



Sorcerers of Knowledge

A Spell Book

By Marcelitte Failla

JOHN W. ENNINGER
1870

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Ashe!

Introduction

In the Brooklyn Public Library gathering dust in the basement cellars, I found over 5000 pages of spells. As a hoodoo practitioner, whose black family is from Louisiana, I cried roaming the pages. Tale after tale of black southerners using complex formulas to bring money, heal physical ailments, keep romantic love, and create protection from the police. In the 1930s Harry Middleton Hyatt an Episcopal priest was commissioned to collect folklore from the American South. The result was *Hoodoo, Conjuraton Witchcraft, and Rootwork*, five volumes of interviews with over 1600 people all of whom except one are black. They are dense and written in southern black vernacular. Although these books have been a wealth of knowledge for scholars and dedicated practitioners of hoodoo, they remain unknown to the public. My hope with this project is to translate and make accessible knowledge that might otherwise go unused. I have also included spells from Zora Neale Hurston's collection "Hoodoo in America."¹ Her extensive study of African-derived religions in the south is a gift to all those interested in the practice and those of us learning our ancestral history.

Hoodoo is the magic of African derived religions as practiced in the United States. There is little separation between religion and magic. They are categories that interact with each other to communicate and call on the energies of the supernatural and ancestral world. Materials used in a manifestation ritual, for example, can correlate to and draw on the strengths

¹ Hurston, Zora Neale. "Hoodoo in America." *The Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931). doi:10.2307/535394

of a specific deity. In Yoruba based traditions, this blending is an intricate balance between the objects, numbers, food items, days of the week and other symbols and the spell or action to create the desired result. For example, in a ritual used to attract love, one may use honey to bring in the energy of the Yoruba Orisha of love, sensuality, and beauty, Oshun. Yvonne Chireau addresses this fluidity between magic and religion in her book *Black Magic: An African American Conjuring Tradition*. She asserts, “African American “religion” is not always distinct from what others call “magic.” Instead, these are complementary categories, and they have historically exhibited complementary forms in African American culture.”² This distinction is a critical observation because of a separation of magic from religion, regarding it as mere superstition, diminishes its legitimacy and the intricate complex cosmologies that are at play in the application of manifestation, divination, hexing, healing and other practices. She quotes David Hall’s definition of “‘lived religion’ or the practice and ‘everyday thinking and doing of lay men and women.’ African American religion, according to this perspective, not only embodies ecclesial formations of faith but also encompasses non-institutionalized expressions and activities.”³ By this definition, then religion is integrated into all areas of life. It is cooking and sharing food, the dances to the gods and the ancestors and the grieving rituals after the transition of a loved one into the other realm. It is the belief in the efficacy of a charm bag, and in the power of the practitioner and the gods to imbue those objects with the ele-

2 Chireau, Yvonne Patricia. *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition*. University of California Press, 2006. Pg. 22

3 Ibid, 19

ments needed to create the desired result.

Many of the spells in this collection are charm bags that have their origin in the Ancient Kingdom of the Kongo. According to Theopus Smith in *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* “Kongo charms or sacred medicines -minkisi (singular: nkisi)- are containers within which are placed material media that, in combination with the living entity or spirit of the charm, create its phenomenal power.”⁴ The making of the charm held different meanings according to how they were bound such as being tightly woven to represent attachment. The inclusion of bodily remains represented the essence of the person, and the combination of these remains with substances could create a desired trait. Objects also carried various meaning, “red pepper to produce heat or irritation; lodestone to draw desirable forces magnetically; bone fragments to signify the passage of powers from the otherworld; soil from grave-sites to symbolize the presence of spirits in transitional places; acrid herbs to displace evil essences metaphorically.”⁵

Prescriptions for keeping the police away were common in the interviews. The spells primarily dealt with gambling and alcohol most likely due to them being collected during and right after the prohibition era. Also, African-Americans were (and are) dealing with severe police violence sanctioned by the rac-

4 Smith, Theopus Harold. *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America*. Oxford University Press, 1995. Pg 40

5 Chireau, Yvonne Patricia. *Black Magic: Religion and the African American Conjuring Tradition*. University of California Press, 2006. Pg 63

ism of Jim Crow laws. Working with energies to create safety from the law was a matter of protection and health. As Stephanie Mitchem asserts in *African American Folk Healing* “Because humans and nature are understood as interrelated, it is possible to find ways to counter present or future negative life events and influences. The activities to counter the negative life events are called protection...Folk healing depends on the ability of the healer to draw on the power to control, protect, or attack, in short, to orchestrate the flow of the natural, the spiritual, and relational aspects of life.”⁶

I approach this collection through Mitchem’s definition of health as wellness.

In African American communities, “wellness” may be a better descriptive term to use when discussing the aims of families and individuals in healing processes as opposed to the term “health.” Wellness implies a temporary condition rather than a possession. “Wellness,” rather than “health,” aligns with the workings of black folklore, cultural traditions, and cultural resistance. “Wellness” references activity and goals rather than a finished product that is a commodity.⁷

This is a holistic approach that accounts for health being

⁶ Mitchem, Stephanie Y. *African American Folk Healing*. New York: New York University Press, 2007, 27-28

⁷ Mitchem, Stephanie Y. *African American Folk Healing*. New York: New York University Press, 2007, 40.

comprised of the mind, body, and spirit. To be well is to care for the factors that influence those areas of being. Therefore I am looking both at spells that heal broken relationships, keep the police away and bring in money as I am at medicinal remedies. What I found affirming in my research was finding interviews and drawing a correlation between the remedies mentioned and its proven use today. Here is one example, “If yo’ have a fever, yo’ know, take it an’ eut it in whiskey or brandy. (The dogwood tree bark?) Yessuh, de bark, yo’ know whut ah’m talkin’ about now. Yo’ jes’ skin dat bark off - de inside skin...It’s a fine tonic.”⁸ I looked up dogwood for fever and listed on numerous websites I found that it is proven to treat such ailments and many others. Tinctures of dogwood are sold to treat “nerve pain, insomnia, headaches or a migraine, anxiety, fear and nervous tension.”⁹ This correlation was accurate for countless other prescriptions including medical concepts such as the homeopathic principle of ‘like cures like’ and cupping, the Chinese method of removing toxins.

The spells in this collection are meant to be used. Because these interviews were collected in the 1930s the practitioners had access to items that we do not have today. I have adapted some of the ingredients based on similar properties such as substituting sulfur for gunpowder because it is an ingredient in gun-

8 Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Root-work: beliefs accepted by many negroes and white persons these being orally recorded among blacks and whites*. Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 437

9 “Dogwood Bark (Cornus Florida).” New Way Herbs Online Store. Accessed December 15, 2017. <http://store.newwayherbs.com/dogwood-bark-cornus-florida-p151.aspx>.

powder and is also used in hoodoo for protection. Prescriptions that call for consumption should be used at your discretion as with anything that is consumed to first assess its compatibility with your body. For occult items that may be hard to find or if the name has changed, I have provided links for online purchase. Although Hoodoo is still dismissed in the public eye as mere superstition, there is empirical evidence, for its validity and practical use. A medicinal application is much easier to prove but the fact alone that practices have survived and adapted from Africa through the middle passage to today should be proof enough of its efficacy. We must not dismiss both the spiritual and medicinal knowledge of the ancestors.

Mullein for Infections and Inflammation¹

As a bath

- Add a handful of mullein to cheesecloth or any porous fabric.
- Soak it in a hot bath for 10 minutes before entering
- Submerge inflamed or infected area in bath water
- Massage area, moving the inflammation or infection toward extremities.

As Salve

1) Gather:

- Dried mullein
- Jar
- Cheesecloth
- Oil- Grapeseed oil or coconut oil works the best.
- Small pot and big pot
- Measurements: About a tablespoon of mullein per cup of oil.

2) Mix oil and dried mullein in a jar.

3) There are two absorption methods:

- Cover with a lid and let sit near a sunlit window for six weeks. This creates a stronger potency.
- Add mixture to a small pot. Put the little pot a large pot filled $\frac{1}{4}$ of water. Boil and cover for 30-60 minutes.

4) Cover jar with cheesecloth and drain oil in a bowl.

4) Return to the jar and use as desired!

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork: Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 377.

Dogwood Bark for Fever¹

- 1) [Dogwood bark](#)-Treats headaches, fatigue, weakness, fever, ongoing diarrhea, loss of appetite, malaria, and boils and wounds, when applied to the skin.
- 2) [Iron](#)- (Spell says ten rusted nails which contains iron. This is used to heat up the body and to give you energy to fight the virus)
- 3) [Canadian Wild Ginger](#) -Asarum leaves. Used for indigestion, reduces fever and treats stomach pain.
- 4) Boil above ingredients together as a tea to reduce fever and treat colds.

1 Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork* Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 437.

Jimson Weed for Chronic Pain and Nerve Damage¹

1. Pull up the whole weed
 - Can purchase [online](#)
 - Or grow the plant at [home](#)
2. Put it in a pot and boil it
3. Add handful of table salt
4. Add a handful of red pepper
5. Bath in it at high temperatures

In my research, I found that [Jimson weed](#) has been found to aid in the cures of asthma, cough, nerve diseases, treats chronic pain and also causes hallucinations and an elevated mood.

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork* Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 454-455.

Attraction Spell¹

This spell can be used to attract a new lover or keep an existing one.

1) Mix:

- [One part Goofer Dust](#)
- One part Dried Rose Petals
- [One part Grounded John the Conqueror root](#)

2) Place the above articles in a small bag with a string on each end of the bag to meet around the waist or carry in pocket.

1 Hurston, Zora Neale. "Hoodoo in America." *The Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931). doi:10.2307/535394, 391.

To Fix a Fight¹

1) Gather

- Verbena Oil - Spell calls for Van Van Oil which initially contained Verbena Oil but to sell it for a lower price, manufacturers diluted and substituted the ingredients. I suggest purchasing the Verbena oil [here](#), but you can also buy Van Van Oil [here](#).
- [Geranium Essential Oil](#)
- [Lavender Oil](#)

2) Mix a few drops of the oils in a bag of sugar

3) Go nine blocks from the house (if you do not live together, go nine blocks from their home)

4) Drop one lump of the mixture on each block all the way to the house

¹¹ Hurston, Zora Neale. "Hoodoo in America." *The Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931). doi:10.2307/535394, 372.

To Bring Back a Lover¹

- Write the name of the absent party six times on paper.
- Put the paper in a glass with two tablespoons full of nutmeg in it.
- Place the paper in the glass next to the candle.
- Write his or her name three times each on six candles and burn one on a window sill in the daytime for six days.

¹ 11 Hurston, Zora Neale. "Hoodoo in America." *The Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931). doi:10.2307/535394, 371.

To Encourage Someone to Love You¹

1) Gather:

- [Orange flower water](#)
- Five cents
- Rose water
- Three bottles of honey
- Nine scoops of sugar
- Nine small sheets of paper with the names of both people on each. Whoever you want to fall in love, put their name first.

2) Make an offering on your altar for nine days of the above ingredients.

Combine in one scoop of sugar for each day: the orange flower water -(a tablespoon per lump), the rose water-(a tablespoon), a third of the jar of honey and one sheet of paper with the names written on it.

3) Place five cents on the altar

3) Burn a pink candle next to the offering for nine days.

¹ Hurston, Zora Neale. "Hoodoo in America." *The Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931). doi:10.2307/535394, 365.

For Separation¹

1. Gather

- One-half bottle vinegar
- One-half bottle of red pepper,
- Dauber nest- Break it up and use it as dust
 - Can be found on Etsy.com. Search for “dirt dauber nest.”
- One tablespoon Epsom salt.

2.

3. Write the name of the person you want to leave five times horizontally and four times diagonally on a piece of paper.
4. Add the ingredients to a bottle and close it tight.
5. Take nine long steps, shaking the bottle with each step (up and down)
6. Put it in the corner of the house and shake it once every day until the desired result.

¹ Hurston, Zora Neale. “Hoodoo in America.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931). doi:10.2307/535394, 383.

Colors of Candles for Love¹

- Red is the strongest to bring love back.
- Pink is the strongest to make them love you.
- Green is the strongest to drive them off.

¹ Hurston, Zora Neale. "Hoodoo in America." *The Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931). doi:10.2307/535394, 379.

Protection from Harm¹

1. Gather:

- Three dimes
- Three matches
- Graveyard Dirt
- Salt
- [Alderwood Dust or Chips](#)
- [Sulfur](#)

2. Go to the graveyard

3. Offer dimes and matches to a grave in exchange for dirt.

4. Boil equal parts graveyard dirt, salt, and Alderwood in about a cup of water.

5. Drain water

6. Let components dry

7. Mix in small bag graveyard dirt, salt, Alderwood, and sulfur.

8. Wear the bag around your waist or around your neck to protect from any potential harm.

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork* Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 411.

Health and Protection from the Law ¹

[Rattlesnake Master](#)'s scientific name is *Eryngium yuccifolium*. In *Hoodoo Conjuraton, Witchcraft and Rootwork* it is used in a spell to protect against the police although it has many medicinal properties as well including being used as a tea to treat fever, whooping cough, spasms, liver concerns, prostate issues and skin problems.

For Protection from the Law

- Can be harvested or you can purchase seeds online and grow indoors or in a garden.
- Eat a small portion of the stem, leaf or root each day. Can also be consumed as a tea.

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork* Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 635.

To Prevent Police from Entering Home¹

1. [High John the Conquer root](#)

- It is used for good luck, money, power, love, success, influencing and commanding others and conquering any situation

2. Dried Rose Petals

3. [Sulfur](#)

- Used for protection, banishing, and spell breaking magic

4. Put about a teaspoon of each and one small piece of the root in red flannel sack

5. Put in your doorstep (front and back doors) and the police will not come to your home. If they do come in they will not find anything to charge you with (could be worn on the body also as a charm)

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork* Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 411.

To Bring Money¹

1. Take three [navy beans](#)
2. Shake them in your hand while repeating the Lord's prayer three times.
 - Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
3. Keep them in your pocket while looking for work or acquiring money.

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork* Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 628.

General Good Luck¹

Wrap a piece of garlic in plastic wrap and carry it with you for good luck.

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork* Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 562.

To Increase Mental Capabilities¹

1) Repeat:

I sincerely send to you the thoughts of my forces at this hour.

I sincerely send to you my mental influence that I can overcome all obstacles and gain what I desire in all influence.

2) Sit down speak these thoughts

3) Close the eyes for five to ten minutes with fingers on the forehead, thumb on the cheekbone.

4) Do this at nine in the morning and seven at night and spirits will help you.

¹ Hurston, Zora Neale. "Hoodoo in America." *The Journal of American Folklore* 44, no. 174 (1931). doi:10.2307/535394, 379.

To Find Work¹

1) Gather:

- A dried piece of Cayenne Pepper- Not ground
- Ten Cents
- [Hoyt's Cologne](#)

2) Combine in a small sack to carry in your pocket or wear as a necklace. Have it with you while submitting applications and going to interviews. Do not discard it or luck will change.

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjunction, Witchcraft, Root-work*. Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 636.

For Success in Acquiring Wealth¹

1) Gather:

- [Sulfur powder](#) -One tablespoon. Original calls for gunpowder which is difficult to find. Sulfur is in gunpowder and carries similar properties.
- A piece of lodestone rock- Found on Etsy.com
- [Nine cayenne pepper seeds](#)

2) Combine ingredients in a small bag and take with you, for a job, for your business to grow or anytime you are seeking wealth.

¹ Hyatt, Harry Middleton. *Hoodoo, Conjuraton, Witchcraft, Rootwork* Vol. 1. 5 vols. Hannibal (Mis.): Western Publishing, 1978, 571.

Marcelitte Failla



Why I practice magic? Because she heals me. Mom taught me how to heal my dog using energy when I was 10. At 13 when I was jealous that Natalie was trying to steal my man, mom and I did a spell. I spent hours talking to the trees, to the mountain and sitting on the stump watching the sun set. At 21 I joined Casa Atabex Ache. A healing space for women of color. There I learned about cleansing spaces with music, florida water, why we wear white, how to call in the directions, how to scream away the racism that's stuck in our bodies and how to heal my sisters. It was there that I met Priestess Luisah Teish after being forever changed by her book, *Jambalaya*. In Brazil I watched eyes roll into the back of folks heads as Chango and Oshun took over their bodies. And I learned I am a daughter of Oya. A warrior, goddess of the graveyard, maker of change. Today I read many many books about Black Magic at Emory while completing my PhD in religion. After every breakup, every fight, every hard and confusing time in my life I seek magic. I come back to it. It's life.

Contact me at: Marcelitte.Failla@emory.edu

