

*The Power
of
Notes and Spells*

A Teapot Cottage Tale (#2)

By

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Chapter One



A Spell To Attract True Love

*On the night of the new Moon,
light a tealight candle and keep it near to you while you work.
Wrap a red ribbon (to represent romantic love) fully
around a white rose (to represent love everlasting) and make a completely ribboned parcel.
Anoint it with two drops of rose otto, to represent two hearts and souls to be joined.
While making the parcel, focus the thoughts
on love and romance.
Incantation; just once, directly into the parcel:
'Angels of Love, I Ask of You,
Bring Forth My Soul-mate, Forever True.'
Place the parcel under your pillow for
seven times seven (forty-nine) nights, repeating
your mantra just once each night before you go to sleep.*

Growing up on Ravensdown farm, at the edge of a tiny town called Torley in a quiet corner of the Lake District, Seraphine Raven - better known to her family and friends as Feen - had always believed in love at first sight. The young white witch, with very strong penchants for Spoonerism and chatting with foxes in the forest, didn't really have a lot of choice; not after what had happened to her own besotted parents, Mark and Beth, around thirty years earlier.

On a wintry Saturday afternoon, in a remote country pub nestled deep in the Forest of Bowland, a fresh-faced Mark Raven had locked eyes with another young white witch by the name of Beth Brierley; a descendant of a local family of witches. In that instant, they were both convinced that even if they lived until they were a hundred and eighty, there would never be anyone else for either of them. Barmaid Beth had pulled a pint of Pendle Witches ale for farmhand Mark, and 'Boom!' Cupid skilfully shot the same arrow through them both, and two fates instantly meshed into one.

Mark and Beth had talked and joked about it often enough over the years, for everyone who knew them to be convinced too, that love-at-first sight existed. After all, Feen's father was an 'Owd Lanky' farmer; a solid, salt-of-the-earth, working-class barrel of a bloke with an accent as thick as treacle, never happier than when he had his hands in the dirt or was rounding up a mob of stubborn sheep. Pragmatic to a fault, with precisely zero in the way of airs and graces, Mark wasn't the type who had much truck with 'all that bloody woo-woo shyte,' as he termed it. He called a spade a spade, never suffered a fool for more than forty seconds, and he wouldn't have been caught dead talking about 'higher vibrations,' or other unearthly things he didn't understand - at least not in the same way his wife and child did.

But he did understand the concept of love at first sight and, as he'd said often enough, when something smacks you in the chest that hard, and your heart gets hijacked with so little hope of it ever being returned, you just have man-up and accept it. There's nothing else to be done. So, as a man who nearly always understood when he had no choice in a matter, Mark had simply shrugged his broad shoulders and surrendered to the inevitable; that he'd lost his heart, good and proper, to the strikingly

beautiful blue-eyed beauty who'd served him his pint o' Pendle Witches. And from the moment that he did, he didn't mind.

Beth had often told her daughter, in describing the moment she first saw Mark Raven, that her heart had literally shifted in her chest. It had *fallen*, she said, leaving her hopelessly in love with the rough and ready young man with the broadest and most comical Lancashire twang she'd ever heard. He'd sauntered through the door, in his mud-caked boots and scruffy oilskin parka, with a smile that could melt the North Pole.

'A'reet, lass?' he'd asked, as his heart fell.

'Aye, cocker,' she'd responded with a wink, as hers did too, and within a split second she was his and he was hers and that was that.

So although Feen had never been in a hurry for it to happen, she always had the unshakeable belief that when her own true love turned up, well, she'd just *know*.

Lately though, something had shifted a little and she'd found herself feeling a bit more wistful than previously, about what might be taking him so long. More and more often now, she found herself wishing that her knight in shining armour would rock up sometime soon, please, and hopefully on a nice white horse that didn't need new shoes that she'd end up having to pay for. She'd met her fair share of spongers and losers, thanks very much, and didn't want to meet any more, but at the ripe old age of almost-twenty-four she was more than ready for romance.

Not that she'd ever admit it. While Feen Raven possessed a rather unique window into most other people's innermost thoughts, she rarely felt compelled to confess her own. Although she usually knew *exactly* what was ricocheting around in most people's heads, few were ever allowed to know what was happening in hers.

This afternoon, she was heading into Carlisle to do a couple of errands. She tooted her horn as she drove away from the farm, past Teapot Cottage; her stepmother Adie's holiday house a little further down the drive. Adie was in there cleaning it, and getting it ready for a new tenant who was due to arrive tonight.

Feen was irritable this morning, which was slightly out of character. She wasn't usually upset by much, or too disorganised to make a simple shopping list and run the risk of forgetting half of what she needed. She wasn't usually prone to strange dreams either, but last night she'd been woken several times by a series of random, disturbed thoughts, most of which she couldn't even remember this morning. It had all left her feeling fidgety and unsettled, and for once in her life she couldn't really figure out why.

Intuitively, she knew the spirits were playing with her, as they occasionally did. She wasn't yet privy to whatever hijinks they were up to but she tried to shrug it off, for now at least. She knew better than to try and second-guess the other-world influences that shaped her life in different ways, especially when they threw exasperating roadblocks in the way of her perception.

Knowing that whatever was being cooked up on her behalf would only be revealed when her guides and angels jolly-well thought it should, and not before, she shrugged her shoulders and kept driving. But she did feel compelled to make her feelings clear to them.

'Whatever you bunch of dingbats are up to today, please can it tot be nedious? I have enough to think about right now, without you hurling all manner of mischievous joops for me to hump through. Please don't be pixies in my head today!'

It never occurred to Feen, as she drove towards the city, that this might be the day when she'd be swept away by the very thing that had taken her goo-goo-eyed parents by storm all those decades ago. It was probably just as well that she didn't yet know what was coming; that instant flash of crystal-clear, cerebral lightning that gave a glimpse of exactly what the future was going to look like.

If she'd known in advance that she'd be ending the day finally understanding the reality of love at first sight, and how it really felt to be hit by that particular freight train, it would have created utter turmoil in her head - the kind that would have made driving impossible. Eventually, of course, she'd appreciate that her excitable angels were being deliberately obtuse until precisely the right moment, when what they'd intended all along could come to pass. She would understand that she'd been cleverly engineered to be in the exact right place at the exact right time, with no sense of anticipation to spoil things.

But within minutes of parking her car and walking into the heart of the city, all thoughts of shopping and spiritual mischief melted away completely, because being hit by a freight train didn't even come *close* to describing what happened next.

He was standing about forty feet away, next to a lamp post, talking to someone who had their back to her. She didn't even vaguely register who it was. Male, female, tall or short, old or young, she really couldn't have said. All she noticed was him. The rest of the world had simply stopped all around her. Everything, everyone else, had completely fallen away.

At about five feet ten, he was stocky with a well-proportioned body. He had a beautiful oval face, with intense, heavy eyebrows, the most wonderful hint of dark stubble around his jaw, and a generous bow-shaped mouth. He also had the most glorious head of hair; long and almost black, fanning out from his face and cascading well past his shoulders. Feen guessed he'd be in his mid-twenties.

He was dressed like a Goth, in a long black leather coat that flared from the waist. Black jeans were held up with a pewter-buckled belt, beneath a purple t-shirt that had something scribbled on it in white writing that she couldn't quite read. A black and white dogs-tooth patterned scarf was draped casually around his neck. His heavy, thick-soled, round-toed black leather boots had chunky heels, chrome toe-tips, and shiny bits hanging off the ends of the laces. He was standing with his hands in his jeans front pockets, rocking ever-so-slightly back and forth on his feet, and looking like he'd walked straight off a movie set or a rock concert stage. Feen froze, staring.

He was listening intently to whoever was talking to him, and then he suddenly threw back his head and laughed. That's when Feen's heart literally fell, just like her mother's had; irretrievably, and forever.

She wasn't even aware that she was standing stock still in the street with her mouth hanging open like a flycatcher, until he felt her gaze on him, and he stared straight back. At the exact moment his green eyes locked with her blue ones, she felt the breath being sucked out of her body. The expression on his face was one of pure shock. He looked, quite literally, as if he'd seen a ghost.

Feen abruptly turned and ran, and she didn't stop until she got all the way back to her car where she sat, shaking like a leaf, as she tried to control her breathing. Her heart was hammering fit to fly straight out of her chest. She checked behind her, and peered down both ends of the lane. There was no sign of him. She'd half expected him to chase after her, yelling for her to stop and wait for him; hoping for that, yet scared to death of it. She was immensely relieved, that he wasn't here tapping at her window, yet deeply bereft that he wasn't. What would she have said? What would *he* have said?

What if I never see him again?

The thought made her stomach lurch. After all, this was Carlisle. It wasn't Torley, her hometown, where most local people knew one another, at least superficially. He could be from anywhere. But in the instant she'd seen him, Feen knew. He was her soul mate; the man she'd been waiting for, all her life. The man she wanted to be with, for all of her life.

Had he found her? Or had she found him? Had they found one another? Or had they not? Had this been a glimpse of a gorgeous future, or the cruellest impression imaginable of what would never be?

A deep, sharp pang of loss rocked Feen to the core. She knew that she would forever be condemned now to wandering the earth, looking for him, as the one missing piece she now knew existed, she now knew she *needed*, that would make the puzzle of her life complete.

'Sometimes you have to give fate a bit of a nudge, love.'

Her mother's voice, ghostly in the ether, whispered to her now. Beth didn't come to her often, but when she did, Feen always felt it, and she always knew it was important.

'Go on, silly, this is it! He is you. You are him. Get going!'

Abruptly, Feen jumped back out of the car, barely remembering to shut the door behind her, and ran as fast as her feet would carry her, back down the road towards where she'd seen him. Misery overwhelmed her as she realised he was no longer there. She scanned all sides of the wide space, as far as she could see, but he was nowhere in sight. He'd vanished. She raced around in every direction, checking all the alleys and side streets, hoping to see his retreating form down one of them, but he was gone.

Flooded with frustration, and fighting the urge to burst into an epic flood of tears right there in the street, Feen scolded herself hard.

Oh, you stupid, stupid woman! Why did you run away like a scalded cat?

Shell-shocked and bereft, she stayed rooted to the spot, until someone came past and accidentally bumped her back into reality. She shook herself mentally and checked her watch. She still had just

under an hour left on her parking and despite the warmth of the early summer day, she was chilled to the bone and shaking. With all thoughts of shopping gone, and not knowing what else to do with herself, she dived into the corner café she was standing in front of, and ordered a comforting cup of hot chocolate.

She wasn't capable of driving anyway, just yet. Her thoughts were a scrambled mess. She needed time to come to terms with the fact that her world had been rocked to its core and she'd responded like a startled bird. She felt ridiculous now; childish and pathetic. Her face flamed with humiliation, at how stupidly she'd reacted to what now felt like the most important thing that had happened in her life to date.

Feen felt her thoughts sliding slowly into negative overdrive, and for once she felt powerless to stop them.

He's gone. I've lost him, and nobody else will ever come close. This was my one chance. I'm going to be alone forever!

Poor Feen had never been 'popular,' especially with boys. At school in particular, while she'd got on okay with a couple of the girls, most of them had basically ignored her, and the boys had given her a pretty tough time. None of them had ever bullied her physically, but most had relentlessly ridiculed her, particularly her diminutive size-six frame.

They also consistently savaged her natural use of Spoonerism; transposing the first letters of a pair of words. A few of the meaner boys had called her 'bad mitch' for a short while, until they got tired of the teachers telling them off. Most had eventually settled for dubbing her 'Feirido Ween' which had stuck for pretty much her whole adolescence. Back then, lot of kids regarded her as 'spooky' and always pretended they were afraid of her, shrinking back and widening their eyes as she passed. They'd have been amazing on the stage, some of them. She'd always itched to tell them, sarcastically, what brilliant little actors they were.

Ultimately, though, she'd held her tongue. She'd made up her mind to pay *them* no mind, because it simply made life easier. But of course, with all that going on, there hadn't even been a date for her prom on offer, let alone a full-blown love-life. Even the quieter boys who hadn't indulged in the bullying had always given Feen a wide berth. The last thing they needed, she knew, was to be badgered themselves by the bullies for showing any interest in their target.

She also knew about the weekend pyjama parties she'd never been invited to, where groups of teenage girls would sit around discussing the various forms of paralysis that plagued them, as they made their first forays into the dating world.

'Does he like me? What do you think he meant when he said that? What should I do if he doesn't turn up? Would it look desperate if I texted him? Do you think this top is too tarty for a first date?'

Feen had missed out on all of that. She'd never had a single conversation about boys, even with her one close friend Josie, who'd married her childhood sweetheart without ever having to give a moment's thought to whether he'd dump her because she had a better-looking friend, or whether he'd hate her new halter-top or hairstyle. She never had to worry that he'd run out on her, if she went all the way to home base and ended up pregnant.

It wasn't that Josie wouldn't have listened, or been sympathetic to whatever dilemma Feen might have ended up in, over a boy. She absolutely would have tried but Feen knew, without a doubt, that Josie would never truly understand in a million years what had happened in the street just now. It wasn't the kind of thing *anyone* would understand, unless they had wildly romantic tendencies, or a portal into a distinctly different world. Josie, bless her gorgeous heart, had neither.

Torley wasn't exactly teeming with eligible men, and Feen wasn't interested in the motley bunch from school who *had* stuck around the area, even those who might have matured enough to see her as more than just that easy-target, 'off-the-wall chick' they'd known as kids. It meant there still weren't many prospects and sometimes, as her girlfriends were meeting boys and falling in love, Feen had quietly wondered if and when her inherent quirkiness might finally attract the affection of a nice young man, or when her own interest might eventually be sparked by one.

There had been one semi-significant lover in Feen's past; a very patient young man who, in all fairness, she could have taken or left. He'd been a friendly and sociable sort who needed like-minded souls around him, and he struggled with the fact that Feen didn't. He'd persevered for almost a full year with the dreamy young woman who would far rather spend time alone in fields picking primroses than interacting with people. But, despite his best efforts, her fluctuating interest finally got the better of him

and he moved on. He eventually got engaged to one of her more outgoing acquaintances, which suited all three of them perfectly.

Feen had never been able to pretend what she didn't feel. She also knew that trying to force the hand of fate was futile. Things happened when they were supposed to, and not before, and trying to ignore, force or meddle with the process never helped at all. The best example of that, in recent times, was her father Mark. He hadn't been looking for love again when it rocked up and turned him inside out, around eighteen months ago. He'd been known throughout the land as a confirmed widower, ever since Beth had lost her battle with bowel cancer almost a decade ago. She'd been the love of Mark's life, and nobody - including him - ever imagined he'd fall in love again.

But then a woman called Adie Bostock had arrived to housesit at Teapot Cottage, on the edge of Ravensdown farm. Within nine months of Mark and Adie meeting and starting off as friends, and furiously denying every last pull of mutual attraction, they'd ended up getting married. Everyone who knew them was delighted - not to mention vastly relieved that they'd finally admitted to what had been blindingly obvious to everyone else from the start. They were surprisingly well-suited, for people who'd come from different worlds.

They were blissfully happy together, and Feen adored her new stepmother. Their lovely romance had given her renewed hope for her own prospects for falling in love, whenever it might choose to happen. She was confident it would, but time was passing, and seeing everyone else having fun and starting to get settled had started to make her vaguely and uncharacteristically impatient.

The bald truth was that fate didn't give a monkey's about how keen or reluctant people might be, for their lives to be upended by Cupid. Whether it suited his targets or not, that fat little marksman showed up when he jolly-well felt like it, not when he was asked, or asked *not* to! But Feen found herself confused beyond belief, about today's not-quite-close-enough encounter of the world-rocking kind, in terms of what it meant, or what might happen next.

Surely something would?

Now, she had to acknowledge that for the very first time in her life she'd managed to tumble into in full-blown panic mode about her love-life; and not about whether Prince Charming was actually coming, but more about where he'd gone!

She deliberately chose to sit in the window of the café with her hot chocolate. She usually preferred to tuck herself away at the back, somewhere in a corner, well out of the public eye. Putting herself on display like a living mannequin was acutely uncomfortable.

But I'm still hoping to see him! If I sit at the back, I won't see him. And he won't see me. Oh, come and find me? Please? Please come and find me!

But, as the next forty minutes passed, Feen became resigned to the fact that the man who'd hijacked her heart had completely disappeared with it. She also managed to convince herself that he'd have been too startled by her unkempt appearance to be interested in pursuing her anyway.

She looked down at her light cotton, original 1950's frock, covered in a bold pattern of glorious green and blue hydrangeas. It was a retro-shop bargain she'd found on a trip to Lancaster, with a very full skirt and half sleeves. She wore a cream lace t-shirt underneath it to draw less attention to its slightly-too-wide scooped neck. She'd pinned part of the skirt up with an antique blue and green diamante brooch, revealing the heavy swathe of pleated cream lace she'd added beneath it. Her dark hair was carelessly scraped back and secured in a messy ponytail with a dark blue velvet scrunchy, and she had her little black buttoned boots on. She wasn't wearing a scrap of make-up. To an outsider, she looked quirky, charming, and completely beautiful, but she felt like a second-hand frump.

I look a mess, she thought wildly. My hair is in such a state, and these moods are so buddy! What was I thinking, coming out looking like this? I'm a crain trash. If we ever meet again it'll be him that runs away!

Feen had always resisted being a slave to fashion, but she wondered now if that had been a mistake. Maybe 'he' thought her idea of style was ridiculous and uninspiring. Maybe everyone else did too. The thought had never occurred to her before, that her uncultivated, purely instinctive image was hopelessly wrong. Perhaps she really did look every bit as ridiculous as she suddenly felt. For one who'd never really cared what anyone else thought of her, or how she looked, Feen was now eating herself alive with embarrassment and worry.

A profound sense of despair, not felt since her mother had died, suddenly settled like a shroud around her. So derailed was her train of thought now, it didn't occur to her that by her very own reasoning, if

she was meant to be with 'him' she would be. If 'he' really was meant for her, as her mother had already confirmed from another realm, another chance would come.

But frustration and despair had unusually eclipsed Feen's normal line of logic, so she didn't think about any of that. She just stared miserably into her mug of chocolate and idly moved what was left of the pink and white marshmallows around the top with her spoon until they dissolved in the mug, leaving a sticky pink ring around the top.

After finishing her drink, she wondered if she should prolong her own agony and order another one, and sit in the window for a little longer. But, she decided, if he was still around she'd surely have reconnected with him by now. It seemed that he was long gone, and all she could hope for now was that she'd somehow, somewhere, sometime, run into him again.

Hopefully before we're crashing into each other in a hare comb somewhere, dribbling and demented, and having to try and untangle our Zimmer frames!

She wiped the mallow moustache from above her top lip and dragged herself dejectedly back to her car, where she sat for a good while, staring into the middle distance. She felt depleted and crushed, as if she'd run a marathon, only to be told it didn't count and she'd have to run it again.

It was hard to believe that fate could be this cruel; that her spirit-world protectors could have allowed this to happen. They'd never let anything disrupt her like this before, not since the death of her mother, anyway. They messed with her head a lot, yes, and played all kinds of hide-and-seek games with her logic and perspective whenever it suited them, but they'd never been vindictive before. What happened today felt indescribably, unfathomably unkind, and it simply wasn't possible for Feen, who was usually so highly intuitive, to wrap her head around the cruelty of it.

She sat quietly in her car, waiting for her mother to 'speak' to her again. She fully expected Beth to come forward and chide her gently, that she'd unwittingly thrown a spanner in her own works by running away, and had nobody to blame but herself. But nothing came, which only made her more confused about what had actually happened to her, and why. It felt as if even her own mum had spiritually abandoned her, right when she needed her the most.

With a heavy sigh, and pushing aside the familiar flare of grief she always felt, whenever she realised how much she still missed and needed Beth, Feen started her car and pulled out into the street.