

Spellbound

Ann Charlotte

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In the supernatural novel Spellbound, passionate lovers are tied to each other across time because of happenstance magic.

In Ann Charlotte's romance novel *Spellbound*, a widowed photojournalist discovers her connection to a Confederate ghost.

After the loss of her husband, Claire, a Canadian, decides to take a working vacation with her children to the Shenandoah Valley. Claire enjoys the long road trip, but the closer she gets to Virginia, the more she feels an intense pull to it. She follows this feeling to an abandoned estate where she experiences vivid recollections. She decides to rent the estate and dig deeper in the hopes of crafting an engaging article.

Soon, a friendly Confederate ghost appears to Claire's children, and found photographs depict a family identical to her own. Claire's dreams become akin to memories of a steamy romance between a previous resident, Clarissa, and her husband, Charles, a soldier in the Civil War. Claire soon believes that she's the reincarnation of Clarissa—and that the estate harbors more secrets than she first realized: Clarissa, who learned magic from her grandmother, cast a makeshift spell that bound her to her husband's spirit throughout time.

Moved along by magic and historical details that are shared in an expository manner, as when Civil War tour guides deliver detailed monologues about the era, this is an often ambiguous novel. Its epic romance is shrouded in mystery: Charles lingers and interacts with people in the present; Clarissa, in casting her spell, didn't understand what she was doing. To somewhat bridge the gap, Clarissa's grandmother's Cajun practices are addressed in mystical terms.

After Claire opens herself to Clarissa's memories and the two become one, though, Claire too often waylays the story with her flashbacks. She unlocks Clarissa's memories within her on repeat, reveling in new sensory experiences of Clarissa and Charles's nineteenth-century life. She relishes in reignited feelings of deep passion for Charles, resulting in steamy and sensual passages. Her recalled memories are so dense, though, that they impede the book's progression. Further, a subplot related to hidden gold dilutes the tale. But near the end of the book, a sense of urgency returns when Claire discovers that the force that binds Charles to her could be fleeting after all.

In the supernatural novel *Spellbound*, two passionate people tied together by magic confront their mortality after a century apart.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 7, 2024)

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