddy charged off towards Witch Matilda’s cave again, closely followed by Broom. They arrived at the doorway in time to see a blue octopus turning a seahorse into a crab. Both fishy creatures turned to stare at the dog and the broom. In an instant the octopus became a wizard and the crab became Cackling Carol. There was delight on Carol’s face for a moment but it quickly changed into concern.

“Run, Big Roddy! Fly, Broom! Get away from here!” she cried in warning.

“Too late!” chirped Egbert gleefully conjuring up a blue brick wall to block the entrance to the cave. “No-one’s going anywhere!”

Cackling Carol began to try and magic the wall away, but Egbert’s sorcery was much stronger than her magic.

“I’ve got the lot of you,” smirked Egbert. “Who shall I dispose of first, I wonder? Oh, silly me, how could I forget. Ladies first! No messing around this time, my dear. Say goodbye to your doggy and your floor cleaner.”

He drew back his arm to cast a dreadful spell but Broom threw himself at the wizard and began bashing him about the head.

“Leave Cackling Carol alone,” he yelled.

There was a blue flash. Broom disappeared. In his place sat a floor-cloth.

Big Roddy leapt into the fray. With a piercing howl he jumped at the wizard and knocked him to the ground. But the next moment, Egbert picked himself up and threw a small toy dog to the ground beside him. The toy dog had a tiny witch’s hat.

Carol watched in dismay. Her dear friends, the one she’d betrayed so terribly, had tried to save her. They hadn’t thought of themselves at all. They were brave and noble. They were friends indeed. And Egbert had defeated and humiliated them. She felt tears in her eyes. But at the same time, anger boiled up inside her.

With every shred of her magic powers she screamed the most powerful spell she knew at the smug wizard. She wasn’t sure it would work but it was worth a try. Egbert was caught completely by surprise. Next instant, instead of a blue wizard there was a blue desktop computer, complete with screen and printer, in front of her. And because there was no electricity in the cavern, the computer couldn’t work. And because it couldn’t work, Egbert couldn’t do anything. Carol had done it! She’d beaten Egbert!

But at a cost. She was drained. She sank to her knees. Her magic was almost all gone. She just had a little bit left.

First she turned Broom back from a floor-cloth. He zoomed to her side and Carol gave him a weak hug.

“Dear Broom,” she croaked. “Dear friend.”

Broom sniffed and wiped his eyes. “Oh Mistress, thank goodness you’re safe!”

Then she turned to Big Roddy. She opened her mouth to say the spell to transform him, but before she could do so, a shimmering pink haze filled the cave around her. It was the Witch Spirit. Cackling Carol had only ever seen the Witch Spirit once before, when she first became a witch. The Witch Spirit was the source of every witch’s magic. She only appeared at times of great importance.

The pink haze took the form of a hooded face.

“Cackling Carol,” said the figure.

“Yes, oh great Witch Spirit?” whispered Cackling Carol.

“Carol, my child, your powers are almost gone. Battling with the great wizard has used up all your magic.”

“I know,” nodded Cackling Carol.

“If you cast your next spell, you will exhaust your powers completely. You will never do magic again.” The Witch Spirit sounded grave but kind. “So what will you do, my child?”

Carol didn’t hesitate. “I must cast the spell, Witch Spirit. I have to.”

“I understand,” sighed the Witch Spirit. “And I will help you. But this will be your last spell.” With that, the Witch Spirit vanished.

Cackling Carol didn’t care. Big Roddy was worth losing her magic for. There was no contest – Big Roddy meant all the magic in the world to her.

She uttered the spell. The toy dog became a big, slobbering bundle of fur with a witch’s hat. He bounded over to Carol and licked her joyously. She clung to him with her remaining strength.

“I’m sorry, boys,” she whispered to him and Broom. “Will you forgive me?”

“I think they already have!” came a voice. Carol looked up. It was Witch Matilda. When Carol had broken Egbert’s spell over Roddy, the Witch Spirit had broken his enchantment of the witches too. They were statues no longer and they had a lot to say.

“Carol, you’re back!”

“We’ve missed you, dear.”

“My, my, look at those horrible clean nails.”

“Whatever are you wearing?”

“You’ve done for Egbert this time. Well done!”

“Yes, Egbert the computer will make a very nice foot stool for Matilda. Such a nice shade of blue.”

“I hope he catches some nasty computer viruses.”

The witches helped Cackling Carol to Matilda’s bed. Broom and Big Roddy stuck very close. Carol was very, very weak. Matilda fetched some nourishing frog soup and stinging nettle tea, with extra stings in.

“So the Witch Spirit appeared, did she?” she asked when she returned with a loaded tray.

Cackling Carol nodded. “I shall have to leave your coven now, I suppose. I have no magic left at all,” she croaked sadly.

“Well, I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” replied Witch Matilda, winking. “I know a trick or two. With a little luck, we should be able to get some of your powers restored, but probably not for a couple of hundred years. Still, there’s no hurry is there?”

Cackling Carol brightened up. That was something to look forward to! But for now all she wanted was to be with Broom and Big Roddy again. When she was strong again, they’d find a new, hidden cavern somewhere where not even the most determined do-gooder could find them and take her away again. She’d get by quite happily without magic so long as she had her friends with her.

“Back together again,” smiled Cackling Carol. “And that’s where we all belong.”

A note from the author

I hope you enjoyed this story about Cackling Carol, Big Roddy and Broom. Did you read the other two - *The Witch's Dog* and *De-Witched* - as well?

I've always loved writing. I wrote my first stories when I was about 7, all about Apple and Carrot! English was my favourite subject at school and I went on to study it at Oxford University. I did a postgrad degree in Publishing Studies and Stirling University and then began working as a desk editor. I took a few years out to be an accountant, but when we moved to Ireland from England in 1992, I set myself up as a freelance editor and indexer, and I've been doing that ever since. I'm married to Chris, have three children - Benjamin, Caitlin and Ruadhri - and since 2006 we've all lived in France on a 75 acre farm. We run a gite and carp and farm llamas, and also edit ebooks.

My first books were published in 1996. I have around 30 to my name now and I'm moving into adult fiction and non-fiction, as well as carrying on writing for children and young adults.

Follow my blog about our life as expats, which is never dull, at <http://www.bloginfrance.com> and find out about my other books at <http://www.booksarecool.com>. Follow me on Twitter too: <http://www.twitter.com/@booksarecool23>

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