

# Bewitch Me

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*Witches of Mystic Hollow*  
*Book 1*

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# Chapter 1

The only thing worse than waking up for your first day of school after the most amazing summer vacation you've ever had is being woken up by your crazy fifteen-year-old sister who can't stop yelling about a curling iron.

"Emmy, wake up!" Chloe climbs on top of me, squeezes my shoulders, and starts shaking me.

I try to pretend I'm still asleep, but it doesn't work.

"I know you're awake," Chloe says. The shaking doesn't stop.

"Please leave me alone," I beg. I know it's still dark outside, because when I sneak a peek at Chloe, all I see is her silhouette.

"The curling iron!" Chloe shouts in my face. Her long bushy hair falls all over my eyes and into my nose. It tickles and I can't help a tiny giggle that escapes my lips. Giggling is obviously the wrong thing to do, because the next moment the light from the lamp beside my bed sends me flinching like a vampire from the sun.

"Please go away," I moan and try to shield my face from Chloe, but she pries my arms open as easily as if they are a box of her favorite chocolate cookies. Her ninety-pound frame feels like a concrete building pinning me down. It's hard to believe that this tiny creature could be this strong. Or maybe I'm just a weakling? No, I'm just very, very sleepy.

"Where's your curling iron?" Chloe yells in my face for the umpteenth time.

"Ugh," I groan and try to bury my face in the pillow, but she doesn't let me.

“You know I won’t leave you alone until you tell me where it is,” she states the obvious.

“Oh, come on. You know where it is. It’s in the bathroom. It’s always in the bathroom.” Chloe and I share a bathroom and that’s where we both keep all our beauty appliances. Although it’s a common fact that nothing in our house ever stays where it’s supposed to stay.

“No, it’s not,” she says, but now that I’m cooperating, she sits on the bed instead of on top of me.

“What do you mean it’s not?” I open an eye and venture another peek at her. She’s all brown hair and pink pajamas. “Have you tried looking there?”

“Duh!” Chloe rolls her eyes like I’m some kind of moron. “It’s not in the bathroom, it’s not in my room—”

I want to ask why it would be in her room if it’s my curling iron, but then decide it’s not worth arguing about.

“—and it’s not here. Your room is such a mess, by the way,” she adds and cringes her tiny nose in disgust.

“Um, what?” I look around for the first time since she woke me up. The room is a mess, but I’m not the one responsible for it. My clothes are strewn all over the floor. So is all the contents of my school bag which I packed so carefully last night. Really? She was looking for the curling iron in my school bag? And is that my underwear lying on the floor? I feel my cheeks turn red, but what really sets me off is when I see my copy of *Jane Eyre* just lying on the floor, collecting dust—well, okay, the dust is a little bit my fault, I never said I was the tidiest person in the world—but *Jane Eyre*? On the floor? Are you kidding me? I roll out of bed and waddle over to the book. I pick it up, dust it lovingly, and place it back on the shelf where it belongs.

“Were you looking for the curling iron on my bookshelves?” I ask incredulously.

Chloe sits on my bed cross-legged with her arms folded in front of her chest. Her waist-long hair is a total and utter mess. She probably washed it last night before bed to save some time in the morning, which turned out to be a terrible idea.

“There’s nowhere else to look.”

“Have you tried asking Mom?”

Chloe’s eyes widen in horror. “You didn’t,” she whispers.

“Of course, I didn’t, but she could’ve taken it herself.” And if she did, the curling iron is as good as gone. Electronic appliances just don’t like her for some reason. I don’t know what it is—I’m pretty sure it’s not her fault—but things often stop working when she tries to use them. Unfortunately, it doesn’t stop her from trying. And sometimes things disappear from our bathroom, like Chloe’s flat iron that went missing a couple of months ago and that Mom swears she didn’t take.

“Ugh,” Chloe shakes her tangled mane—which doesn’t help matters, I might add—and jumps off my bed. “Well, if you lost the curling iron, then you’re going to fix my hair without it.”

“Uh, no, I’m not.” I check my alarm clock—it reads 5:43 a.m. My alarm is set for 7 a.m. and now I want to scream in frustration, but all I do is sigh. Screaming never helps, unless you’re my little sister, of course.

“Yes, you are.” Chloe grabs my wrist, her hand clamping around it like a vise, and drags me out of the room. I try to protest, but she is just two damn strong.

Suddenly, I feel enormous regret for not having shaved Chloe’s head while she was asleep. Why do such wonderful

ideas always come to me when it's too late to do something about them?

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“Ouch,” Chloe cringes as I pull her hair too hard.

“Sorry,” I mumble, even though I’m not really sorry. Well, maybe just a little bit. It’s almost seven o’clock and the sun is peeking through the windows of our parents’ bedroom while I’m doing my best to arrange Chloe’s hair into some kind of presentable state. “Maybe we should just shave it,” I say, more to myself than to Chloe, but the way she looks at me in the mirror tells me I should keep my opinions to myself.

We did find my curling iron. And another one. And an old straightening iron that we’d forgotten about. And three hair dryers. Three! They were all piled up under the sink of our parents’ bathroom. Together with a few mechanical toothbrushes, a trimmer, and something else we don’t really want to know the use of. None of those things functional, of course.

After Chloe experienced a mild panic attack, I convinced her to get into the shower and wash her hair once more. We put half a bottle of Mom’s favorite coconut conditioner on Chloe’s mane—didn’t help the mane, but sure did make us feel better when we squeezed the last drop out of the bottle—Mom really loves that conditioner. Just as we used to love our curling iron. And the hair dryers. All three of them.

And now I have spent the last hour untangling one strand of Chloe’s hair at a time and braiding them into a fishtail braid. It’s a lot easier to work with wet hair—of course it’s even easier to work with normal hair, not one that feels like it belongs to a yeti who lathered it with coconut oil—but still,

it's pliable enough to braid, and when it finally dries on its own (since all of the hair dryers are indisposed at the moment) it will look pretty nice. As long as Chloe doesn't ruin it by constantly touching it and pulling out the strands.

I slap her hand. "Stop pulling it out."

"But it's so sleek. I look like a geeky librarian."

"Librarians aren't geeky. Geeks are geeky. Librarians are—well, it's not the point. It will look different when it's dry, just don't touch it." I finally finish the braid and reach for a hair tie.

"So librarians are library—according to your logic?"

I snort. "Don't be ridiculous. You do realize I can unbraid your hair in like two seconds, right?" Not that I would. I've put way too much effort into this masterpiece.

Chloe squints at me in the mirror, but doesn't say anything.

"Besides, there's no such word as library." I secure the braid with a hair tie, then pull out a few strands on either side of her face. Now the look is complete.

"*You* look library," Chloe says.

I pretend not to hear. Besides, as much as I would like to think that she is just trying to get on my nerves, she kind of has a point. If there is such a thing as looking library, I am definitely pulling it off. I don't use make-up, my hair is always pulled back in a ponytail or a bun, and I love simple clothes that don't draw any attention to me. And if that isn't enough, I literally live in a library. I have like twenty thousand books in my room.

"All done," I say proudly and observe my creation from every angle. The braid is a masterpiece, my hair on the other hand looks even worse than what Chloe started with.

Chloe examines herself in the mirror, turning from side to side and curling the little strands of hair that frame her face around her fingers.

It's not like I'm begging for a compliment or anything, but it would've been nice to get some kind of acknowledgment for my efforts.

"Not bad," Chloe says finally. Coming from her, it's the biggest praise I can hope for. Chloe smiles at her reflection in the mirror, flips the braid over her shoulder, and strolls out of the room.

"A thank you would've been nice," I shout in her direction.

"Yeah, so would a curling iron," she shouts back.

I don't have a lot of time left to get myself ready, so I scoop my hair up in a ponytail, head to the bathroom to wash my face and brush my teeth—good thing I took a bath before bed last night, so I'm squeaky clean—and then put on a pair of black jeans and my favorite blue silk shirt with a cute ruffle collar and thin black velvet tie that ties into a lovely bow up front.

I assess the mess in my room and quickly stuff all the clothes that Chloe scattered around the room back into my closet, then repack my school bag, which takes me the longest because I need to pack not only my textbooks and notebooks, but also a change of clothing and a few other things I will need for a sleepover at my best friend Jessie's house tonight. Her parents are out of town on a research trip (they write historical novels) and we've been anticipating this opportunity for weeks.

Finally, I take a random book from my to-be-read bookshelf and stuff it into my bag. I probably won't need it, but it's hard for me to spend a night outside my house

without taking at least one of my books with me. Not that Jessie doesn't have a huge collection of her own, but for me it's a security blanket kind of thing. I pick up my school bag, which weighs like a bag of bricks, and head downstairs to get some breakfast.

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"What is this stuff?" Chloe asks me, cringing her tiny nose.

We huddle over the stove and examine four pots that all have something brewing inside. But I know immediately which pot Chloe is talking about, because it's the only one emanating the smell of roadkill.

"I have no idea," I say.

Dad is at the table, reading his morning paper on a tablet and sipping coffee. He doesn't seem to register anything that's going on around him. Mom is nowhere to be seen.

"Don't touch it!" I catch Chloe's hand before she can open the pot. "Don't you remember what happened last time you opened something Mom was cooking?"

"It wasn't that bad," she says, but pulls her hand away nonetheless.

Not that bad? We had to redecorate the entire kitchen. It would be a shame to ruin it again. And besides, no matter what state your kitchen is in, you don't just go opening pots that smell like roadkill being cooked in toxic waste. You just don't.

"Oh, girls, you're up!" Mom floats into the kitchen through the patio door, her white peignoir flapping open and revealing a pretty white nightgown, her blonde curls framing that innocent looking face.

“Um, Mom, what are you doing with that pig leg?” Chloe asks.

Mom’s eyes open in innocent surprise. “Why, I’m going to roast it for dinner, of course.”

Chloe and I gulp in unison. I say hesitantly, “So when you said we were going to try traditional recipes, you didn’t just mean that we were going to switch cereal for oatmeal?”

“Oh, don’t be silly, Emmy. You’ll love it, I promise. It’s your great-grandmother’s recipe. I want my girls to have the best nutrition. And besides, oatmeal will make you hungry in a couple of hours, while a good offal stew will keep you full till dinner.” Mom affectionately squeezes Chloe’s cheek with one hand while trying to balance the frozen pig leg with the other. So that’s what’s cooking in the pot: the offal stew. That does not sound like something I would like to try. I don’t even like the taste of liver, and who knows what Mom put into that stew.

“Yes, Emmy, don’t be silly,” Chloe says with a nasty grin. She is so loving this. Chloe has no problem eating any kind of food. Her stomach can digest anything. I bet she could eat a handful of nails and get some nutrition from them.

I scowl at her and whisper quietly so that Mom doesn’t hear, “Are you seriously going to pretend to like that stew just so that I’d be forced to eat it too?”

“Oh, yes, you bet I am.” Chloe is almost beaming. “Will suit you right for shrinking my favorite shirt. And bleeding your jeans all over it.”

My cheeks turn beet red. “It was an accident. You know I didn’t mean to.” Laundry isn’t my forte. Neither is cooking, cleaning, sports, science or pretty much anything other than reading my favorite books, but laundry is probably the worst.

And that's with a washing machine. Who knows what damage I'd inflict if I tried handwashing something.

"I know that my favorite shirt is ruined forever. And I spent an entire month's allowance on it."

"I offered to pay you for it. What else do you want me to do?"

"I don't want your money," she scoffs. "I want you to suffer for what you did."

I roll my eyes. "Don't be such a drama queen. You're just using this as an excuse to be"—Mom dances past us with a ladle—"a very bad person," I hiss through gritted teeth. "Besides, I saw you wearing that shirt. Why would you do that if it was ruined?" Sure, it's blue instead of white now, but judging by the way Chloe always flaunts her cleavage, the shrinking did not do that shirt any harm.

"Whatever," Chloe says lazily.

"Whatever," I say, annoyed, and go to the coffee maker to pour myself a cup of coffee. But before I can take even one sip, Mom opens the pot with the stew and the smell overwhelms my senses.

"It's almost ready," Mom chirps happily, covering the pot only halfway.

I stare at my cup of coffee, not sure if I want to drink it now that it doesn't even smell like coffee anymore. I sit at the breakfast table and take a tentative sip. Thank goodness, it still tastes like coffee. Dad doesn't seem to be perturbed by anything that's going on around him. Chloe hovers over his shoulder and peeks at what he's reading. She looks away in a few seconds, bored, then picks up a spoon and checks out her reflection. I roll my eyes.

"Mom, can I have some stew now? I'm really hungry," Chloe says and smirks at me.

“Coming up, sweetie,” Mom says through the clatter of dishes and pots.

*Suck-up*, I mouth at Chloe, but her smirk only deepens.

I lean in and whisper, “Are you seriously going to pretend that you like Mom’s stew just to get back at me?” Until this moment, I didn’t truly believe it, but the gleam in her eyes tells me I’m totally screwed. There is no way I could ever tell Mom that I won’t eat her cooking. Even Dad always pretends to like it, and he has a much more sophisticated palate than I do. Chloe is the only one who can ever tell Mom that her recipe flopped and needs to be discarded. But, apparently, not this time.

One by one, Mom sets four steaming bowls of her offal stew on the table and Chloe digs into hers right away, pops what looks like a piece of lung into her mouth (or maybe it’s a piece of kidney? I can’t really tell), all the while grinning at me like it’s her birthday. Dad finally puts his tablet down, sighs so quietly I only notice because I’m watching him so closely, and sends a spoonful into his mouth.

*I hate you*, I mouth at Chloe and without looking at my bowl, bring up a spoonful of the stew to my mouth and start chewing. At this moment I realize that shaving Chloe’s head in her sleep isn’t nearly punishment enough for her.

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“Hurry up, girls, unless you want to walk to school today,” Dad says. We try to hurry, but we are having a hard time navigating through the living room, since most of it is occupied by Mom’s paintings.

“Is Mom really giving away all of her paintings?” I ask Dad when I finally reach him.

“Yes,” Dad says, somewhat wistfully.

“All to the Asylum?” Chloe asks. Dad nods, and says, “Yep.”

Mom works at the Mystic Hollow Mental Asylum as an art therapist. Apparently, she’s really good at it, and so are her paintings. We always thought she could make a lot of money selling them, but she doesn’t want to. Dad told us that she had to sell her paintings when they were young and broke and now she has this sort of a bad aftertaste from being forced to sell her art when she didn’t want to and only feels comfortable giving it away for free to people she cares about. Apparently, her charges at the Asylum fall into that category. Now that Dad is making good money at his job, it’s not an issue, and it’s pretty obvious that Dad loves my mom’s eccentricities and is happy to put up with all of them. I will miss her paintings, though. I have this beautiful painting of a fairy sleeping in a forest that she painted for me when I was ten. It’s hanging in my bedroom—it’s tiny, compared to her other paintings, only about ten by ten inches, but it’s my favorite.

We get into the car and Dad starts the engine. The school is on the opposite side of town, but Mystic Hollow is so small that the drive only takes about ten minutes. We drive through the Main Street, past the Fountain of the Four Witches, and The Black Cat—the only restaurant-like establishment in our town, and a few minutes later Dad parks the car in front of our high school.

“Destination achieved,” Dad says cheerfully. Chloe pecks him on the cheek and jumps out of the car.

“Um, Dad, you remember that I’m staying at Jessie’s tonight, right?” I ask tentatively. We’ve been discussing this for the last couple of weeks and my parents finally agreed

that I could have a sleepover at my best friend's house when her parents were out of town. And her seventeen-year-old brother was in, but that part never came up in the conversation.

"Does your mother know?" he asks innocently as if this is the first time he hears about it.

"Dad!"

"What?"

"Ugh!" My Dad is impossible. You can never tell if he's joking or not. Most of the time he is, which is perfectly fine, but sometimes you just can't tell. I would never, ever play poker with him.

A rapping sound on the car window makes me jump. Chloe's face stares at me through tinted glass. I blink twice in surprise, then roll down the window. "Why aren't you in school?" I ask.

I figured she went to school the moment she left the car. She doesn't like people seeing us arrive together. She doesn't like people knowing I'm her sister. Ever since Chloe started high school last year, she hasn't made it a secret that she wants to be the most popular girl here. Not just one of the most popular girls. The most popular girl. And so far it has been working out for her. She's on the cheerleading squad. She hangs out with the popular crowd. And, to top it all off, she manages to get good grades. I, on the other hand, am perfectly content reading a book at home, or watching a movie with my best friend, or researching a school project at the library. Does that make me weird? In Chloe's eyes it definitely does. That's why the thought of Chloe waiting for me to go to school together is inconceivable.

“I’m waiting for you,” she says sweetly, but the way she squints her eyes suggests that it might be sarcasm. Or maybe the sun is shining too brightly.

“Dad?” I ask once more.

“All right, go,” he laughs. “I’ll tell your mother about the sleepover. If she forgets.” As I’m getting out of the car I swear I can hear him mumble, “If she actually notices.” I know this is one of those times when Dad is not joking. Mom can be so engrossed in painting, or cooking, or whatever other project she’s involved with at the moment, that she might not notice a plane crashing into her living room, let alone her daughter having a sleepover at someone else’s house.

“I’d like to make some things clear,” Chloe says as soon as Dad’s car disappears from view.

“Huh?”

“Don’t *huh* me,” Chloe says derisively. “And listen carefully. I’ve already been seen with you and I suppose there’s no way to avoid everyone knowing that we’re related, but that’s where it ends. Is that clear?”

“Um, sure?” I say, not knowing exactly how I am supposed to react to something like this. Should I be offended or just ignore her? Besides, we’ve already had this conversation last year. Do I need to listen to this pep talk every year?

“Anyway,” Chloe says. She keeps shifting from foot to foot and glancing over her shoulder. Making sure nobody sees her talking to her own sister? “Anyway, you know Jessie, right?”

“My best friend Jessie? Sure.” I wonder where she’s going with this.

“And you know her brother Logan, right?” Chloe is twisting the end of her braid nervously.

“Sure. They live together,” I say. She knows Logan as well as I do. He used to hang out at our house with Jessie all the time. Not so much in the last couple of years, but still.

“Well, um, I’d like you to ask him if he could ask Derek Smith from his football team if he would like to invite me to come with him to Brian’s party on Friday,” Chloe blurts out in one breath while her entire face explodes with color.

Of all the things in the world she could’ve asked me, this is something I would’ve expected the least. Is she asking me to be her matchmaker? Me, who has only dated fictional characters in my imagination? To help her get a date?

“But don’t you see him every day when you have your cheerleading practice?” I ask, flabbergasted by the whole ordeal. “Why don’t you ask him out yourself?”

“I can’t just ask him,” Chloe says, her cheeks turning as red as ripe tomatoes.

“Why not?”

“Because,” Chloe says stubbornly. “So, are you going to help me or not?”

I sigh. “I guess I could ask Logan,” I say. What would be the harm in asking? “But I obviously can’t promise you anything more than that,” I say quickly.

Chloe seems relieved, though, and her cheeks start returning to their normal shade. “Great,” she says. “Let me know how it goes.”

We start walking toward school together, and almost make it all the way to the front gate, when suddenly my big sister instincts wake up. “Wait a minute,” I say. “Isn’t Derek two years older than you? He’s in the same year as Logan. He’s a senior, and you’re a sophomore.”

Chloe’s cheeks get a hint of that blush again, but all she says is, “So what? Besides, you already promised.” And then

she leaves me standing there alone as she runs toward the entrance. “See you after school!” she shouts before disappearing in the school hallways.

I give up. No one remembers that I’m going to a sleepover tonight. If I come home tomorrow and the house is filled with police officers and sniffer dogs, that will so not be my fault.

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