

BEWITCH

A Children of the Apocalypse Story

By Skyla Dawn Cameron

“And I just don’t know what to do!” The middle aged woman, perched on the edge of the couch, wiped at her face. Tears traversed the aged lines around her eyes, snaked down her cheeks, and then gathered at her jaw where they fell in fat drops onto her shirt. The royal blue blouse had about a dozen dark wet spots on it now.

Krysta Guerin regarded her from the divan opposite the couch, legs crossed over one another and fingers tapping her knee. She was quite certain sobbing wouldn’t solve the woman’s problems, but then she’d made a point of never drawing attention to the obvious with a client. Condescension rarely paid the bills.

“It’s been two months,” the woman—Amelia, Krysta believed her name be—continued. “It’s never gone on this long before. He always comes back to me. I just know that tramp has something to do with it.”

And nothing to do with the fact that you’re desperate and keep accepting him back again and again. Some women never learned.

“And what would you like me to do?” Krysta said.

Amelia’s dull brown eyes locked with Krysta’s, a spark of fury in their depths. “I want him back and I want her dead.”

Not asking for too much, I see. “That’s a little out of my realm of expertise.”

“Oh, no, it can’t be.” Amelia shook her head emphatically. “I heard that you’re the best—that you can do anything.”

I can...for those who can pay. If Krysta had a dime for every poor idiot that came through her door begging for someone to love her, or to kill a rival, or to curse an employer, perhaps she could retire away from Newhaven. But she’d never work for so little.

“Please,” Amelia begged.

“What you’re asking for is very dangerous,” Krysta said, her face dead serious. “And very wrong. I *can’t* kill people. That goes against every spiritual code there is.” *Not to mention the limit on your bank account by the look of that outfit.*

“But...can you make him love me? Make him come back to me?”

Krysta shook her head. “Coercive love spells are also out of the question. And he wouldn’t be back because he *loved* you. It would be like living with a zombie. It wouldn’t be real. You can’t *make* someone love you.”

Amelia’s lower lip trembled and her voice fell to a whisper. “I just want him back. I don’t care if it’s true or not, I just want him with me.”

Pathetic.

“The supplies for such a spell are very costly,” Krysta said. “It’s nothing I have on hand.”

“How costly?”

“Think of a number between one and ten.”

Amelia nodded. “Okay.”

“Now add at least four zeros.”

The woman paled and a little, “Oh,” barely passed her lips. Amelia bowed her head and chewed on this new information for a bit, and for a moment Krysta almost thought she’d go for it. At last she looked up again, a sense of cautious hope to her eyes. “What can I get for about two hundred?”

Figures. Krysta stifled an annoyed sigh, plastered on a fake smile, and stood. “Get a photo of him—and your chequebook—and return to me on the afternoon of the new moon in six days. We’ll cast a spell to draw him back to you.”

“Oh, thank you so much!” Amelia rose as well and ran to Krysta to clasp the witch’s hands in her own.

Krysta stiffened at the contact, but continued to smile as she casually wiggled her hand loose. She watched Amelia gather her purse and head for the door. She’d cook up the usual for the woman—a little candlelight, a little incense. The chick’s boyfriend would probably come home on his own, but she’d add some magical kick-in-the-butt to get him back sooner. The pay wasn’t great, but she did have a certain reputation to cultivate, and she liked having her name out there. Happy clients were usually good at spreading the word.

Just as Amelia exited, the buzzer by the front door sounded. It was the middle of the day and Krysta hadn’t been expecting any more visitors. A “no solicitations” sign on the front door usually kept people away; she hadn’t so much as encountered an Avon lady in the year since she’d lived in Newhaven.

“Yes?” Krysta said as she pressed the button below the intercom.

“It’s Michael.”

She held back a smug smile as she buzzed him inside. *Took him long enough.* She’d spoken with his little witch a day earlier and she’d expected him there that night, but perhaps he felt like drawing it out. Couldn’t fault him for that. Still, she wasn’t pleased he took off so abruptly last Saturday night. She’d better make him grovel a little, or at least as much as Michael was capable of.

Krysta left the door open for him, and then sat on the couch while she waited for him to come upstairs. Pity she hadn’t had some warning; she had a cute teddy delivered the other day, and she would have liked to slip it on. Not like he ever noticed anything she wore, but Krysta liked it, and that was what mattered to her.

She heard his footsteps in the hallway, approaching her apartment and moments later he appeared in her doorway.

Krysta smiled. “I thought you’d be here sooner.”

Michael didn’t cross the threshold into the apartment. Krysta’s eyes locked with his and her heart sped up a little. Something was wrong... She retained her composure and waited as he suddenly fished something out of his back pocket.

He tossed the item onto the couch beside her. Krysta’s gaze flickered to the pendant she’d given the witch the day before. *Of course—I didn’t think he’d be terribly impressed about that.*

“What the hell did you think you were doing?” he said coldly.

With a bored sigh, Krysta folded the pendant and chain up in her hand, and then dropped it in the wooden box that sat on the shelf behind the couch. “Doing your friend a favour.”

“Leave her alone.”

Krysta's skin prickled at the order. Still, she played it calm. Played the smiles, the nonchalance. "*She* came to me, Michael. Maybe you should get her a leash."

"First you sent her to that fucking kid—and we both know what he's capable of—and now you're helping her with spells. This has to stop."

Her anger rose, but she gave him a casual shrug. "*You're* the one who told me what a powerful little witch you had on your hands." Krysta stood and strolled toward him. Her full lips fell into a playful pout. "Rethinking that position, are you? No reason for you to get so upset about *your* mistake." She paused just a step away from him. He looked down at her, rage-filled eyes fixed on her own. He could play mad all he wanted—she'd win him over. She always did.

"Leave her alone," he repeated.

Why so fixated on that witch of his? The goddamn child? This wasn't funny anymore. "Let me remind you once more: I didn't contact her in the first—"

"She doesn't need your influence."

My influence? Oh, this was rich. *She* was the corrupter now. What a concept.

"And what's so bad about me?" she asked. "Hmm? Maybe I could teach her a thing or two."

"Stay the hell away from her."

"Sounds like you're getting mad. Tell me, what's so special about her? Why is it you're so worried about someone corrupting her precious little brain?" She waited to see if her bait would work; if he'd reveal anything she knew he'd been keeping from her.

"If she comes to you again, send her away."

Krysta grinned and reached for him, her fingers running over his arms. He'd give in to her sooner or later. There's no way this was a social call.

Still, she played along, and gazed up at him with a mix of innocence and wickedness. "Or what?"

"Or I'll kill you."

That was a little rougher than she'd usually go for, but like anything else in life, Krysta was game. "I'm starting to think I might find it interesting to see you try..."

His arms snapped out and fingers wrapped around her wrists. In one swift movement, he twisted her arms to a painful angle and she couldn't disguise the fact that he'd hurt her.

"No," he said in a low voice. "I actually don't think you would."

Krysta's chest rose and fell with anger. He couldn't do this—that's not how this was supposed to work. "Get the hell out of my apartment."

Michael let her go. His eyes were distant, cold. "With pleasure." He turned and left without another word, heading down the hallway toward the elevator.

Infuriated, Krysta stepped past the doorframe into the corridor and watched him go.

"This isn't over," she called.

She didn't hear whether or not he responded. Though she waited a few minutes longer, he didn't turn to come back to her—didn't bother even glancing in her direction.

Krysta stalked back into the apartment and slammed the door closed. She paced across the carpet, running her hands back through her hair. This wasn't supposed to happen. He'd come and go, sure, and she expected tempers to flare, but this? Arriving at her doorstep to tell to stay away from The Witch? Since when did some fucking ditzy teenager have more control over things than she herself did? No. She wouldn't accept it. Children of the Apocalypse or not; it didn't matter who the kid was. Krysta would not play second to anyone *ever* again.

She couldn't cool down. Couldn't calm herself. It all kept playing over and over again in her head.

What if he *didn't* come back?

"No, no, no...no!" She stormed through the apartment to the bathroom, where she knelt at the cupboard beneath the sink and threw open the doors.

Inside sat the same wax figure and circle of herbs that had been there for a year. A candle still burned, the flame flickering in the dark space under the counter. She changed the votive candle daily, never letting it burn out until a new one had been lit. Every fucking day. All to draw Michael Parris to her...

And he threatened to kill me, then left.

With a frustrated scream, she reached inside and tore the items out of the cupboard. Everything scattered across the clean white tile. The wax figure broke into several pieces and the black candle went out.

Krysta slumped on the floor in a heap, head buried in her hands. *It's not supposed to happen this way...*

She brushed away angry tears that hovered in her eyes. She could handle this; she'd handled worse plenty of times before. *Take a deep breath and think clearly. I'm better than this. I'm not giving up.*

She'd bring him back. It was that simple.

Krysta stood straight and smoothed her hair, all the while taking several deep breaths. Her step calm, she exited the bathroom to retrieve a broom and dustpan from the closet, then swept up the mess on the floor and deposited everything in the trash. From there, she moved toward her laptop, which sat in sleep mode on the end table next to the couch, with a particular contact in mind. A delivery of supplies was definitely in order.

I've spent too many years looking for him; I'll die before I let him go.

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The waning moon hung high in the clear sky over Krysta's apartment building. She sat cross-legged on the tar roof beneath the stars, facing the east where Michael's house lay. Though she could see over much of Newhaven from her position, she couldn't see his place. Still, she knew where it was.

A dark red, silk cloth lay on the ground in front of her along with two lit pillar candles. The items required for spell casting were arranged on the cloth: John the Conqueror root; a spool of red thread and red bag; several jars of various powdered substances; a piece of parchment; and items belonging to her target. Yes, she seemed to have everything.

Before starting the ritual, Krysta had one final ingredient to prepare. Standard Goofy Dust was fine for the average client, but not for her purposes. She opened a jar that contained a mix of sulfur, salt, and ground up bugs. The only thing left was dirt from a grave.

It couldn't be just any dirt, however. No, for something like this, she was supposed to have the dirt from the grave of someone who loved her.

The only trouble is, no one loves me. Not anymore...

She lifted another jar from the far corner of her set up and held it up to her critical eye. No, she might not have the grave dust of someone who loved *her*, but she had that of someone who both loved *him* and was loved in return. It had to do the trick. It had taken her two years of combing the English countryside to find the grave she sought.

Anne's Parris's grave. Michael's wife.

She'd filled a large jar with the dirt that lay over the other woman's heart, knowing it would be of use to her one day. And now her supply was over half gone; she'd used it twice already when locating Michael, as well as when drawing him to her the first time a year ago. She tried to be sparing, but...

But I'll use it all if I have to.

She shook most of the remaining dirt from Anne's grave into the jar of other ingredients, then shook the mixture together into Goofer Dust and left it on the cloth within reach.

After writing Michael's name over and over again on the parchment along with the words of her spell, she put a slice in the small round root and stuffed inside it the personal items of his she'd collected. Hair. Semen. Dirt lifted from his footprint. A square of fabric cut from a pillow case that had been drenched in his sweat. Dried blood scraped from beneath her nails. The final bit was the Goofer Dust, which she sprinkled among the other items.

"Make him return to me," she whispered to the dust, willing it to do her bidding. "Make him love me."

When everything had been fit in the tiny slit, she set it aside. Next, she took the knife and drew it over her palm, letting the blood drip on the parchment.

She envisioned him returning to her apartment, walking through her door, following her to her bedroom. She closed her eyes and felt him again, moving atop her, surrendering to her only. She pictured him there, burning for her. Just her.

The parchment now soaked in her blood, she put the stuffed root in the center of it and molded the paper around it. Taking the new spool of red thread, she started wrapping the package again and again until the "jack ball" was completely covered. She left off a length of thread at the end and pinched it between her fingers so the thread-wrapped root hung below.

"Michael Parris, love me or die," she whispered and she swung the ball back and forth. "Michael Parris, love me or die. Michael Parris, love me or die. Michael Parris, love me or die..."

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Krysta sat in front of her coffee table with her client, Amelia, and finished the final words of the spell.

"Sprinkle this around your bed," she said as she handed the older woman a small sachet filled with a special powder. "As well as over the thresholds in your house. Bury this package," she gestured to the small bag in the centre of the table that held an egg and a few personal items belonging to the target, "by your front step. Within a few weeks, he'll be back."

"Oh, thank you!" Amelia said as she gathered the items up. "Thank you so much!"

Krysta smiled coolly as she watched the woman put everything in her purse and walk to the door. *Just so long as your cheque doesn't bounce.* Thank god she made her living dealing items on the supernatural black-market—if she had to rely on the petty cash her occasional clients provided, she'd starve in no time.

With that final appointment over, Krysta moved out of the living room and toward her bedroom. Beneath her pillow sat the small red bag that held the jack ball. She pulled out the magical item, sat on the edge of the bed, and closed her eyes.

Nearly a week had passed since the initial casting, and yet nothing. She repeated the spell every day. Bid him return to her. But he hadn't.

It would be easy to give up. Spells never took this long to work—not for her. She’d put everything she had into it, and yet he hadn’t come yet. But she had to have faith. Had to keep believing he’d come.

“Michael Parris,” she whispered as she swung the jack ball by its thread. “Love me or die.”

It had to work. She’d done the coercive spell for other clients and it always got them what they wanted. The desired lover *had* to come back—he or she would be sick and die otherwise.

You will love me or die...

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Late that night there was a knock at her door.

Krysta’s heart thudded in her chest as she looked up from the book she’d been reading. Her gaze fixed on the door and she held her breath for a few beats, waiting to see it had been just her imagination or not.

A second knock sounded, though it was more of an insistent pounding this time.

She closed the book, set it on the coffee table, and rose from the couch. The security door downstairs kept out unwelcome visitors—who the hell got in there to bang on her door at eleven o’clock at night? Sure, she wanted it to be him. Prayed it would be him. But she’d been let down far too many times to let herself believe it just yet.

Krysta padded toward the door to her apartment, threw back the lock, and opened it.

Michael stood in her doorway. His green eyes were fixed on hers, boring into her—looking right through her, it seemed. He smelled like whiskey and looked pissed off.

He knows, was her first thought. Somehow, he’d figured out what she did. Maybe the witch told him. Maybe he just—

He stepped forward suddenly and grabbed her. One hand slid around the back of her head and tangled in her hair, and then he jerked her face toward his. His lips mashed against hers and she opened her mouth to the welcome fire. He almost never kissed her—seemed like the type who’d find it too intimate. She seemed to have him now, though...

But no, she didn’t feel him there *with* her, or so she realized suddenly. He was angry. Trying to forget something—trying to lose himself.

Then I’ll help him, she thought as she yanked her blouse open. Buttons flew in all directions, striking the floor around the apartment. It didn’t matter *why* he was there, just as long as *he was there*.

Everything else would come in time.

Love me or die...

Michael kicked the door closed behind him.