

Equinox Society Radio 007

My Dear Strangers,

Tonight's episode comes entirely from society member Amanda Cress.

Amanda writes:

Hi, listeners.

I'm having a sad summer, and Dennis and I both know other people having sad summers, and probably some of you are sad-summery, too. So here comes Amanda's Sad Summer Witchcraft Episode.

I usually love talking about myself but suddenly not so much lately, which I guess is pretty normal with depression or whatever it is this is. I hear myself talking about being sad and it's like listening to somebody I don't really like. It makes me feel worse, and like I'm bad for other people. But I think sometimes the trick is talking anyway, and other times it's OK to be quiet, and sometimes it's just getting out of myself completely and paying attention to somebody else for a change.

My slump started with Janet and the growling fires. I told the whole story back in Episodes 001 and 002. The short version is that I used magick to solve a mystery, but in the end a woman died because I didn't think ahead. I'd been so dazzled by my own spellwork, thinking I had everything under control, but then I didn't have the smarts and skills where it mattered. I've second-guessed myself ever since.

So much of witchcraft and magick and *any* kind of work relies on belief. Not just cosmic prayer-and-power deity belief, either, but self-belief. And after Janet died, I lost my self-belief and started playing everything super-safe and vanilla. Now I'm screwing up even minor spells and rituals, and every screwup twists onto the previous screwups, and so in one summer, I've gone from doing heavy-duty spellwork really well to messing up my own recipe for tea.

It's got me way down, like I can't even start making up for Janet's death because I can't do anything right. I'm getting stressed about the spritziest little failures and mistakes. I feel like I need some totally mega win to balance things out, but all that does is add more pressure. Like, "Hey, it's OK your doodles are bad, just paint a masterpiece and you'll be awesome."

What's the worst is that I'm making the right moves and trying crazy hard to think the right things, trusting my instincts and following good advice and isn't working. If insanity's doing the

same thing and expecting something different, and all the good things lead to the same bad results, should I do the wrong thing? Should I *not* trust my instincts?

Like here's an example. William had a creepy slow ghost stalking him around his house, and whenever he didn't see the ghost, its influence somehow made him lower his defenses. Eventually the ghost caught him unprepared and touched his hand and broke two of William's fingers. He called me for help and I was so excited. I'd been having a super-sad night, and when I got his call, my entire mood went solar because I hadn't felt useful in weeks, and here was a perfect chance to work some magick and focus on somebody else.

Plus I've been crushing on William for ages, which is safe to say out loud because he doesn't listen to the podcast. He got his *heart* broken by a different ghost last year—that whole story's coming out as an audiobook in October—and so I haven't asked him out or flirted or even seen him as much as I want, because I'm trying to respect his emotional bubble. But so anyway, I was thrilled he called and I rushed right over.

I wrapped up his broken fingers with a poultice, gave him a cup of healing tea, and helped him talk it all through. I felt like a good witch and a good friend. I'd made the right moves and I didn't feel sad for the first time in days, and it was just such a relief, like finally getting out of some heavy, sickening humidity. I felt like I could breathe again. And then I messed up.

The ghost that hurt William's fingers wasn't definitely gone, so I cast a temporary protection spell to keep him safe. The spell was pretty trad, but I like to play and improvise, and I was too flashy and totally overcooked it. When the spell was done, William was surrounded by a strong, invisible sphere. He was visible, but any person or creepy ghost would get too distracted and self-involved to notice he was there. Including me.

So all night long, he couldn't get my attention, no matter what he tried. He said it was like being with a sleepwalker. He figured out what had happened and didn't take my obliviousness personally, and when the spell finally wore off around dawn, he was so nice and had such a good sense of humor about it. He said he'd spent the night telling jokes, pantomiming, juggling right in front of me. He thanked me for keeping him safe and fixing his fingers. He even complimented my spellwork. And then he made me *breakfast*, and it all made me feel so pathetic and embarrassed.

I guess it's funny in retrospect now, and I did heal his fingers, but it put me off magick for a whole week after. Plus having pancakes with him sent my crush into warp drive, so now I'm scared to ask him out and have it go wrong, and I've been Bumbling into random dates to build my confidence back up.

Claire says app-dating's like going to a bar with a blindfold on, and for a while you think it's going OK, and then you take the blindfold off and there's a weird naked person throwing darts at your face. Claire actually likes the unpredictability. I don't. But I'm not meeting datable people in person, and I'm not happy by myself lately, and I know it's bad advice to get a

boyfriend to feel better about myself, but I've had such depressing luck with good advice, I might as well try something else.

But then I go on apps and look and look and can't decide, and even if my profile had a picture of a slug, I'd get a hundred guys sending messages like, "Hey, what's up your ooze trail is hot", and even if there's somebody perfect hiding in there, there's waaaay too many to sort through. So I invented a dating-app spell. Before I tried using it, I decided to charge myself up and started with repurifying my temple.

I share an apartment with my friend Katie, so my temple is my bedroom. It's the only private space I have. I've made it as good as I can with my bed and dresser and everything else crammed into the room. My circle's in the empty part of the floor, my supplies are in a cabinet, and I keep my altar off to the eastern side of the room, hidden by a curtain, and take it out whenever I need it.

So I scrubbed my walls and ceiling and floor with sea-salt water and did my purifying ritual on the night of the new moon. I treated myself to incense and a gorgeous new libation dish, because shopping to feel better is bad advice, too, but why not. It usually at least works in the short-term.

The next night I consecrated my circle and cast my dating-app spell. I thought if it really worked, I'd be a wealthy witchy hero to about a million people. What the spell does is trance me into this meditative state where I can swipe through all the nos in a kind of happy daze, with none of the fatigue and grossouts and fritzzy manic dread. But then my senses sharpen up whenever a good possibility appears. It seemed to work. I happily swiped past a few hundred no-guys and zeroed in on two promising yes-guys.

My date with the first one was fine, I guess. He was handsome and dressed well—Stitchfix, I think—and he was a real listener and treated me great. But when we made out, he kissed boring. Like he'd spent a lot of time reading how to kiss in men's magazines, and it was pretty on-point but over-technical somehow. And then I realized everything he'd said and done that night had been the same way—really textbook and nice and diligently practiced—and the thought of sleeping with him or even trying another date was like when I start an OK book, and I read twenty pages and plan to finish it later, and then I just totally forget it's on my bookshelf forever.

But the dating-app spell seemed to be a success. The first date had been a solid B-minus, and I hoped the second guy would have all the first guy's plusses *and* that he could make my bellybutton spiral. Good conversation and a good makeout. Such a basic ask.

But he was so incredibly awful. He showed up late and didn't apologize. There was almost a *visible* mist of sport cologne around him, and he had those tense, beady eyes that some guys get when they're angry and their looks are like miniature punches. Before he finished his first beer, and he drank *fast*, he managed to belittle Charli XCX, witchcraft, vegetarians, and the

bartender. He talked at me the whole time. I almost just left, but instead I went to the ladies' room and I did some focused breathing, and then I went back out and tried to make the most of the situation.

I wanted to hone my sense of who to avoid on future dates, because I'd obviously missed some burning red flags, so I peppered him with questions and encouraged him to talk about himself even more. I soaked him in as much as I could, like I was memorizing the exact smell of a certain kind of poison.

Then I did something I'm not proud of. I led him on, and let him get a really solid buzz, and then I subtly hexed him. He was so self-absorbed, he didn't notice me tracing symbols on the table and mumbling the incantation. When the hex was done, I finished my drink and told him what I thought of him.

He got so angry it was scary, and he started insulting me just like I'd expected him to do. Except the hex made his insults directed at himself. So instead of saying, "You're a bitch" and "You're not even that hot in person," he said, "I'm a bitch" and "I'm not even that hot in person", loud enough for people around us to hear. He didn't realize he was doing it, and he sat for five minutes, publicly degrading himself.

I shouldn't have done it. I should have just left. Because the stuff he said was horrible and incredibly mean, and even though he kept addressing it all to himself, I knew he was *really* saying it all to me. And the part that me feel the worst is that I basically assaulted him, and whether or not he deserved it, I ended up feeling a little like *him*.

Magick fail, dating fail, Amanda fail. And if all that wasn't enough to make my summer feel cursed, there's one more thing that happened two days ago.

It's about my roommate Katie's boyfriend Chad. That's his real name, not even kidding, and he's the Chadiest Chad you've ever met, no offense to all the nice Chads in the world, I'm sure they exist.

Real quick about my apartment, it's a two-bedroom I share with Katie, who I met back in college. Katie's OK but she's dated Chads nonstop as long as I've known her. Her current Chad lives in his parents' furnished garage, which is so nice it's like a really great house, and he's an HR manager and pubcrawls with his coworkers every Friday and makes a big deal about he's not all corporate because he plays bass on weekends with a local band. They sound like the Dave Matthews Band if the Dave Matthews Band was a bunch of HR dudes who jammed on the weekends. Chad's kinda sexy, but kissing him would be like drinking a microbrew with a pretty label and discovering somebody dropped their cigarette in the bottle.

So anyway two days ago, I worked a ten-hour shift. Katie was visiting her Mom for the day, but Chad had slept over the night before and I guess he woke up in her room after Katie had left.

And he thought it was fine to hang at our apartment all day, and he invited two of his friends over to drink and play poker until Katie got back.

I got home from work exhausted. The apartment was empty and I was so relieved. All I wanted was to slide into a bubble bath and listen to Austra and realign and sleep.

I always lock my bedroom when I leave the apartment. But that day I forgot, and since Katie's room is always a mess and our kitchen's cramped, Chad and his friends decided my open bedroom was a good place to spend the day.

My altar is a round wooden table, and they dragged that into the middle of my circle to play poker. They left my candle and my Goddess and God statuettes toppled on the floor. They used my brand-new libation dish as an ashtray. One of them drank Fireball whiskey out of my horn goblet. There were empty Carlsberg cans, sticky beer spills, poker chips, and takeout bags everywhere. I'm pretty sure they looked through my supply cabinet and clothes drawers.

I was death-witch fury. I was fire and ash and dick-withering hexes. I wanted to punish them right away, and I was shaking so hard my eyesight blurred, and then I looked around the room and took it all in again, and all my wild energy spilled right out of me. I just climbed into bed and cried.

It turned out Chad and his friends had left before Katie got home, and they met Katie and her friends at a bar, and Chad and Katie didn't come home until late. I heard them go to her room and have sex and then I guess they fell asleep.

While I was home alone before they got back, I'd forced myself to stop crying, put some music on, and threw the garbage out. I rescrubbed the ceiling, walls, and floor with water and sea salt again. I put everything back in its place. I burned my new incense and got everything mostly back to normal, but I'll need to do another full purification at the next new moon.

After my space felt OK, I did the fertility ritual I invented for the Equinox Society summer kit. I hadn't done it since spring, and I wasn't exactly sure what I was aiming for—maybe just a feeling of fertility in general. Then I had a perfect night of sleep and the most amazing dream that my hair was sunlight, and it swirled around and dressed me in a warm, orange light and made things grow wherever I went.

The next morning, I went to a café and texted Katie and Chad pictures of my room from before I cleaned it up. Katie freaked. She doesn't believe in the craft but she knows how much it means to me, and either way it was *my room*, and I think she honestly felt terrible and she texted me long rambling apologies all day.

Here's how Chad replied, though: "Fuuuck Manda I'm an asshole. We were lit, were gonna clean up before you got home."

Then ten minutes passed, probably with Katie yelling at him but like not *actually* yelling at him, and he texts me this: “Your room’s locked. When you get home, I’ll clean up and Febreze everything. You back soon? I think I left my wallet in your room lol.”

He did. I had his wallet. Debit, credit, work ID, condoms. I thought about doing a hex so his condoms were always too big to wear. There’s two ways to work that hex, by the way—enlarging one thing or shrinking the other. But what if he was drunk and didn’t notice, or just decided to soldier through, and then it fell off and Katie wound up with an STI or a baby Chad, I’d never forgive myself. Plus I still regretted the insult hex from my second date. It’s not the me I want to be. So I gave him back his wallet and told him never to set foot in my room again.

I need a new place to live, with a whole new separate room to set up my temple. I need to turn my whole life around somehow.

Sorry I’m such a sad summer drag, podcast listeners. I usually love this season. I usually love all the seasons. I’m tired of making mistakes. I’m tired of being alone and feeling insecure. But I am all those things now, so I guess that’s Amandaland this summer, and I’m going to live here and do the best I can.

I’m going to end the episode tonight with the fertility ritual I invented. I hope you try it and it works.

xoxo
Amanda

P.S. Dennis fancied up the wording in the chapbook and it sounded all good and official, but I’m going to keep the wording looser. Here goes.

Fertility isn’t just about plants and babies. It’s any kind of flourishing or blossoming or growing. It might be a creative project, or a relationship, or a goal at work, or an idea about yourself. This ritual is only a guide, and you should substitute elements and steps however you think is best.

You can do the ritual alone. If you’re doing it with a partner, you don’t have to be naked and everything, but you should pay close attention to each other because you’ll unify your powers more.

Pick a time that feels right. Day if you’re a sun person, night if you’re a moon person.

Swallow an edible seed with a drink. Wine, juice, tea—any drink is fine.

Then get some dirt—I used a fresh bag of potting soil—and make mud. Mix herbs or spices or anything meaningful into the mud. I used raspberry leaf and bee pollen. Then spread the mud on your body and let it dry.

Find a special leaf or flower. Tie it to yourself with string or vine, maybe as a necklace or twined around your limbs.

Immerse yourself in water. It's good to do it outdoors in a lake, or maybe rain, but a bathtub is OK. Wash yourself and rinse all the mud off. If you're doing this with a lover, wash each other.

Leave the water and let yourself air-dry. While you're drying, do whatever acts, or say whatever words, that feel most aligned to the fertility you're hoping for. Visualize it. Really feel it. Pay attention to every detail and every one of your senses.

Don't rush. When the time feels right, and the seed you want to grow feels secure inside you, let your mind empty out until you're totally relaxed.

Then eat a piece of bread with a cup of water. If you don't eat bread, eat fruit. Take the flower or leaf you tied to your body and hang it from a high place, like a branch or an upper window, as a sign the ritual is done.

Keep nourishing the seed. Just because you planted something good doesn't mean it can't die. There aren't any guarantees or foolproof methods, because magick only works as well as a person works it. That's a good thing, though. The active element is you.

Equinox Society Radio is produced by Dennis Mahoney. New episodes appear sporadically.

Join our mailing list at EquinoxSociety.com, or follow The Equinox Society on Facebook and Instagram.

Our three-note theme is played by Jack Mahoney.

Imagine our closing song is "Spellwork" by Austra

Until next time, dear strangers... take care and look beyond.