

# A Witch's Power

Shelley absentmindedly watched the spoon in the kettle stir the brew. A flick of her wrist sped the mixing up just a tad more as she mulled over her dilemma. It wasn't much of a brew, simple ingredients, a few worms, a gecko, some wormwood, and a stray set of rat guts. Still one had to keep the fire consistent and the mixture loose or another catastrophe like last February could happen. Shelley shuddered at the thought of that accident and the cleanup afterward. It was such a mess. Katrina, her cat, still steered clear of the south garden.

Halloween was coming. Shelley didn't have to look at the calendar, she could feel it in her bones. A sigh escaped her lips. She used to revel in the day. Halloween, a chance to be herself. Black cats, pumpkins, candy, and frightened children. Oh the frightened children, they were always the best. A little girls terrified squeal or the little bully running in place unable to fight or flee. Shelley cackled to herself over the many images of the children she had tricked on this night of nights.

Of course Sam was always beside her. Shelley and Sam and Halloween it was if the force of nature has made a perfect pairing. Of course Sam knew she was a witch. He always knew. Even when she didn't understand or know what was happening, Sam knew and helped her through all of it. The Goth clothes and dark period in High School, the naughty nakedness of college, and even the rage of her twenties as she came of age and accepted her full powers. Sam was always there, never questioning, always supporting.

Shelley remembered when she had confronted her own powers. The day before the acceptance and the understanding of who she was. It was a horrible Halloween day. Rain fell the whole day and mud covered the landscape. The grass that she had tried to grow through the year on that solemn patch of land shrank in embarrassment from her efforts leaving nothing to show but barren hard scabble dirt. Dirt that the rain had now turned to the slithering mass of mud. The decorations she had placed so carefully were now a motley mess. The pumpkins were folding in on themselves as they molded into a full decay.

Shelley sat on the top of the porch stoop with her head in her hands and cried. She had worked so hard to have a cool Halloween, to really celebrate, and now everything was ruined. She was wearing an old black dress, leggings with alternating strips of orange and black, and a pointed hat that now hung forlornly in her fist.

Shelley smiled as she remembered him walking towards her with a ratty old broom. Not just ratty, but god awful. It was little more than a long black stick with a bundle of black twigs tied to one end. Her memory lingered here for a moment. Geez, Sam was handsome. Six foot something, long full blonde hair, and the bluest eyes she had ever seen. And his body! Oh dear. Let's just say his daily workout fully defined the more important parts.

Shelley warmed herself at these memories' and snuggled a little more towards the fire keeping the kettle hot. Her toe's wiggle uncontrollably as they reached out for the heat of the flames.

She remembered Sam had looked at her from a rain drenched face and snickered. That snicker was the last straw and she just couldn't take anymore. Her emotions exploded and so did her world. Everything stopped. I mean everything. Not a raindrop fell, not a muscle on Sam's face moved or twitched. The flames on the candles in the windows didn't move in the wind. Heck there was no wind, no sound, no anything. Shelley was in shock. First she was scared, then she thought she might have

died, then she worried about Sam, then wondered how she was going to fix this and then she really got anxious and nervous.

The loud whoosh on the top of the porch grabbed her attention. Really she didn't know if it was that loud or only loud because there wasn't any other sound. Still in the moment it took to hear the sound a woman dressed in an exquisite black ankle length silk dress, complete with matching heels and hat stood on her very porch. That was when she met Jasmine.

"A little too much all at once, dear?" Jasmine asked.

Shelley had stuttered and stumbled but finally gathered her voice.

"Who are you?" She asked still more than a little bit startled.

"My name is Jasmine and I am tonight's sentinel."

"Sentinel?"

"Yes dear. Many witches' come of age on Halloween. Just the way it is. Nothing to be ashamed of or worry about. But without a guide or someone to keep an eye on things, you know a sentinel, things can get out of hand. So I am tonight's sentinel and you, my dear, are my first for the evening."

"First what?" Shelley asked.

"Why, new witch as it were. That is if you want to be." Jasmine smiled.

Jasmine began to look around and take in what was before her. A smile crossed her face as she looked at Sam.

"I think that is quite enough, Sam. We don't need to overwhelm her any more that she is." Jasmine said as she winked at Sam.

Shelley turned and saw Sam shrug and wink back at Jasmine. Everything was still frozen except her, Jasmine, and Sam. Sam moved toward Shelley slowly. She backed up just a little, but his comforting smile held her close.

"Didn't want to shock her anymore that she was. They can be dangerous at times like these as you are well aware. Besides I knew you would be along shortly." Said Sam.

"What the hell is going on?" Shelley asked rather pointedly.

"Well, maybe we should get on with it." Jasmine replied. Then with a flick of her wrist and a snap of her fingers everything began to move again. "Let's go inside. I'm sure we can find a nice hot toddy to drink while everything is explained."

And inside they went. Jasmine explained in summary that witches reach their coming of age at about 28 or 29 years old. Usually around Halloween their latent powers become so focused that they explode into the witch's reality and have the ability to become a permanent part of her existence. She can become, in simple terms, a practicing witch. Of course it is always a choice. A witch can choose to not become a practicing witch in which case the powers return to a latent form. It was all so straight forward and in some ways clinical. Shelley hung onto Sam's arm through the whole narrations.

"Why wasn't Sam affected by my outburst?" Shelley asked.

"My mom's a practicing witch. She protected me." Sam replied.

"Then you have always known? About me, I mean." Shelley had asked.

"Well pretty sure. But I wasn't positive until tonight. That is why I brought the broom."

"That piece of crap? That's a broom? It couldn't sweep the leaves off a porch." Shelley grinned.

"It's a witch's broom, my dear." Jasmine said. "Not supposed to be used for sweeping. It is a very powerful tool if you accept your gifts. Especially this one."

"Why this one?" Shelley asked as she took the broom into her hands.

"It is blessed with the power of a practicing witch and given in the name of love." Jasmine replied as she looked at Sam.

Shelley turned and looked at Sam. She looked at him for what seemed an eternity. She saw all the times he held her up and stood for her when all around fell. She remembered his touch at her darkest times and his strength when she needed it. All given without charge or requirement. She felt ashamed of her ignorance. What she had been looking for had always been in front of her. She began to cry and sway. Sam had taken her into his arms and held her steady.

"You never said anything." Shelley whimpered.

"He shouldn't have to." Jasmine replied.

Sam just held her close. She looked up at him and saw the tender desire in his eyes. She raised herself on tiptoe and for the first time kissed him as hers. Jasmine waited a moment then coughed a small cough. Shelley and Sam turned towards her.

"Time to make the decision, my dear."

Shelley knew without doubt and that night became a practicing witch. Sam never left her side again. Shelley's memories failed at the crack of a flame on one of the logs. She startled then looked towards the wall. Sam's broom was mounted just at the fireplace's edge. Shelley looked up from her gaze just as the clock began to strike seven.

"Oh hell, Jasmine will be here in an hour and I'm not near ready yet." Shelley moved from her perch and began fussing about the house.

"Still pinning dear. It has been two years. You should give yourself a break." Jasmine said as they made their way down the steps. Both had their brooms in hand.

"I know but Halloween just brings it back so hard. Doesn't seem like the season without him. I mean he was so creative. He knew how to mix my powers with the fun of the night." Shelley replied.

It had indeed been two years since Sam left her. Being a practicing witch doesn't protect you from reality. In some ways it makes it worse. Witches after all are just people with powers. Prejudices, jealousy, and power struggles still come with the territory. But now an angry opponent can do some serious harm. Some witches took the dark side of their powers very seriously. Most just enjoyed the day to day benefits of being one with nature. Jasmine and Shelley were definitely in the latter category. But Frances wasn't. She was decidedly the former. She also had little tolerance for those that weren't.

Francis. Just the name sent a shiver of hatred and fear down Shelley's spine. It was the bitch of a witch that took her beloved Sam from her. Jasmine put her arm on Shelley's.

"Calm down, girl. Just calm on down. Remember it's Halloween. Besides you don't know it was Francis. She disappeared the same night you lost Sam." Jasmine said while she looked in Shelley's eyes for some comfort.

Shelley began to calm down and drew deep breaths.

"Yes, Halloween. I am not going to let that bitch take Sam and my day away from me."

Shelley put on a smile and moved forward into the night. They were headed to a coven party. It was to be held in a large old mansion on the east side of town. Spookily located just next to an ancient cemetery with large old oaks and mausoleums dotting its landscape. The lights on the house were set just so to invite trick or treaters and those that made it past the scares were rewarded with some of the best candy.

"A house full of witches that dance, sing, eat candy and cakes, and like to scare kids for fun. How bad can this be." Squealed Shelley.

“That’s the spirit.” Jasmin laughed as they made their way down Main Street to the party.

The party was a hit. Twenty witches with spouses and a boat load of trick or treaters. There had been more than one blood curdling scream from the kids. Simple tricks like moving a tree branch just so or having a vine grab a leg just sent chills down many a goblins spine. Shelley began to find herself actually laughing. After a few hours the children stopped coming and the adult party really began. A muting spell was cast about the house so no one could hear the loud music and complain to the police. Candles were lit and hovered over the guests along with multiple jack-o-lanterns. Bats dive bombed the unsuspecting and black cats roamed the hallways. Shelley soon noticed that more than a few articles of clothing were thrown throughout the house and a conga line of women in questionable dress were dancing under the full moon.

As the full witching hour approached the music got louder, faster, and more intense. The dancing became a frenzy and every one was taken by the moment. In that instant, in that moment, just before the strokes of midnight Shelley’s mind grabbed the agonizing loss of her beloved Sam and everything stopped. Everything, every witch, warlock, cat, bat, and pumpkin froze solid in place. The music stopped and the quiet hit Shelley’s ears like a bomb. What shouldn’t happen, what couldn’t happen, happened.

“We aren’t supposed to be able to freeze other witches.” Shelly thought as she looked around the room.

Shelley moved from one room to the other. Everyone including Jasmine was frozen. Time had come to a standstill. Shelley didn’t know how she cast the spell and worse she didn’t know how to break it.

“Do you remember?” came a voice from out of nowhere.

The question was more of a whisper. But it burrowed into her brain. She could hear it clearly.

“Do you remember?” the voice asked again.

Shelley did remember and the tears began to flow down her cheeks. She didn’t want to remember this. She didn’t want to relive this memory, not now, not ever. But the voice demanded it and her mind went to the past.

She and her Sam were at their home. It was Halloween just two years past. The night wore a full moon and the leaves had long fallen. The branches of the trees looked like long arms reaching out to grab any unsuspecting passerby. Shelley had flipped her wrist just enough to let the large oaks branch reach out and grab Sam’s butt as he bent over to plant another jack-o-lantern. He jumped and yelled at her once more to let him be for just a few more minutes. Shelley laughed and promised no more tricks until later.

Shelley felt the cool air of that night fall across her face. She smelled the fading grass from outside and could see the lights from inside the pumpkins blink through the carved faces. It was as real right now to her as that night two years ago. But Shelley knew what was going to happen and the tears began to fill her eyes. She was inside getting the candy together. A horrible scream filtered in from the front lawn. Sam, her Sam, was hurt. Shelley ran to the front door and through it open. Sam staggered before her, a branch from the old oak thrust through his chest. He fell into her arms and died as she screamed in agony. His blood soaked her black dress. A loud cackle filled the air and Shelley looked up from her grief to see Francis bolt away on her broom.

Shelley stood up and screamed her name. She shot bolt after bolt of curses and spells towards her. But each and every one missed. Francis disappeared into the night. She ran back to her Sam and

held him until his mother and the coven came. After a few protection spells they called the police and the worst few days of her short life began to unfold. It had taken months to gather enough strength to join the world again. Another year before she had any semblance of normalcy. But her heart still ached for her beloved Sam. This party had been the first she had attended since his death. Now she had frozen time and was forced to live it all over again. Shelley broke down completely.

A black mist gathered before her as she wept. It had no form, no real substance. But it hovered just before her and seemed as to share her great grief. As she looked at it and stopped her crying the blackness inside it became a lighter shade, almost as if it was reacting to Shelley's each and every tear. Shelley's sobbing ceased and she reached out to the form. It slowly moved forward and softly enveloped her small hand. The feeling gave great comfort to Shelley and she calmed down.

"See the truth." The voice said and Shelley was transported back to that fateful day. This time as an observer.

Shelley saw Sam jump at the goose the limb gave her. She saw herself move back into the house. Then Jasmine appeared at the front gate. She appeared just like the first time she saw her on the front porch. She and Sam were exchanging heated words when Francis swirled into view. Francis wheeled onto Jasmine immediately. Sam moved forward to separate the two when Jasmine hexed a branch towards Francis. Francis moved to deflect it and bore the branch deep into Sam's chest. Shelley heard Sam's scream one more time then she was transported back to her current reality.

Shelley sat stunned. It was an accident. Jasmine was there. She and Sam were arguing. What about? Why? A darkened archway in the room shimmered and parted just like a curtain. Francis walked through and stood quietly before Shelley.

"You!" Shelley hissed and raised her arm to curse her. The mist wouldn't let go. Shelley struggled but was held still. Francis moved quickly towards Shelley.

"It wasn't me. It was an accident," Francis said quietly, almost in tears.

"Bull. You made this up. It is all fake. Jasmine would never." Shelley shouted.

"How? How could I have made this up? How could I have done this? You've been a practicing witch for 12 years. How could any one of us make this happen? Only love can stop all time. You know that." Francis shouted in tears and anger.

Shelley stood dumbstruck. Francis was right. Only love can stop all time for everyone. Suddenly the mist on her arm became a hand. It formed into an arm then a shoulder. Sam formed in front of a shaken Shelley.

"Hey witch." Shelley heard him in her head. It was her Sam. She moved to embrace him and she fell through his form. The mist parted and then reformed, a sad look fell over his face.

"But why?" Shelley asked. She looked at both Francis and Sam. Her heart breaking once again.

"You're in trouble, pumpkin. Listen to Francis, please." Sam's ghost pleaded hauntingly inside her head. Shelley looked expectantly toward Francis.

"Jasmine has been using her position as a sentinel to grow her powers. Many of us thought so for a long time, but it was Sam that got the proof. When you came of age Sam made sure he was there. He suspected Jasmine would try to convince you to avoid practicing the arts. If you agreed, Jasmine would have offered to 'help' you through the transition. But her help would have been nothing more than a transfer of your powers to her.

Jasmine wasn't looking at Sam when you froze time on your porch. She was looking at the broom. The gift of a witch's broom is strong. A broom claims the witch. Once Sam had brought the

broom to you, your gifts were sealed only to you by the broom. Jasmine had no power to take your gifts. Sam was protecting you even when you didn't know it."

"What was the argument about? Why did she hurl a branch towards you?" Shelley asked.

"Sam was going to present to the Council. He was trying to have her sentinel ranking revoked. Jasmine was furious. I came to defend Sam. My presence only made matters worse. Jasmine exploded and hurled that branch to me not knowing I was defended the same as Sam."

"The same as.... What do you mean?" Asked Shelley.

"I am Sam's aunt. Sam's mother protected all the family from Jasmine with her spells, even me. But once the branch hit my charm it ricocheted towards Sam. At that point, it was no longer guided by Jasmine's spell, but his mother's. The branch pierced his protections and his heart.

Jasmine saw what happened and dis-apperated immediately. I tried to stay and help Sam, but it was too late. That was when you came out screaming and cursing at me. I ran and hid. There seemed nothing else to do until Sam came to me."

Sam hovered over both Francis and Shelley. Shelley looked toward him and smiled.

"Always looking out for me. Always there." A tear fell as Shelley spoke the words.

"Always." The words formed in her mind as the ghostly Sam smiled back.

"But how? I didn't know spirits could do this." Shelley asked as she focused her thoughts on Francis.

"Hell, I don't know either. I know spells, curses, even dark magic. But I have no idea about spirits and sure as hell obviously no nothing about love. All I know is Sam came to me in a quiet moment and said he needed my help. He said you were in danger."

"How? How am I in danger?"

"Halloween night. The witching hour. You know it is the most powerful hour of the year for a witch. It is also the night she is most vulnerable. It is the one night and the one hour that a witch's broom can be broken by the right spell given by a powerful witch. When the broom is broken the witch's power can be taken and the witch ended." Said Francis.

"But why me? Jasmine and I are friends." Shelley cried.

"Jasmine is friend to no one but herself." Shelley heard the words and knew. She looked up towards Sam. He was beginning to fade away.

"Our time is short, reality returns. Be careful Shelley. Sam and I will be near, but there is little we can do." Francis said as the music started to break through and time rewound around her. Shelley blinked and her world and her time had returned. It was just minutes before the chimes of the witching hour fell from the clock in the hall. Revelers were dancing and singing all around. It was a mad house of fun and debauchery as only witches and warlocks could conceive.

Shelley moved to the front hallway and summoned her broom. It flew into her hands and glowed warmly at her touch. Shelley found the glow of the moon flooding in from the open doorway. She kneeled with her broom in her hands and began the chant. As the hall clock tolled its sixth chime and moved closer and closer to twelve Jasmine appeared. Shelley's pose was all she needed to know that her deception was over.

"Where is that little bitch? Where is Francis, you little whore?" Jasmine screamed. Her once sedate façade dropped away and the evil that was within was released. Jasmine's face turned green with envy. Her eyes burned with anger. Her whole body seemed to grow as she towered over the small witch and her broom. Curse after curse was hurled towards Shelley. The room erupted into flames.

But Shelley held and kneeled and chanted. The curses blocked by her own spells. The clock chimed seven, then eight, then nine times. Jasmine reached to the sky and pulled down the heavens to punish this imp, this girl, this nothingness. The screams brought more magic to bear and the witches and warlocks from the party gathered in awe at the power unleashed towards Shelley. Each in turn held firm in fear to intervene in her imminent destruction. As the clock chimed 10 times, then 11 Jasmine moved to the doorway her back towards the moon above. Jasmine raised her broom to strike just as the clock chimed its 12<sup>th</sup> time, the witching hour had come.

In one fluid motion Shelley rose to her feet pointed her broom towards Jasmine and screamed "Rectify, return, restore." Jasmine froze in place, her features as though permanently fixed in angry and hateful pose. Then creaking could be heard. Like an old door opening at last. First one twig fell off Jasmine's broom, then another and finally in the broom itself created a thunderous roar. A blinding light split the night and Shelley could feel the heat of a hot furnace brush past her skin. Then quiet. It just became increasingly and very quiet. Jasmine was no longer there, just a pile of ash and twigs gathered at the front door. Soon a breeze brushed even that trace away. And in from the night walked Francis.

"Well done, Shelley." Francis said as she embraced her.

"Thanks', aunty." Shelley replied with a giggle.

Francis wagged her finger at Shelley.

"Now we will have none of that." She grinned and turned her attentions to the house guests. "Anyone have a drink?"

And as quick as that the music began again. The bats dive bombed the guests into the house. Pumpkins danced and cats meowed. Reality had returned. But so did Shelley's great appreciation and wonder about the power of love.

Shelley moved out on to the front porch and onto the front lawn. She couldn't see him. Spirits were way out of her league. But she knew he was there. She sat down on the grass next to a tree bathed in moonlight. Her faithful broom at her side. It was quiet and a bit cold. But as Shelley sat on the naked ground her arms became warm and her body snuggled against an unseen, but familiar form. She smiled. She knew her Sam was there. He had always been there and would always be there.