

CHAPTER

★ One ★

“Do you believe in witches?”

I jump at the question, spilling my drink all over me.

“WHAT? *Witches?* NO!” I squeak, staring wide-eyed at Kareen, who has asked the question. “Don’t be RIDICULOUS! That is so stupid! Seriously, *witches?*” I gesticulate wildly, the homemade lemonade dribbling down my fingers. “That’s crazy talk, Kareen! That’s MAD!” I tip my head back and cackle loudly for effect, before adding, “There’s no such thing as witches. Everyone knows that. So, *no*, I do not believe in witches.”

Silence descends. Kareen makes a face at me.

“Thanks for your opinion, Morgan,” she says with a sneer, “but I wasn’t asking you.”

“Oh.”

Zoey and Lucy, in on the conversation, snigger together. Heat rises to my cheeks as I realize my embarrassing mistake. I'm an idiot. She wasn't even looking at me when she asked the question. Now that I think about it, I'm not even sure she'd noticed I was there.

"Sorry," I say quietly, my eyes falling to the floor.

"Why are you asking about witches?" Zoey asks, flicking her hair behind her shoulders and going back to ignoring me.

"Iris keeps talking about them," Kareen says breezily, as I sip what's left of my drink. "I think she's met one."

I spit my lemonade out everywhere, coughing and spluttering.

"EW!" Lucy cries, recoiling from the spray. "Gross!"

"Sorry," I say again, my eyes watering from the liquid going up my nose. "What was that you said about Iris? She's met a witch? That's impossible."

"Well, *I* think she has," Kareen explains to me reluctantly, clearly wishing I'd leave them alone. "She keeps having the same dream about seeing a witch perform magical spells, you know, a recurring dream. Anyway, it's so detailed and real that I said to her maybe she had met a witch –" her eyes widen with excitement – "and then they'd wiped her memory but not done it properly. So now, she keeps dreaming about something

she's actually seen. That happens in TV shows and movies all the time."

"No way." Zoey laughs, rolling her eyes. "Don't be stupid, Kareen."

"Yeah, Kareen," I agree, nodding vigorously, "don't be stupid."

Kareen narrows her eyes at me and I take that as my cue to leave. I make an excuse about getting another drink and then slip through the crowded kitchen, heading down the hall where party guests are chatting and laughing together, before ducking into an empty room and shutting the door behind me. My heart is thudding loudly as I lean back against the door, feeling sick to my stomach.

Kareen isn't stupid. She isn't stupid at all. In fact, she's right.

I know that Iris has met a witch. I know that Iris saw the witch performing magical spells. I know that the witch then wiped Iris's memory using an amateur warlock's potion.

I *know* all this.

Because that witch happens to be me.

I shouldn't have come to this party. This is all Mum's fault. She's the one who encouraged me to go. When

Iris, the most popular girl in my class, messaged me just before Christmas and invited me to her New Year's Eve party, I thought she had accidentally messaged the wrong person, and so I replied to let her know her mistake. She'd then messaged some laugh emojis before telling me that there wasn't a mistake, she really did want me to come if I didn't already have plans.

"That's wonderful!" Mum had exclaimed when I told her I'd been invited to a party. "You see? I told you that the events of last term would soon be forgotten. No one could stay mad at you. All is well and you'll start the new term afresh."

"Mum, you are deluded," I'd said stubbornly. "I am not going to this party. And I'm grounded, remember? You grounded me for the Christmas holidays."

"Well, I'm setting you free," she'd said cheerily. "Why wouldn't you want to go? Things aren't that bad, are they?"

Yes, Mum, things are that bad. Things are *very* bad. In fact, things could not be WORSE.

When I passed my Young Witch Exam, or YWE, in the summer, proving I was in control of my magical powers and could therefore go to normal school without the risk of revealing the secret that witches exist, I was *ecstatic*. I'd been home-schooled FOR EVER, tutored by

Mum's friend and fellow witch Dora, and I was desperate to go to school and have the chance to make friends. Most witches pass their YWE at the age of five. I was a bit behind so by the age of thirteen, I'd yet to make one friend. Not one. Every year, my birthday parties consisted of my mum, Dora and her husband, Howard. And Howard doesn't know that he's married to a witch, so most of the time we couldn't even do anything cool and magical. We'd all sit around in our party hats, eating cake and playing charades. One disastrous year, Mum tried to mix it up and we all went roller-skating.

I rolled into a bin and knocked out a tooth.

I don't want to talk about it.

Anyway, the point is, I couldn't WAIT to go to school and be around people my own age. From the very first day, I promised Mum that I wouldn't use any spells because obviously it would be really bad if any normal students found out that witches live among them blah blah blah. And I fully intended to stick to that promise. Trust me, you do not want to cross my mum. She is, ever so slightly, terrifying. Not only is she this fiercely intelligent, super-authoritative businesswoman, CEO of an advertising company, she is also the Great Sorceress of the witch community, the youngest EVER to be voted into that position. So I wasn't planning on letting her

down. I was determined to be on my best behaviour, stick to the rules and glide through my school years, making hordes of friends and passing myself off as a perfectly normal student.

Unfortunately, things didn't quite work out that smoothly. I wasn't exactly well-practised in the whole making-friends arena and within a few weeks of the start of my very first term, I realized I would have to cast a few harmless, teeny-tiny spells if I was ever going to have a shot at fitting in.

But some of the magic got a little bit out of control, like how I forced the headmaster to uncontrollably salsa dance all the time, everywhere he went. Or how a swarm of bats I summoned to scare my classmate, Felix, ended up trapping him and his family inside their house for a few weeks – an issue that I made worse when I tried to get rid of the bats and instead turned them into mini dragons.

Yeah. It was bad.

The worst thing, though, wasn't the dragon situation. The worst thing was that I used my magic to become amazing at dancing to impress my talent-show team. Zoey, Kareen, Lucy and Iris all thought I was some kind of professional breakdancer and we became best friends as I fooled them into thinking that we were going to win

the show. Then, at the last minute, I backed out and they had to go on stage and perform to a huge audience with a team member down and without any rehearsal. Unsurprisingly, they now hate me.

I could have gone through with the talent show, too, and then I'd still be wildly popular. Even though my magic was starting to wane – no magic lasts for ever – I had a secret weapon: dance potion from a warlock. But that stupid warlock basically guilted me into doing “the right thing”, arguing that I was lying to myself and to everyone else by using magic to cheat.

Ugh, warlocks are the worst.

How come I manage to find the one warlock in the WORLD who is a nice person? And not just that, but he encourages *me* to be a nice person, too. It makes everything so much more confusing, and my life is already a DISASTER.

Witches and warlocks are enemies. We have been for centuries. It's the way the world is. Witches can create powerful magic by clicking their fingers (which is awesome). Warlocks, on the other hand, make stupid magical potions in their smelly, gross cauldrons (which is obviously lame).

Witches HATE warlocks. Warlocks HATE witches. And that's that. No questions. Simple.

Of course, I have to go and mess everything up by being friends with one.

I blame Owen Blaze, the warlock in question. It's not my fault that he happens to go to my school and be in the same class. And it's also not my fault that we each discovered what the other secretly was. If we're going to point fingers at anyone, I vote pointing the finger at him. He could have stayed out of my business and let me go on causing chaos at school by using magic, but *nooooo*, he HAD to get involved and be all nice about it and help me.

Now, it's very hard not to like him.

"Go to the party, Morgan, it will be fine," Mum had said with a long, drawn-out sigh, once I'd listed all the above reasons to outline why I shouldn't show my face at a school party. EXCEPT the part about Owen.

Mum can never find out that I am friends with Owen Blaze. Ever. She would *kill* me.

It's bad enough that I have to put up with the constant snide comments about our friendship from my familiar, Merlin. Every witch has a familiar, a shape-shifting animal spirit guide, who is always with you, supposedly your soul's sidekick, advising and supporting you through life.

Yeah, it's a lovely idea, except while every other witch on the planet seems to have a kind-hearted familiar, I've

been landed with grumpy Merlin, who is sarcastic and rude at the best of times.

“Everyone will stare meanly at me and whisper about me behind my back. They hate me,” I’d cried at Mum, while Merlin took the form of a bat and sat happily on top of my head, digging his gross bat talons into my scalp. “OUCH, MERLIN! Get off.”

I’d swung my arm up at him but he’d flitted away, leaving me to hit myself in the head.

He’d screeched with laughter, receiving a glare from Mum’s familiar, Helena, who had been in the form of an elegant Bengal cat, sitting by Mum’s feet. Merlin had ignored Helena’s looks and flown back to perch on my head again.

“Morgan Charmley,” Mum had said, coming over to put her hands on my shoulders, “your schoolmates do not hate you.”

“They think I’m a horrible person for letting down Iris and the other girls right before the talent show.”

“Go prove them wrong. Show them you’re not a horrible person and have fun at the party. You have to face them some time. They became your friends last term. It won’t be long until you’re all friends again.”

“They were friends with me because I used magic to fool them into thinking I was cool.”

“They were friends with you because of *who you are*,” Mum had said, looking me straight in the eye and beaming at me. “It had nothing to do with magic.”

Obviously, Mum was wrong, but we were having a nice mother-daughter moment and I didn’t want to spoil it by pointing that out.

Now, here I am at this party trying to prove that I’m not a horrible person. So far, I’ve managed to spit my drink all over the girls I’m supposed to be making it up to and now I’ve shut myself away in an empty room, so it hasn’t really gone that well.

Merlin, who has been in the form of an ant hiding underneath my collar, changes into a tarantula and crawls down my arm under my sleeve, appearing on my hand.

He rolls all eight of his eyes at me.

“I know, I know,” I sigh. “You don’t need to say it. This is a lost cause and I should go home before I embarrass myself any further.”

“Morgan?” a voice says suddenly from the other side of the room.

I yelp in surprise; Merlin disappears, turning into a fly and zipping back under my sleeve before he can be seen.

A head pops up from the sofa.

“Iris!” I cry out, placing a hand on my chest. “What are you doing in here?”

She sits up properly on the sofa. “Hey, Morgan.”

“You gave me a heart attack! I thought I was alone!”

“It’s weird,” she says, crossing her arms and raising her eyebrows at me, “but I could have *sworn* you were just talking to a spider.”