

A SPOOKY GAMES CLUB MYSTERY

BROOMSTICKS AND BOARD GAMES



AMY McNULTY

BROOMSTICKS AND BOARD
GAMES CHAPTER 1 PREVIEW

A Spooky Games Club Mystery Book 1

AMY MCNULTY



Broomsticks and Board Games by Amy McNulty

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Chapter 1

THIS IS AN UNCORRECTED PROOF. TYPOS MAY BE
PRESENT WITHIN THE TEXT THAT WILL BE FIXED FOR THE
PUBLISHED EDITION.

“WOW. THAT’S A STRIKING TATTOO.”

When you’re doing your neighbor a favor by rummaging through his attic and someone walks up behind you while you’re levitating just a *little* bit, you have three options.

One: Play it cool and float back down to the top of the stepstool, hoping he doesn’t notice the smooth move.

Two: Admit the jig is up and introduce some poor hapless individual to the fact that witches—and vampires and werewolves and just about anything paranormal you can think of—are real.

Three: Lose your wits and tumble helplessly backward, right into the stranger’s arms.

I, of course, stumbled into option three.

“Whoa, watch it!”

The deep, baritone voice was paired with a set of muscular arms in a white collared dress shirt. My back slammed against a sturdy chest, the top of my head clipping what had to be a chiseled chin—the grunt of pain that followed confirming my fears.

And then somehow, I found myself in a princess carry, my wavy, red-orange hair tumbling over the side of those muscular arms. Something hard pushed into my back as I gazed up into the dark brown eyes of a hopelessly handsome, completely unknown face.

This was Luna Lane. There weren’t supposed to be unknown faces.

“Hi, there.” He arched a single dark brow, the corner of his lips curling up into a smile, revealing a dazzling set of teeth.

The smallest trickle of blood cracked across his lips, dripping onto the perfectly centered cleft on his strong chin.

“Oh, bananaberries! I’m so sorry.” My heart thumped rapidly—

whether from the fact that I was in a tall, strapping stranger's arms or the fact that I'd clearly injured him or the *not so minor detail* that I really had no idea how much he'd seen.

Kicking and flailing, I scrambled to get back on my own two black-ballet-slipped feet. The groan the stranger let out when my elbow knocked into his wire-framed circular glasses didn't help matters.

I was two for two in the unintentionally-assaulting-a-stranger department today.

Good thing Sheriff Roan Birch had known me since I'd been just an apple in my mom's eye.

"Are you all right?" the man asked, one hand clutching a silver metal flashlight that he hadn't turned on yet. The other hand he used to straighten his glasses and wipe his chin. The bleeding had stopped already.

I stared up at him. At five-nine, I was still just barely up to this behemoth's shoulders. Huh. Not too often were there men that much taller than me in the Luna Lane dating pool.

Not that I was *at all* worried about dating this man whom I didn't know from Adam, of course.

Like a fish gasping for water, I clumsily opened my mouth. "I hope *you're* fine. I didn't mean to hurt you when I... When I..."

"Fell off the stepstool?" He took in the rickety, chipped stool sorely in need of a coat of paint—fixing that would surely count as a "good deed," actually, I needed to make a note of that—and let out a giant sigh.

He hadn't noticed.

My left arm itched something fierce, a sharp jolt of pain piercing into my very flesh. I scratched at the little patch of skin about the size of a quarter that was the source of the distress.

The rosy pink skin was changing, a scale the color of silver to match the rest of the scales that coiled up and down my arm, from shoulder to wrist, branching out in all directions like a growing vine.

My shiny, silver "tattoo" that wasn't a *tattoo* at all.

"Bananaberries," I swore. "What time is it?"

He tilted his chin. "I think it's around seven..."

Sunset was at 6:54 today. It had to be too late.

I was getting *way* too laid back about this. I'd *sworn* I'd had time. It'd just take a minute to help Milton Woodward out next door, get my good deed out of the way for the day—right *at the end of* the day.

Hubris, thy name is Dahlia Poplar.

"What are you doing?" asked the stranger, loosening the simple red

tie around his neck and sliding in behind me as I climbed the stepstool once more.

I slipped on the third stair. This thing really *was* in need of repair. My eyes flit to the sole window in Milton's attic, the last embers of the orange sky over the horizon.

No time to repair a stepstool, especially without magic. *Focus, Dahlia. Stick to what you're in here for.*

"Careful," said the man, sliding in to offer support.

Support I wouldn't have needed at all if the guy would just *leave me alone* already.

Balancing on the very top, I stretched my left arm out again, wincing as the scale burned into my flesh.

No. It's not too late. It's not!

I pulled my arm back and reached out with my right. *Almost there.*

My fingers grazed the long, rectangular box Milton had asked me to get down for him.

It was yellowing and faded, the beams from that small attic window reaching perfectly onto the box for years and years, no doubt, the edges of the top of the box frayed from frequent, perhaps careless, removal.

Almost had it. Almost, but not quite close enough. This was why I'd been using a levitating enchantment to begin with.

Why in the blazes had Milton stored it up so far out of reach to begin with?

With a scream, I fell back, the small patch on my left arm too painful to ignore any longer, the new silver stone scale ripping into the flesh permanently.

The man behind me wrapped his arms around me, the flashlight still clutched in his hand, and we both tumbled down the last couple of steps on the stool.

The yowl I let out led him to quickly steady me and look down at my feet.

"Did you twist your ankle?" he asked.

My arm smarted enough that my first instinct was to snap at him—to blame him for my failure, for my ego thinking I could quickly get a good deed done and out of the way with only a few minutes to spare. But as I cradled the new scale on my left arm and looked at the man in the dying light, I bit my tongue.

"I'm fine," I muttered, just a little bit of the sullenness I felt permeating my voice. "Thank you," I added quickly, staring at the hardwood floor. There were knots in the wood that reminded me of

ghostly faces staring up at me to mock Luna Lane's last remaining witch for her foolishness.

With a click, the man turned on his flashlight, illuminating the dark space with a dim, yellow beam. My eyes strained to adjust as he climbed up the rickety stepstool and took the box down off the top shelf with no trouble whatsoever, climbing back and handing the dusty board game box labeled "Evidence" to me with both hands as if a present.

Evidence, huh? Is that a Clue rip-off?

Curse his long limbs, the short stepstool—me having to hide the fact that I could have levitated and gotten it myself.

Curse foolish me for not acting sooner.

"Thanks," I said quietly, taking the game. I couldn't look at him.

I could have used levitation to bring the box right down to me the moment I'd entered the room. But good deeds didn't work that way on a very technical level.

Good deeds. I'd been cursed—before I'd been born, mind you—to have to perform one every single day of my life before the sun fully set or I'd slowly—one scale at a time—turn to stone.

That was what the shiny, silver "tattoo" was. A record of my failure.

And the older I got, the bigger each new scale seemed to be.

Examining my arm, I could see that I'd clearly had a lot of days that had been failures. But I couldn't have rightly fully performed a good deed per day as an infant and young child. Mom had tried her best, cajoling me into picking up litter or setting the table at a friend's house before dinner, but the *intent* had to be there.

The understanding.

It had only been with Mom's magic that we'd been able to keep the scales so tiny to begin with. It was the most she'd been able to do for me, to save me from the dark magic that ran through my veins.

I was certain the witch who'd cursed me had assumed I'd be fully stone before I'd reached my third birthday.

But no. I'd survived far longer than that. I was thirty now and still here, my stone-scaled arm the only evidence I'd ever been doomed to die young.

The last ten years, with Mom gone, there was nothing I could do to keep the scales small anymore.

So it was a good thing I was pretty vigilant about doing good deeds to help everyone out. Mostly vigilant. Okay, I was a little lax about it, but...

Luna Lane was a small town. Good deeds hardly ever encompassed

saving lives or making sure someone didn't go hungry for the night.

There were three hundred of us. In general, the town was full of people who took care of one another.

There were almost no good deeds left to go around to stretch three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

And I couldn't step foot outside of this town to help anyone elsewhere.

That dug extra deep. I knew there was so much good my powers could do outside of our tiny town, but the curse... The curse hadn't been some way to encourage benevolence.

It had been a mockery. A twisted mockery of the kind of witch my mom had become, always helping others, never using her magic to curse people, to cause even the mildest form of mischief.

I took a deep breath. I shouldn't have been so quick to "curse" anything, not even jokingly in my head, least of all this amiable stranger.

I stared at the box. It was a game from the 1960s or 70s by the looks of it. Milton and his wife, Leana, had played games a lot when I'd been growing up, but this one was completely unfamiliar.

This was the first time he'd asked for a game since his wife had passed earlier this year. He usually didn't remember she'd passed at all. He was always asking for her.

If only I could use healing magic on him and heal the mixed-up memories in his brain.

"Some good deeds are just out of our hands," Mom would say. She hadn't been here when Milton had started exhibiting signs of dementia, but she'd tried to heal old Mrs. Flores when I'd been young.

Her mind hadn't wanted to accept the magic, Mom had decided. *"Just let her keep offering you blueberry pie,"* she'd said when Mrs. Flores had confused a loaf of bread for the pie and had handed me the whole loaf on a plate. *"Smile. Thank her for it. She used to win ribbons for her pie, you know."*

Mrs. Flores was gone now, but the effect was the same. They were happier reminiscing in the less painful past.

So I wouldn't mess with Milton's brain. I'd just do one good deed at a time to help.

For a good deed to count, I couldn't fully rely on magic to accomplish the task. Again, it was a twisted mockery of my mom's intentions. If she played with the humans, she should help them like one.

In this case, Milton had wished he could play this game I'd never heard of again. To accomplish that, I'd had to figure out where it was—

he'd kept saying, "the attic, the attic, she stuffed it away in the attic," and that was all I'd had to go on, so it'd taken longer than I'd hoped. I'd searched the place up and down, sweat sticking to my skin as the stuffiness of the musty attic had crushed down on me. If it hadn't been for an errant mouse scurrying up over the shelves and overhead beams, I never would have found it. Honestly, the Woodwards would have had to have gone out of their way to stuff that game so high up. No wonder he'd lost track of it.

Then, when I'd spotted the stepstool in the corner, I'd known I'd have to climb it like a human would have. Then—and only then—if I exhausted all possible options, could I cheat the system just a little bit. Levitate *myself*, not the object of my desire. Besides, Milton didn't always remember that witches were real anymore, and I didn't relish repeating the conversation with him over and over every time he caught me in the act.

A little levitation off the top of a stepstool I could make seem natural, if the witnesses' eyes weren't directed to my feet.

Which, I supposed, they hadn't been in this case.

There's one blessing.

"I'm Cable Woodward," the man said out of the blue as he extended a hand toward me. His cheeks darkened and he moved the hand smoothly back across the back of his short, wavy hair. "Milton's nephew. Oh. Guess you have your hands full."

Right. The game.

"Dahlia," I said by way of answer. I let out a sneeze. The dust up here was really getting to me. "Dahlia Poplar."

"*Gesundheit*, Dahlia." He offered me that dazzling little half-smile again, along with a handkerchief he pulled out of his shirt pocket.

I thanked him and took the crisp, white handkerchief, juggling the game in one hand and patting my nose with the other. It gave me a chance to study him closer, to search for the resemblance. Milton talked a lot about his sister, Ingrid, who'd moved away as a young adult, long before I'd been born. He sometimes talked about her as if she were just upstairs—other times, he remembered that she'd "gone off on an adventure."

It'd been ages since he'd spoken about her normally, but I did remember him and his wife, Leana, talking about a nephew back in the day. "*We have a nephew about your age!*" "*I hope you can meet our nephew when he comes to visit.*" "*I guess Ingrid couldn't make it this year. She and Craige are exploring a rainforest!*"

Yes, for some reason, my childhood brain remembered their nephew's name as "Craigle." I supposed I'd thought it was a strange nickname for "Craig" or they were saying "Craig'll." "*Craig'll be there*" must have been "Cable'll be there" all along.

Cable, huh?

I went to hand him the handkerchief and hurriedly took it back again. Who handed someone a dirty handkerchief they'd just borrowed? I tucked it into a pouch on my golden belt, thankful the loops weren't full of potion flasks I'd have to explain. "The famous Craig—Cable Woodward here at last." It felt awfully hot in this small, cramped attic. The dusty memories packing the shelves all the way to the ceiling seemed to make the small space even more cramped and confining.

Cable chuckled. "Famous, huh?" His nose wrinkled. "Craig?"

"I might have gotten the name wrong. They kept talking about you, but you never showed."

"Not often, no," said Cable. My mind raced to remember him ever visiting, but it came up blank. "Mom and I traveled a lot, rarely made it back to the States. And then I got my doctorate in England." He rubbed the back of his head some more. "I'm sorry I missed Aunt Leana's funeral. I've been teaching abroad for a few years in Scotland. I couldn't easily make it back."

Scotland. Across an ocean. After a lifetime of traveling all around the globe. He had the slightest tinges of an unplaceable accent, but it was more like a mixture of everything had sieved through his smooth Midwestern standard through time, leaving just traces behind.

I was suddenly irrationally jealous of the fact that he'd *traveled*, that he'd *lived* in places I'd just read about, had only seen on TV. Everywhere else in the world seemed like a fairy tale setting to me.

"I'm the only nephew either of them had," he said, his elbow knocking up against a newer box labeled "Leana's clothes," kicking up a bit of dust into the air. He scrambled to stop it from sliding off the shelf. "They didn't have kids themselves and my mom is getting on in years—she had me rather later in life, you see—so I figured I was the only one who could really check in on Uncle Milton." He straightened his loosened tie. "So when I was offered a sabbatical for the semester, I decided I'd move in with him."

Move. In. With. Him?

Here?

To Luna Lane?

To this sleepy town where everyone knew to keep quiet about the fact

that the paranormal exists, to watch what they said and did in front of visitors who might waltz right out of here someday and share the news with the world?

My heart sunk. And of course, I would be the one who'd have to be most careful.

As the last witch in town, that meant I couldn't perform magic where Mr. Here-for-a-Sabbatical-Semester might see it.

Not for half a year.

Not even to help me cheat just a little to perform my good deeds.

I winced, focusing on the sharp sting of the latest scale on my arm of shame.

He watched me so earnestly, so clearly worried that I had hurt myself during this little debacle.

And boy, did his dark eyes light up stunningly when clouded with concern.

This was going to be *a long* few months.

Join the Spooky Games Club in
Broomsticks and Board Games



Dahlia Poplar is a genuine witch, an unofficial gofer, and Luna Lane's

only cursed resident.

With a werewolf best friend, a vampire ex-boyfriend, and a ghost for a hanger-on, Dahlia is far from the most unusual dweller of her sleepy small town, but she's the only one unable to leave. Dahlia has to perform at least one good deed per day—or she's one step closer to turning to stone.

Fortunately, the residents of Luna Lane have plenty of tasks for Dahlia to complete to avert the curse until Cable Woodward, fetching professor and nephew of her elderly neighbor, stops by for the semester on sabbatical. Attempting to help Cable's uncle work through the trauma of losing his wife, Dahlia uncovers the man's collection of board games, which leads to him reminiscing about the long-forgotten Luna Lane Games Club.

Dahlia reestablishes Games Club, only to find evidence of a number of horrible demises connected to the original group. While trying to uncover the truth about the deaths, Dahlia has to fight off her curse, protect her elderly neighbor from becoming the next victim, and most vexing of all, keep Cable from figuring out Luna Lane's supernatural secrets. Only with eerie board games like these, there may not be a loser—or even a winner—who survives.

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About the Author

Amy McNulty is an editor and author of books that run the gamut from YA speculative fiction to contemporary romance. A lifelong fiction fanatic, she fangirls over books, anime, manga, comics, movies, games, and TV shows from her home state of Wisconsin. When not reviewing anime professionally or editing her clients' novels, she's busy fulfilling her dream by crafting fantastical worlds of her own.

[Sign up for Amy's newsletter](#) to receive news and exclusive information about her current and upcoming projects. Get a free YA romantic sci-fi novelette when you do!

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