



the  
ENCHANTED  
GREENHOUSE

SARAH BETH DURST

*New York Times* bestselling author  
of *The Spellshop*





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*For my mom,  
Mary Lee Bartlett,  
who taught me to love stories  
and has a much greener thumb than I do.*

*I love you.*

## CHAPTER ONE

The plant was innocent.

Everyone agreed on that. Still, when the judge declared it in his reedy voice for the official record, Terlu nearly cried with relief—after she'd been arrested, her primary worry was that they'd blame the plant. He wasn't to blame. It was all her. She'd tried to make that clear.

She shifted in her chair to watch while the court bailiffs escorted the spider plant away. He raised a tendril toward her, and Terlu lifted her fingers to her lips and then toward the newly sentient plant.

*I won't cry.* She refused to cry when she hadn't done anything wrong. Very illegal, yes, but not *wrong*. So far, she hadn't shed a single tear, at least not in public, but right now, all that prevented her from sobbing out loud was the scowl on the prosecutor's face as he glared at her, as well as the head librarian's hand on her arm, which was the only touch of kindness in the courtroom, both literally and figuratively.

Leaning closer, the head librarian, Rijes Velk, whispered to her, "I will see that he is safe and cared for. He'll always have a home with us."

Terlu swallowed hard.

*Not going to cry.*

Stiffly, gratefully, she nodded at Rijes Velk and then faced the judge.

The judge was swaddled in embroidered robes that transformed him from a skeletal man with spidery limbs into a wide mushroom of ruffled silks. He reminded Terlu of a hermit crab, the kind that used to swarm the beaches of

her home island—his gnarled body tucked inside his ornate outer shell, with only his claws exposed. She had to look up to see him, seated on the dais, raised high above the accused. *Above me*, she thought miserably.

He was framed by stained glass windows that showed a stylized map of the Crescent Islands Empire, each jeweled bit of land caught within panes of sapphire blue. Instead of warm amber daylight, it cast the whole courtroom in a bluish tinge, which made all the painted faces glaring down at her from the balconies on either side of the dais look even more cold and unfriendly. It was all designed to intimidate and overwhelm, and it was, Terlu thought, rather effective.

If the judge was a hermit crab, then she was an oyster, extracted from her shell, splayed open and exposed to the elements. She fidgeted with the sleeves of the tunic they'd given her. It was a gray cotton, soft from use and vastly oversize, and she wondered how many other (much taller) criminals had worn it before her. She knew how she looked in it: like a child playing dress-up, rather than a woman in her twenties. *Or more accurately, I look like a chipmunk*. She was short and pleasantly plump, with wide eyes that made her always look slightly surprised, round cheeks, and smile creases around her mouth. She was certain she looked more like a chipmunk than a criminal, if chipmunks were lavender and gray. Her mother had purple skin, while her father was tinted more pink, and Terlu had ended up an agreeable shade of lavender, which matched nicely with the gray cotton. But however nice and innocuous she looked, it didn't seem to be making a bit of difference in the way the case was going. She'd even tried to tame her curls for the court appearance, as if tamed hair would make her appear any less guilty.

The problem was she *was* guilty: she'd cast a spell. She'd gathered the ingredients, researched the words, deliberated on whether it was wise, decided it wasn't at all wise, and did it anyway. She'd created Caz, a sentient spider plant, to keep her company in the empty stacks of the Great Library of Alyssium. She'd made herself a friend because she could not handle one more day of being friendless, of being so far from her family, of living sequestered in her silent and empty corner of the library where the only



choice was find a way to bear the isolation or admit that she'd failed to find a place for herself, that she'd made a mistake in leaving home, and that her family and friends were right to say she'd never flourish out in the world on her own.

Terlu honestly hadn't thought anyone would mind.

She'd harmed no one. She hadn't even inconvenienced anyone. And Caz himself was delighted to be alive and thrilled to be her companion. The patron who'd noticed Caz, though, had been neither delighted nor thrilled.

Only the most elite sorcerers were allowed to use magic. The spellbooks that filled the Great Library were for their use alone, by imperial decree. The imperial investigator who took the case was not about to let one low-level librarian be the exception to the rule. As the prosecutor, he'd argued eloquently for her guilt.

Frankly, she didn't think he'd needed to argue so hard. She'd obviously broken the law—a talking, walking spider plant was kind of unignorable proof.

And so, Terlu wasn't the least bit surprised when the judge pronounced, "Terlu Perna, Fourth Librarian of the Second Floor, East Wing, of the Great Library of Alyssium, you have been found guilty of illegal magic use. Sentencing will commence immediately."

Beside her, Rijes Velk rose. "I plead for leniency."

Like the judge, the head librarian was also encased in embroidered silk, but unlike the judge, she looked as if she belonged in such finery. She was an elegant woman with silvery-gray hair, which had been braided to echo the latticework on the great door to Kinney Hall. Her onyx cheeks were painted in gold with symbols that indicated the oaths she'd taken, to honor the history, wisdom, and knowledge of the Crescent Islands. If Terlu hadn't known that Rijes was old enough to be her grandmother, she would have assumed she was simply ageless.

Terlu was both honored and amazed that such an important and elegant person had chosen to speak on her behalf at her trial, especially given the whole *obviously guilty* situation.

“Librarian Terlu Perna intended no harm,” Rijes Velk said, her voice ringing through the vast courtroom, up to the spiral dome above. “Furthermore, she caused no harm. Not a single citizen was hurt. No property was damaged. Nothing was broken, stolen, or lost. There were no ill effects whatsoever from her lapse in judgment. I therefore ask—*plead*—for mercy from this court. This is her first offense, and she has learned from her mistake. She will not work magic again. I personally guarantee it.”

Terlu let out a little gasp in surprise. That was a tremendous statement, to have *the* head librarian promising her good behavior. She heard the sorcerers in the balcony who had come to watch the show whisper to one another and shuffle in their viewing boxes—clearly also surprised at this endorsement.

The prosecutor rose, his scarlet robes rippling as he moved. “It doesn’t matter what you promise. It doesn’t matter what the convicted intended, or what she intends after this point. What matters is what others do in reaction to this case. If her punishment is light, then *I* guarantee that the empire will see more illegal magic use, and it will not all be without consequence. I implore you to send a message to all who contemplate using magic without the proper license that the law is the law, and the emperor’s will is not weak.”

“Mercy is not weakness,” Rijes Velk countered.

“Your Honor, my counterpart would have you feed the growing unrest—”

Rijes cut in. “Terlu Perna’s case has nothing to do with any—”

They argued back and forth until the judge raised one of his crablike hands. “I have made my decision. Terlu Perna will be made an example of, for the health and safety of the empire.”

Terlu felt her mouth go dry. She clenched her hands together on her lap, bunching up the fabric of her tunic. *An example? What does that mean? What are they going to do to me?*

“She will be transformed into a statue and placed in the Great Library, to serve as a warning to all librarians, scholars, and patrons who might be tempted to defy the law.”

There was a stunned silence.

It was a harsher punishment than any she'd imagined—far, far harsher. She began to shake. Her heart beat as frantically as a hummingbird's wings.

The drums began to sound, the signal that a verdict had been reached, deep and low and echoing. She felt them in her bones, each beat reverberating through her entire body.

Around her, the courtroom erupted into shouting. Rijes Velk stormed toward the dais, while Terlu sank deeper into her chair and hugged her arms around herself. It was only when the judge demanded silence that she realized she was screaming like a dying rabbit.



It all happened quickly after that.

Terlu was shuffled out of the courtroom by two court bailiffs. She stumbled as she walked, unable to remember how to place her feet one in front of the other. All the shouting had faded as if she'd been shoved underwater, smothered by the swirl of her thoughts.

A statue.

Her, transformed into a statue.

*Will it hurt?*

*Will I live?*

*Will they ever transform me back?* The judge had made no statement about the length of her sentence. *Is it forever?* No, it couldn't be, could it? That would be too cruel. But if it wasn't, wouldn't the judge have set a duration? She'd never heard of such a punishment, but then she also hadn't heard of any librarian breaking the ban on magic use by non-sorcerers. With all the spellbooks in the Great Library, she couldn't imagine another librarian hadn't been tempted, but perhaps she was the first to be caught.

She wished she'd been more careful. More clever.

She didn't wish she hadn't done it. If she hadn't cast the spell, then Caz would have never existed, and he'd been so happy to be alive. She'd never

wish to undo that. She hoped that Rijes Velk would keep her promise—that she'd keep Terlu's spider-plant friend safe and happy.

The bailiffs delivered her to a black stone room shaped like an octagon. It had no windows and no light except for a single candelabra in the center of the room that was lit with a dozen white candles, and it smelled of tallow and burnt herbs. A bearded man with sunken cheeks waited beside the candelabra. He held a bowl in his pale hands.

She recognized what he was instantly: a sorcerer with the ingredients to a spell.

And just as quickly she realized what this meant: there would be no reprieve. No last-minute mercy. Her punishment had been decided long before the judge had delivered his verdict.

She stared at the sorcerer.

She felt too empty to scream or cry now. She wished she'd had a moment to thank Rijes Velk for trying. Terlu truly did appreciate her kindness.

"Change," he told her.

She noticed a folded tunic, a library uniform, on a chair. She hesitated for only a second before stripping off the gray clothes and pulling on the familiar blue of a Fourth Librarian. At least she wouldn't face her fate dressed like a criminal. She wondered if this was Rijes Velk's kindness as well, or if they simply wanted their example to be uniformed as a librarian. The sorcerer watched her dispassionately, and she wondered what he'd do if she tried to flee. She knew she wouldn't get far—undoubtedly, there were guards on the other side of the door—and she didn't want him to cast the spell while she was fleeing. If she was going to be transformed into a statue, she didn't want her face to be frozen in fear. She wanted to at least try to be brave.

"Will I live?" Terlu asked.

The sorcerer hesitated. "Yes." And then he began the spell.

As her blood slowed and hardened, as her breath caught in her throat, as her eyes froze in place, as her flesh turned to polished wood, it occurred to her that perhaps that wasn't the right question to ask. But she couldn't think of a better one.

*If I live, I can hope.*

★ ★ ★

Darkness.

Silence.

She didn't know which was worse—the darkness or the silence—but she was suffocating in both. She couldn't open her eyes. No, she couldn't close her eyes.

*Where am I?*

She listened. There was nothing. No breath. No heartbeat.

★ ★ ★

A creak, then a sliver of light, and she could see shapes and shadows: shelves, a crate, and a cart. There were voices behind her, muffled, arguing about where to put a stack of chairs.

She was in a storage closet.

She wanted to call out to the unseen voices, ask them to talk to her—no, beg them. She wanted them to move to where she could see them. She needed to see a face, to look into someone else's eyes, to see a smile. She wanted to tell them she was awake, alive, aware.

*I am here!*

The door shut.

★ ★ ★

She dreamed sometimes, or almost dreamed, since it was never true sleep. Statues can't sleep. In her favorite dream, she was standing in sunlight, listening to music. Ahh, music! And she was tasting a pastry. Or tasting a kiss. And there were people all around her, voices and laughter that were the most beautiful music. All around her, it smelled like roses.



But the dream never lasted, and then once again there was nothing, nothing, nothing.

★ ★ ★

She wasn't afraid anymore.

Or angry.

Or sad.

But she wished ... Oh, she wished. For sunlight. For breath. For a kind voice. And so she dreamed and remembered and drifted through the days, losing her grasp on time and on herself.

★ ★ ★

In the silence and the dark, the statue endured.

When, at last, they came to place her on the pedestal they'd installed in the North Reading Room of the Great Library of Alyssium, she wanted to thank them.

At least now, she wouldn't be alone.

## CHAPTER TWO

Snow fell gently on the statue, which was, the statue thought, lovely but unexpected. Flakes dusted her nose and fell onto her unblinkable eyes, and she wondered why she wasn't in the alcove in the North Reading Room on her usual pedestal.

*Clearly, I missed something important*, she thought.

She used to have a view of floor-to-vaulted-ceiling bookshelves filled with priceless (and dusty) books and scrolls. Now she was facing a grove of pine trees, wreathed in snow and laden with pine cones.

She knew she'd been drifting ever since her transformation, but this time, she must have drifted for quite a while and slept very deeply to miss being moved from the Great Library to ... wherever this was. *How long?* she wondered. *How much did I miss? Where am I?* Between two pines, she spotted a glint of reflected sunlight, but she couldn't identify what—

Suddenly, she shivered, and a ripple spread down her wooden limbs.

Given that she was an inanimate object, she shouldn't be able to shiver, so why did— It intensified into a shudder, and she heard a creak that sounded like a tree bending. *Oh no, was that inside me?*

And then: *crackle, crackle, crackle*. She felt bubbles rising from her toes up to her knees, through her thighs and into her torso, where they swirled faster and faster.

For so very long, she'd felt nothing. And now suddenly, she felt everything.

She burned. She froze. She hurt. She felt as if she were being ripped apart, and then she felt as if she were soaring through the clouds, her head spinning with a thousand colors. She was an exploding star, bursting with indescribable pain and incandescent joy.

And then Terlu Perna, formerly the Fourth Librarian of the Second Floor, East Wing, of the Great Library of Alyssium (jewel of the Crescent Islands Empire), and much more recently a statue made of wood on display in the North Reading Room, condemned for the breaking of imperial law regarding unauthorized spellwork ... collapsed into a heap on the snowy forest floor.

She was flesh again.

Terlu felt the wet snow seep through the thin fabric of her librarian tunic. It prickled her left thigh and her hip at the same time as the breeze chilled her bare arms. She sucked in air and felt the cold burn her throat, and she expelled it in a laugh.

Oh, she could feel! She could breathe! She could move! She could talk! At the top of her lungs, she sang, “La-la-la!” Her voice cracked, her throat dry from disuse. A bird startled from the top of a nearby pine tree. “Sorry!” she called to it as it flew away, red wings bright against the white sky.

She breathed again as deeply as she could and inhaled the scent of pine and the crisp taste of winter, so sharp and clean that it hurt all the way down to her lungs. In fact, now that she noticed it, all of her hurt: every joint and every muscle ached so badly they shook, but she couldn’t stop smiling. She was alive again!

For a moment, it overwhelmed her. She had very nearly given up hope. She’d had, after all, no rational reason to hope, except for the simple fact that she’d remained alive.

Terlu pushed against the ground to stand up.

And promptly fell down.

“Ow.”

More snow soaked through her tunic. Pushing with both hands, she rocked forward into a squat. “Steady,” she said. “You can do this, Terlu.” Her voice was stronger now, only wavering a little. Slowly, she stood. Her knees

wobbled, and she grabbed on to the branch of the nearest tree. Its bark bit into her palm, but she didn't fall.

She shivered as the cold seeped into her skin. Wouldn't it be terrible if she finally was restored to human and she froze to death immediately? Yes, it would. *Whoever restored me can't have intended me to freeze.*

Whoever restored ...

Of course! There had to be a sorcerer nearby who'd cast the spell to free her. Probably they just didn't know that their spell had taken effect already. As soon as they realized it had, they'd show up with blankets, coats, hot chocolate, and a really excellent explanation for where she was and why she was here, and she could thank them from the bottom of her soul.

"Hello!" Terlu called. "I'm..." What was the word? Awake? Alive? Fleshy? She didn't want to shout that she was fleshy. "I'm here! Over here! Hello?"

She waited for someone to answer, but no one did. The snow fell as soft as a whisper, and the wind brushed against the branches, making a *shush, shush* sound. It felt as if she were the only living soul in the forest, but that couldn't be. Someone had to have been responsible for the spell that revived her, so where was that someone?

"You did it!" she called. "You saved me! Yay! Can you come out so I can thank you? Really, I'm very grateful! And also cold!"

Still, no one answered.

Terlu wrapped her arms around herself, but it didn't help much. She tried a hesitant step forward. Her legs shook like a baby deer's, but she kept herself upright. She took another step and then another. Ahead was the glint she'd seen between the pine trees. She aimed for that, since every other direction was just trees and snow.

Why would anyone cast a spell to restore her and *not* stick around to see if it worked? It was irresponsible spellwork, that's what it was. At the very least, the sorcerer could have pinned a note to her that said, "Just have to duck out for a quick bite to eat. Be back soon." Or they could have left a sign telling her which way to go. Or an arrow. It wouldn't have been so hard to

make an arrow out of rocks or stray pine cones: *This way to warmth and food!*

Unless whoever it was didn't want her to find shelter?

What if this was a strange part of her punishment that she'd somehow not known about? She *had* been in shock at the verdict—well, no, not at the verdict. She had been one hundred percent guilty. She hadn't expected, though, for the punishment to be so severe. No one had. Terlu thought of Rijes Velk arguing for leniency ... but they'd wanted to make an example of her, and that was that. She'd been wood-ified. Or should that be solidified? En-statued? There wasn't a proper verb for it, which bothered Terlu—if you were going to do a thing to someone, there should be a verb for it, and if there wasn't, you should reconsider doing it at all.

Snow fell harder. It swirled around her, and she held her arm in front of her face to keep it from flying into her eyes. It was ankle-deep between the trees, and she had to march her feet, lifting her knees up high, to make progress. The pine trees were clumped together with branches that poked her skin every time she brushed against one.

Ducking under a thicker branch, she knocked into it with her back, and an armful of snow fell onto her neck. She yelped and scooted forward. So soon after her reawakening, she wasn't ready to react to anything that fast—she fell forward onto her knees. All the air rushed out of her with the jolt, and pain shot through her knees.

Tears pricked her eyes. "Hello? Anyone? Please! I need help!"

Refusing to care, the snow continued to fall.

Gritting her teeth, Terlu picked herself up and stumbled onward. Pushing another branch aside, more carefully this time so the snow didn't dump on her again, she stepped out of the forest into a clearing.

Ahead of her was a window. Many windows. A wall of windows, framed in black iron that curled delicately around the panes in branch-like patterns. The structure was massive—at least three stories high and so wide that she couldn't see its corners. Tilting her head back, Terlu looked up and up to a glass cupola on the top. Snow fell on it.



Stumbling forward, she reached the glass wall and pressed her hands against it as she looked inside. It was cool but not icy, and she noticed there was no frost on the panes. Instead the glass was cloudy, as if hot air inside had fogged it up. *It's warm inside*, she realized. Gloriously warm! All she could see through the foggy glass was a tangle of shadows. And ... green? It was filled with green.

*It's a greenhouse*, she realized. *An enormous greenhouse in the middle of the woods*. It had to belong to someone, even if it was dark inside. If she could find the owner, perhaps she'd find her rescuer?

Not that they were a very good rescuer, leaving her out here in the cold. She'd forgive them, though, if they let her inside. *I'll forgive them instantly*. They'd made her flesh again. Knocking on the glass, she called out again, "Hello! I'm out here! Please let me in!"

She walked along the glass wall, knocking as she went. It had to have a door, didn't it? Or a window that opened? *I suppose I could break the glass*. But that would let the cold inside, as well as her, and what would the owner think of that?

If they hadn't left her alone in the cold, she wouldn't need to break a window.

Still, she'd rather not. It wouldn't be the best introduction. Besides which, she wasn't certain she could. It was thick glass, and her arms were shaking so badly that she wasn't certain she had any strength in them.

*Only as a last resort.*

The wall seemed to go on and on, as the snow thickened at her feet. Her toes were beginning to feel numb, as well as her fingertips. She wondered if she had frostbite. She'd never been this cold before. She'd grown up on a sun-drenched island called Eano, where you were in far more danger of sunburn than frostbite. She used to walk barefoot through the sand and feel it tickle her toes on her way to her cousins' house, and she'd swim every sunset in the sun-warmed water before her parents called her in for dinner. At the height of summer, you could cook mussels and clams by leaving them out on the rocks, and you had to drink fruit juice to stay hydrated or you'd

risk the wrath of the cluster of grandfathers who'd hand out pitchers of guava and watery sweet-berry juice at every street corner. Remembering, Terlu could almost taste the hint of sweet-berry. It was the flavor of the summer solstice, when the whole island would be decked out in flowers and smell like chocolate and cinnamon and citrus as every baker and aspiring baker would compete to create the most delectable pastries for the Summer Feast ...

At last she reached the corner of the greenhouse and turned—to see more glass.

*I have to break it. If I stay outside any longer, I'll be an ice statue instead of wood.* She didn't know if that would be ironic or just pathetic. She laughed, slightly hysterically.

Terlu scouted the ground for a rock or a sturdy branch. Everything was coated in snow, but she spotted a medium-size branch that had fallen off one of the pine trees. She picked it up, and sap stuck to her palms. Carrying it back to the wall of windows, she eyed the glass. If she hit it in the center, it should be the weakest there.

“Sorry,” she said to her unknown host. “Very, very sorry. I'll clean it up, I promise.”

She swung the branch at the glass.

It hit solidly. She felt the impact shake through her arms, but the glass didn't break. Dipping the branch down to rest for a second, she caught her breath. It felt like her muscles hadn't been used in months, which was accurate. Hefting up the branch, Terlu tried again.

Not a dent. Not a scratch.

She whacked it again and again. After the fifth try, she stopped, panting. Either she wasn't strong enough or the glass wasn't really glass. Or it could be spelled to be unbreakable. She knew the windows in the palace had such spells on them. When the emperor visited the lower canals in the poorer parts of the city, he was said to travel in a carriage made entirely of glass enchanted to be unbreakable. It was possible this greenhouse bore the same spell. In which case ... *This will never work.*