

witch klutz



Warning: *The following excerpt is unedited. Typos and grammatical errors galore.*

Double Warning: *Since this is rough-draft material, the scene I'm sharing with you may or may not end up in the final book...if the story even makes it to publication.*

Triple Warning: *Sorry, I don't really have a third warning; I'm just a goofball who wanted to write "triple warning." It's so fun! Anyway, enjoy the excerpt!*

Chapter One

“Old! Just who’re you calling old, little girl? We’re far and gone from *old*. We still have a chance—and a mighty good chance, might I add—to find love and happily ever after just like any other person out there.”

My aunt, Willow, sniffed out an indignant snort as she frowned down her nose at me.

“Die an old maid, my butt. I *will* find my soul mate someday.” Tossing her glare from me, she focused on her older sister, and her face instantly collapsed with worry. “Don’t you think?”

With a maternal pat on her hand, Sassafras, or Aunt Sassy as I called her, smiled indulgently. “Of course, Willow dear. Anything’s *possible*.”

I sighed, wondering how our dinner conversation had oh-so drastically turned from me to them. “Hello, can we focus on the topic here? Did you not just hear what Emma Greenson called me today?”

Aunt Sassy sighed as she paused from dishing up a bowl of steamed sweet potatoes. Yeah, steamed sweet potatoes. We had them almost nightly. It was enough to gag a poor girl. “Apologies, dear. But I think we got stuck on the part where you called *us* two old maids.”

I cringed. Oops. “But you know I didn’t mean it *that* way.” I cast a repentant glance Aunt Willow’s way. “Right?”

With another sniff, making me wonder if she had sinus trouble, Aunt Willow flung up her chin defiantly, making the

mole on her nose wobble as if it sat on a precarious ledge. “I don’t see how there’s any other way to take such a comment.”

“She called me a horse-face loser,” I broke in before either aunt could take any more issue with my unintentional insult.

In unison, both women gasped, clutching their hearts in overdramatic outrage. You’d think they’d just been stabbed through the chest by harpoons.

“How *dare* she?” Aunt Willow cried.

“You have the very face of your mother,” Aunt Sassy nearly growled. “And Cypress was most definitely *not* horse-faced.”

“God rest her soul,” Aunt Willow added, crossing herself.

My shoulders relaxed, glad my aunts were back on my side of things instead of against me.

“What did you do to her?” Aunt Sassy demanded, eyeing me through her huge horn-rimmed glasses and no doubt expecting me to report some kind of devious, inhuman payback.

I blinked. What had I done? Wasn’t it obvious? “I ran to the bathrooms and bawled the rest of the way through lunch.” That’s what I’d done.

Both aunts scowled.

“Oh, honey. Don’t you remember the rules around here?” Aunt Sassy asked in a rather reprimanding voice, focusing most her attention on using her fork and knife to cut into a morel mushroom as if it was a piece of decadent steak. “Spruce women don’t get mad; we get even.”

I deflated, Shoulders slumping, hopes sinking, I blew out a depressed breath. “But...how? She’s so popular, and pretty, and—”

Aunt Willow smacked me in the arm. “Juniper Cherry Spruce! You’re a witch. Own it, darling.”

My eyes grew to the size of quarters. “You...you mean, I can put a spell on her? I’m *allowed*?”

“And encouraged.” Sassy forked a bite into her mouth and moaned delightfully while she closed her eyes and chewed. “You *have* been working on your potions, haven’t you?”

When she opened her lashes, she pierced me with a poignant glance.

I floundered. “Uh...well...I’ve been trying, but—”

“You’ll do fine,” Willow encouraged with a motherly pat on my arm, right where she’d just slapped me. “We wood witches always know our potions. It’s like they’re ingrained into our very chromosomes or something. Your mother could brew up a spell like nobody’s business.”

Sassy cracked off a sudden laugh and bumped her elbow into Willow’s with a camaraderie of memories. “Remember that time she made a shampoo for Wendy Tudermeyer to deflate one boob smaller than the other?”

Willow had just lifted her cup of green tea for a drink and ended up spraying liquid across the table at me. “Good Wicca, I forgot all about that.” Focusing to me, she explained. “It lasted a month and everyone called her Wendy Cyclops Boob.” Shaking her fist in a victorious manner, she trilled, “Priceless.”

“And she never thought to steal another one of Cypress’s boyfriends again,” Aunt Sassy said with a serious nod in my direction. “That’s for certain.”

“You should definitely go with a good shampoo brew, Juniper.” Willow nudged me with her cup before taking another sip. “Your mother was a natural with them. I’m sure you will be too.”

“But I—”

“Just toss in what feels natural,” Sassy added with a dismissive flick of her hand. “It’ll be fine.”

Fine. Right.

I nodded, but inside, my stomach stirred with unease. Every potion I’d practiced so far had turned out horribly, horribly wrong. I’d just rearranged my entire room last week, pushing my

bed against the opposite wall to cover the huge, gaping hole in the floorboards I'd made from my last potion attempt.

Maybe I'd have the courage to confess that hole to my aunts when Emma Greenson's shampoo potion came out perfect.

Yeah.

Energized about my next project, I hurried through supper, gagging down my sweet potatoes and mushrooms. Once I cleaned my plate and set it back in the cupboard, I scoured the herb garden out back.

"I little thyme," I sang softly to myself. "Some rosemary, and definitely a whole lot of garlic. Clove and..." I bit my lip as I ran my gaze over the cluttered garden bed. When I spotted the two mushrooms poking out the grass not two feet from the edge of the garden, my instincts perked to life inside me.

"Mushroom," I finished, plucking them both up.

In the kitchen, I gathered some olive oil from the cupboards as well as the half-empty carton of out-of-date milk from the fridge. "There. That ought to do it."

Carting my supplies to my room, I emptied my cauldron of the clothes I'd tried on this morning and rejected that lay draped over the rim.

Once I heated up the portable Bunsen burner Aunt Willow had gotten me for Halloween last year, I set my cauldron on top and closed my eyes while the steel tub heated.

Breathing in deeply, I called to a place inside myself. My intuition. My inner witch. I contemplated what I wanted to do—pay back my revenge on Emma Greenson—and let a vision of the results I desired stir through my mind.

Emma was the most beautiful girl in my class. If only I could steal her beauty, maybe people would be able to see her for the heartless, ugly jerk she was.

So...what was her most appealing feature?

Well, that was simple. Her long golden locks. I hated how she could always get them to curl just so.

A grin spread across my face. Wasn't it just handy I planned on making her a shampoo brew, then? If I could get my potion right and somehow trick her into using it, maybe I could turn her amazing locks into broom bristles.

Wouldn't Aunt Sassy and Aunt Willow be so proud?

My heart fluttered in excitement. And I began to create, almost in a trance. The milk went in first. I giggled aloud when a sour clump plopped into the base of my cauldron, imagining it dripping over Emma's gorgeous hair. Next I scraped all the purple rosemary petals from their green stems. They turned the clumpy milk a lovely lavender hue.

After chopping up the garlic, I tossed that in before adding the thyme whole. When I came to the mushrooms, I paused. One seemed like too little but two seemed like too much. I sliced one in half. After palming the full and one of the halves, I spilled them into my concoction.

The potion heaved and burped out a noxious gas that had me wincing from the awful smell and swatting my hand in front of my face. In seconds, the shampoo began to bubble and froth up toward the rim of the cauldron.

"Oh, great," I muttered, already beginning to panic. "Here we go again."

Another ruined attempt.

"Juniper," Aunt Sassy's voice called from downstairs. "How's it going, dear?"

I gagged as the rank odor filled my room. "Fine," I called back. "Just fine." Working quickly, I opened my bedroom window and waved the foul odor outside.

After turning my Bunsen burner off, the bubbling settled, thank goodness. Even the awful smell dissipated and become almost pleasant.

Giving it time to cool, I camped out on my bed and worked on homework—rocking the math problems—and then painted my toenails—a lovely sea foam green color, if I do say so myself.

When bedtime approached, I yawned and checked my potion's progress.

Time for a test sample. After plucking a few hairs from my own head, I strung them out on a petri dish. Holding my breath, I scooped up a sample spoonful and dribbled the potion over my dark locks.

Almost immediately, the tendrils dried up and made little popping sounds as they cracked into brittle sticks.

A breath of relief exploded from my lungs. "Oh, my goodness. It's perfect."

Holy black cats! It was really perfect. I couldn't quite believe my eyes.

As the truth sank in that I'd finally mastered a potion, a slow grin spread across my face.

Emma Greenson better watch out tomorrow. I laughed aloud, practicing a witchy cackle. She'd probably shave her head bald once this shampoo touched her.

Finding an old water bottle in my bathroom, I rinsed it out and dunked it into the potion to gather up a good amount to give Emma.

"Take that," I crowed.

After storing my concoction in my book bag, I put away my finished homework and readied myself for sleep. I felt so good about the next day, looked forward to getting my revenge that I dropped off almost instantly.

And I dreamt of Taylor Crawly, the cutest boy in my school. He had beautiful hair—almost as pretty as Emma's—the color of sun-ripened wheat.

In my dream, the waves of golden locks sifted across his forehead as the wind kissed him. He lifted his hand to swipe his lengthy bangs out of his eyes and when he could see again, he focused on me. Cerulean blue eyes, the color of swimming pool liners, blinked as he smiled. His teeth were so white they nearly blinded me when the sun reflected off them.

We stood in a meadow; the brilliant green grass rose up to brush against our knees. I never wore dresses when awake but one draped me now, and as good as I looked in it, I told myself I better invest in one as soon as I stopped dreaming. With thin, summery straps and decorated in tan flowers on ivory cloth, it hugged my chest then floated out from my waist down to my knees. When I moved, it fluttered around my legs, clinging. Made me look soft and girly—kinda cool, really.

Taylor seemed to like what he saw. His chest heaved as we drew near each other.

“So beautiful,” he whispered and reached out to gently cup my cheek in his warm palm.

The texture of his skin against mine made me shiver with electric delight. Curious about the grooves decorating his flesh, I took his wrist and urged his hand down so I could inspect his palm.

Dreams have always been so very confusing to me. They never lead where I want them to, because if I’d had my way, I would’ve kissed him instead of preforming a palm reading.

But in my dream, I frowned with thoughtful intent. “You have a very distinct fate line.” Lifting my face, I smiled softly. “Something important must be destined to happen to you.”

Instead of delighted, he looked troubled. “What?” he demanded. “What’s gonna happen to me?”

I returned my gaze to his palm, hoping to find his love line. Maybe we were meant to be together. We could grow old with each other, happy and in love.

But the lines blurred in my vision. Blinking, I dabbed at his palm, trying to wipe the haze away. It wouldn’t budge. Soon, the distinct outlines of his fingers began to smudge into the greenness of the grass in the background. With a gasp, I looked up. And his face had grown distorted.

“Taylor?”

“What?” he asked, sounding clueless as if he had no idea why I looked worried.

Glancing around me, I found everything had lost focus. The blue of the sky melted into the green of the grass. I reached up to pull away the cobwebs obscuring my vision.

“Don’t.”

A new voice floated up from behind me, startling me. I don’t know why. Every time I dreamt in color, *he* showed up. My mystery dream boy. I should’ve been expecting him, but Taylor had distracted me.

I turned, and there he stood in perfect detail while the world around him remained as blurry as an unfocused camera.

“Go away,” I growled, irritated to see him this time. “You’re ruining my moment. I was looking for his love line.”

He shook his head, his smile cocky yet indulgent as he swaggered closer. “Don’t bother. He’s not for you.”

Though roughly the same age as Taylor, this boy opposed my crush in nearly every way. He kept his midnight black hair short until it spiked up in the most interesting places. Lean and rough in a rugged sort of way, he had none of Taylor’s smooth, cultured tidiness but possessed a predatory sort of grace as if he spent his life hunting and killing for survival. Not as thick as Taylor, I would’ve guessed he still had more muscles packed into his rangy frame. In a black suede vest, no shirt underneath, and equally black jeans, he paused before me, then reached out to touch the ends of my hair in a familiar, almost loving way.

I smacked his hand away. “Do you mind? Taylor was about to kiss me.”

His smile showed conceit. “Not in my dream, he wasn’t. You know I would never allow that.”

My back straightened with indignation. “*Excuse me?*” Growling out my irritation, I spun back toward Taylor, ready to place a big wet one on him just to show Mr. Interruption how wrong he was. But Taylor had disappeared. “Hey! What did you do to him?”

“He doesn’t belong in our world.”

Finally fed up with always dreaming about this guy, I spun back around and snapped, “*Our* world? We don’t share a world, buddy. You just come and haunt me whenever I try to have a good dream. And I’m getting sick of it. Sick of *you!*”

Instead of hurting him or even making him angry, I merely amused him.

He grinned. “You’re not sick of me. You’re sick of me not being there when you wake up.”

He had a point. I’d known him since I was a little girl. When he first started invading my dreams, we’d become friends instantly. We laughed and ran through the crisp green fields, climbed trees, played in the nearby stream. It was perfect.

But through the years, puberty hit. He wanted more. I wanted more. He took his first kiss from me two years ago. When I woke without him, I felt so very alone. I hated it. And thus, I grew to resent *him*.

It was a sorry sight when a sixteen-year-old girl had only been kissed in her dreams. I wanted something tangible. Corporeal. Something like Taylor Crawly.

“Don’t lose hope,” my dream boy said. “I’ll find you. Out there. In your world. I’m getting closer every day.”

Crossing my arms over my chest, I turned my back to him moodily. “I don’t see how. You’re nothing but a dream. A figment of my imagination.”

“A *figment*,” he murmured as if insulted. Curling his fingers around my shoulders, he tightened his grasp on me and spun me around to face him. “Would a figment do this?”

Dipping his chin, he pressed his mouth to mine.

I wanted to fight him. But he was such a wonderful kisser. And it had been a few dreams back since we’d last kissed. I had missed them. Missed *him*. So I surrendered to the sensation, clutching fistfuls of his vest and pressing up onto my tiptoes to anchor my mouth more firmly against his.

Hey, it was only a dream after all. Might as well make the best of it, huh?

And as with every other dream I'd had with him, he successfully seduced me into wanting to be with him as much as he wanted to be with me. Unwilling as I always started, I ached for the moment I could wake in his real, live arms.

Our mouths clung to each other, tasting, yearning for more.

Closing my eyes, I pulled my lips from his to rest my cheek against his shoulder. His unique smell enveloped me. Smokey with a subtle musk. Not cigarette smoke but more like wood smoke. Scorched in a pleasant way.

Stroking the front of his vest and feeling scorched in a pleasant way myself, I whispered, "I don't even know your name."

He kissed my temple. "You will. Soon. I promise. I won't stop looking for a way through until I'm with you."