



## Chapter One

Charlotte Fenchurch stared down at the library cart of books waiting to be reshelved and wished for the hundredth time in as many days that her recently acquired status as a witch also came with immediate powers.

It did not, and while she was learning new spells and bettering her existing skills every day, nothing she knew so far would allow her to instantly put all of these books back into place with the twitch of her nose like certain classic television programs would have one believe.

Sadly, she had also been informed by her mentor and most powerful witch extraordinaire, Lola Honeycutt, that nose twitching *only* worked on television. Be that as it may, Charlotte had

discovered that she could levitate books and place them into their appropriate spots if she concentrated and only did one book at a time.

This wasn't a skill, however, that could be utilized when the library had patrons in it. Or when her boss and head librarian, Mildred Merriweather, was around. (The same went for Norm Poole, the part-time librarian.) Neither Millie nor Norm were witches, and coven rules specifically stated that spells were not to be demonstrated within viewing range of ordinaries. In other words, non-witchy human types.

And while Everlasting was a curious town filled with interestingly gifted people and quite a few citizens who believed in things that went bump in the night, it also had its share of regular, non-magical folks.

Resigned to doing things the ordinary way, Charlotte started sorting the books in order of how they needed to be reshelved. General References was first. But that book was old, and the musty smell of it made Charlotte's nose itch with an impending sneeze.

She went to the front desk to grab a tissue and found Millie with another old book in her hands. Charlotte helped herself to a tissue from the box on the desk.

Millie gave Charlotte some side eye as if to say nose blowing was time wasting, then let out a heavy, perturbed sigh.

Charlotte glanced at her boss as she finished blowing her nose. Millie's hair, a gray helmet of precise curls, looked especially helmet-y today. Charlotte sniffed once more for good measure and was about to comment that sometimes noses had to be blown, when Millie's frown deepened dramatically.

"This is *not* a library book." Millie shook her head. Not a hair moved. That hair, combined with her tall, slender frame, often made Charlotte think her boss looked like a steel Q-tip. Not the most flattering of descriptions, perhaps, but one that fit.

Although a grumpy steel Q-tip would have been even more perfect, because it wasn't so unusual for Millie to be bothered by something.

Millie ran a tight ship. So tight that it was a wonder she didn't squeak when she walked. Norm, the part-time librarian, had actually said that once. Not in front of Millie, obviously. Millie would have reprimanded him on the spot, then probably added a note in his file. She held little truck with rule breakers, scofflaws, and those she considered slackers. (Which included a shockingly high percentage of the townspeople.)

Someone had apparently violated one of her set-in-stone rules. Namely the one about putting donated books into the returned book drop box. Mixing the two was a big no-no in Millie's world.

The offending object was still in Millie's gaunt hands, a shabby thing about the size of a dictionary with a tattered leather cover and gilded pages that had long since lost their golden gleam. Shame. Charlotte loved books in any condition, but this one had not been well-cared for. "Maybe it could be restored—"

"No." Millie clucked her tongue and shook her head as she pulled the book away from Charlotte's gaze. "This book should have been discarded, not donated. The title is completely worn off."

Pain clenched Charlotte's heart a little. The thought of a book being discarded had that effect on her. Books were...well, everything.

Millie tried to open the book and snorted. "And the pages have been glued together. Abominable." She tossed the book into the trash bin.

The heavy clunk of it dropping to the bottom pealed like a death knell through Charlotte's soul as she went back to her cart of books. Even if the pages had been glued together,

it could still be decorative. Books always looked nice on a shelf. Or under a plant. No book deserved such an inglorious end as the trash bin.

A boisterous laugh cut through the library's reverent stillness. Sounded like Bobby Driscoll. He was a slightly wild young man who'd had the misfortune of being born into one of the wealthiest families in Everlasting, meaning he'd also had the misfortune of being coddled and allowed to get away with his generally bad behavior.

Millie's head jerked up at the sound. Loud noises were not permitted while she was on duty. Like a dog on the scent of a steak she left the pile of returned books behind and stalked off toward the Natural Sciences section to reprimand whoever had dared to find something funny among those volumes of information.

Charlotte left the cart behind once again, made a bee-line for the trash and rescued the book. She held it down low so that if Millie looked over, she wouldn't see that Charlotte had pulled it out of the bin.

Charlotte glanced at the cover. Definitely leather. It was warm in her hands. And not nearly in as bad of shape as it had seemed. The gold-leafed title was flaking off in a few spots, but she had no problem reading the words. *Middian's Book of Curiosities, Curses, & Commanding Hexes*. Understanding those words wasn't hard either. Especially the curses and hexes part. As a fledging witch, she knew what those were. She couldn't cast any, but she got the general idea. Curses and hexes were generally considered dark magic, which wasn't something the witches in the Everlasting coven ever dabbled in. Sure, there were other witches in town who approached magic differently, and had no intentions of joining the coven, but they were all good witches that she knew of. Not at all the sort to use dark magic either.

Charlotte liked the coven's approach, though. She'd been told that when she became a full-fledged witch and was sworn in, she'd have to pledge herself to all that was good and right. Something she'd do happily and without hesitation.

That didn't stop her from being interested in the book, however. There could still be something to learn from it. Maybe she'd take it with her to the next meeting and—

“Hello there, Miss Fenchurch.”

She glanced up at the familiar, wispy voice and smiled. “Hello, Judge Turnbury. You're late today. I was getting worried about you.”

“Arthritis slows me down sometimes, but I wouldn't miss a day.” He shuffled on by, today's newspaper tucked under his arm. He'd be nodding off in the reading room in under twenty minutes if today followed his normal routine. Which it most likely would. Gilbert Turnbury had been a judge in Everlasting until his retirement ten years ago. His wife had passed on not long after that, leaving him alone. It was no secret how much he missed her. He'd started coming to the library for the grief support meetings.

The library was so many things to so many people. Just one of the reasons she loved being a librarian.

But the biggest reason was in her hand. She went back to the book. She *had* to take this book home. She almost felt compelled. Like it was...meant for her. She started to lift the book for a better inspection.

“Can you tell me where the sci-fi books are?”

She tucked the book under the counter and looked up. Into the most serene green-gold eyes she'd ever seen. The rest of this man, however, looked positively devilish. Black hair a little too long, strong brows, and the shadow of stubble accented his squared jaw. Throw in his black

leather jacket and the dark sunglasses pushed up onto this head and he was clearly doused in trouble.

This wasn't really the first time Charlotte had seen him, though. Just the first time she'd seen him this close. The man had been coming into the library for the past week, but he'd yet to check anything out.

She pointed toward the stacks he'd asked about. "On the other side of romance."

He laughed, and the sound sent a lick of pleasure down her spine, confirming his devilishness. A man's laugh should not have that effect on a woman's sensibilities.

"What's on *this* side of romance?" he asked.

She stared at him, at a loss for words. She wasn't a sparkling conversationalist, she knew that. She was a woman who preferred animals and books over most people. But she could usually come up with something. Just not, apparently, when faced with this bastion of male temptation.

He stuck his hand out. The inside of his wrist bore a Mobius strip tattoo. "Walker Black. I'm new in town."

"Walker?" Most of the men she knew were Jim or Bill or Mike. This was Maine, after all. The land of frugal living and practical values. And Walker seemed neither a frugal nor a practical first name. "That's quite a moniker."

He grinned. "It's a family name."

She was still staring. It was hard not to. His smile almost sparkled. She blinked herself out of his spell and shook his hand, trying to make as little actual contact as possible. Hard to do in a handshake. His grip was firm and warm and made her want to hold on longer than was polite. Definitely trouble. "Welcome to Everlasting."

Ooo, there was a dazzling bit of conversation. She almost rolled her eyes at herself.

“Thanks...” He squinted at her name tag. “Charlotte. Nice name. Do you ever go by Charlie?”

“No.” That was a boy’s name. And while she might not be the girliest girl to ever live in this town, she certainly didn’t want to be called by a boy’s name.

“Good,” he said, surprising her. “Charlotte suits you.”

“I suppose you’re here for the Cranberry Festival?” The month-long extravaganza brought a lot of business—and tourists—to town. The place was crawling with them, but the library was rarely on their list of must-see places.

“Something like that.” His gaze swept over her like he was in charge of doing a Charlotte Fenchurch inventory. The nerve. “I’m going to need a library card, too. Can you help me with that?”

“Yes.” That much she could do. She got out the form and presented it to him with a pen. “You’ll need to fill this out. Also, for a non-resident card, there’s a twenty-five-dollar fee. The card is only good for one month. Unless you want to pay for a whole year. That’s two hundred and ninety dollars. And you can only take out one book at a time.”

He gave her a slightly surprised look. “Not a fan of the tourists, huh?”

“The tourists are fine. We just don’t want them leaving with our books.”

“Good to know. And one month will do me just fine.” He read over the form she’d given him, then took the pen and started scratching away. “I don’t usually give out my number to women I’ve just met.”

Was he flirting with her? The mischievous sparkle in his eyes said he was. Men didn’t generally flirt with Charlotte. Not men who looked like this. Not that Skip Hartman, the teller at the bank who always gave her a lollipop, even though technically those were for kids, was

unattractive. He was nice enough looking. (And seemed on the verge of asking her out.) But he wasn't the kind of handsome that made you forget to breathe.

Like the man in front of her.

Whatever Mr. Black's game was, she wasn't falling for it. She knew her shortcomings far too well to think that this decadent example of the male species was remotely interested in her. Her medium brown hair and regular brown (hazel on a good day) eyes didn't inspire flirting. "Don't worry, I'll only use it if you have an overdue book."

He seemed to consider that. "How long before a book is overdue?"

"Two weeks."

He sighed. "Seems a helluva long time to wait, but all right." Before she could say anything else, he bent his head and went back to filling out the form. The tip of his tongue stuck out from between his perfect white teeth.

It was such an innocent expression, she instantly wondered if she'd misjudged him. "I'll be right back."

"Mm-hmm," he muttered.

She slipped the book she'd rescued from the trash from under the counter and, holding it down low, spirited it away to the breakroom and into her big tote bag, which she then stuffed back into her labeled cubby. With the book safely secured, she went back to the counter.

Mr. Black was done with his form and was once again smiling at her. "Here you go." He slid the paper and twenty-five dollars in cash toward her.

She processed his library card as quickly as she could, then pointed him in the direction of the sci-fi books again. Millie returned as he was walking away, so Charlotte tucked the money into the cash drawer and went back to her cart. "I'm going to reshelve these."



Millie gave her a strange look. “You don’t need to tell me you’re going to do your job, Miss Fenchurch. Just do it.”

“Yes, ma’am.” This was another of those times that Charlotte wished she wasn’t just a fledging witch and had the ability to put a frog in Millie’s lunch or give the woman a strange, unexplainable rash. But as Lola had repeatedly told her, witchcraft should only be used for good or one would suffer the blowback of karma.

So no frogs or rashes, but there had to be something Charlotte could do to mellow Millie out. She considered what sort of simple spell she could cast. She’d done well with the levitation ones, but she didn’t see how lifting Millie into the air would do anything but freak her out.

The *ustulo* command was the one Charlotte really need to practice. Especially with Lola due back from giving one of her lectures and doing a book signing in Boston. Charlotte wanted her mentor to know she’d used her time wisely. And Lola had told her *ustulo* was one of the most basic spells there was, useful for lighting candles and starting fires in fireplaces, that sort of thing. All Charlotte had managed to do with it so far was nearly set her apartment on fire and turn one very expensive Yankee Candle into a jar of boiling wax. But that’s why she needed to practice. Now, what kind of candle might she light this evening on Millie’s behalf?

Charlotte pushed her cart into the stacks as she gave that some thought. Maybe the woman needed a love spell cast on her. Then she’d have someone else to focus on. Or *maybe* being in love, if that was possible for an uptight woman like Millie, might soften her up. Millie had been married once upon a time, so clearly it was possible for her to fall in love. Now who should she direct that spell’s intent toward? Judge Turnbury? He could use a woman in his life. It might even take his mind off his late wife.

But Millie might be more a curse than a blessing. Charlotte snorted out loud at the very idea.

“Something funny?”

She jumped and turned to see Mr. Black behind her. “You’re still here?”

He leaned against the stack. “Is there a time limit on how long someone’s allowed to stay in the library?”

“No, but...” She glanced at the clock on the wall behind him. “You’ve been here for half an hour.”

“I’m still looking for something to read.”

“I thought you wanted a sci-fi. This isn’t the science-fiction section.” Her words came out crosser than she’d intended, but she wasn’t a fan of being surprised. Hated it, actually. How anyone watched a scary movie was beyond her.

“Nope, it isn’t. I moved on. Sorry about startling you.”

“Yes, well, I’m fine. Thank you. So you want something from the metaphysical section?”

He shrugged. “I like to read all sorts of things.” He gave her that look again, like he was sizing her up. “What do you like to read?”

Books were the way to her heart. But she doubted he knew that. He was just making conversation. “I’ll read pretty much anything. Thrillers, biographies, cookbooks—not that I’m a great chef—foreign language translations—”

“What are you reading now?”

She hesitated, not because she was ashamed of her current selection but because technically she wasn’t reading it, she was rereading it. “A book I’ve read many times before. *The Scoundrel Prince*.”

“Never heard of it.”

“Doesn’t surprise me. It’s a romance. A historical romance, to boot.” She made a face at him. “I’m sure you wouldn’t like it.”

He crossed his arms. The sleeves of his jacket stretched tight over his biceps, and for a split second she wondered what he looked like shirtless. “Oh really? Why? Because I’m a guy? Isn’t that a little judgmental?”

It was. But it was also based on years of experience and a keen understanding of what men typically liked to read. “So you’re interested in it, then?”

“Absolutely. Hook me up.”

She studied him for a moment. There was no mockery in his eyes, nothing flippant about his smile or his tone of voice. “Okay, follow me.”

She took him to the romance section and found the book easily. She knew exactly where it was because she recommended it quite often and the library had two copies. One of which had been checked out three days ago by Helena Grimaldi, who also reread the book at least once a year, but the other was in its place on the shelf.

She pulled it down and handed it to him. “There you go.”

She watched his face as he took in the cover with its passionately embracing couple replete in their slightly historically inaccurate outfit of breeches on him and a flowing, but nearly falling off, ball gown on her.

Mr. Black looked up at her. “How about when I’m done with this, we discuss it over dinner?”

Charlotte’s brows lifted. “That implies you’ll actually read it, Mr. Black.”

“I plan to. And call me Walker, please. Dinner, then?”

“I don’t know...” Dinner was a big commitment for someone whose last date had involved going with a second cousin to a third cousin’s wedding.

“Lunch?”

“Hard to do when I’m here. I only get half an hour.”

“Coffee, then. With nothing planned afterward.”

“I suppose that would be all right.” Especially because she doubted he’d finish the book. And if he lied about it, she’d know. She knew the book backward and forward. Just like she knew that Mr. Black—Walker was up to something. Which was almost forgivable given how he looked like he could be on the cover of a romance novel himself. She could just about picture him in a pirate’s shirt, sword on his hip, hair blowing in the brisk, sea breeze.

“Great. Coffee it is, then.” He tipped his head. “Check me out?”

“What?” She snapped out of her reverie, unaware she’d been so obvious.

He waggled the book. “Can you check this book out for me?”

“Oh, yes, sure.”

They went back to the desk, and she got him sorted as quickly as possible. Millie was at the desk too, working on the computer. Probably compiling the next list of late notices to go out. Or tallying fines.

Charlotte watched Walker leave. He’d better not abscond with that copy of *The Scoundrel Prince*.

“Miss Fenchurch, you may take your break now.”

“Hmm?” Charlotte looked at Millie, then checked the time. Lunch break already. But her appetite was for something much different than the chicken salad sandwich awaiting her. Much different. And much more appealing.

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