

Gemini Witching: Elements 101

Roberta J Gordon

Sam 101

“Sam, wake up.”

I know I heard it, but man I didn't really want to wake up. I squeezed myself into a tighter ball becoming more aware of the cold concrete floor where I didn't want to be. I wanted to roll over, and this all be a bad dream. I wanted to burrow under my favorite blanket and hide from the world. Hide from what I knew I was about to face... again.

“Come on Sam, Vicki will be coming in that door any minute. You know she's not going to be happy to see you here again.” Thank God it was Beth who found me this time, I thought, as I rubbed my face with both hands trying to wake up. Stretching, I couldn't tell how long I'd been here this time. If hours, then how many? I remember sitting on my couch last night watching a late movie, and then nothing. I sat up leaning against the display counter that held all the food items the store carried, and then rubbed my face some more.

“Did you just get here?” I asked stifling a yawn.

“No, we've been here about twenty minutes,” Beth's voice came more distant this time. I could tell without looking she was at the drive through window with her back to me.

“And you just left me here?” I raised my head feeling the stiffness in my neck now.

“Listen we both know you've not been sleeping good, so I told Dale we'd let you sleep a little longer. Vicki's on early shift this morning, too, so you'll want to get up before she comes through the door.”

Trust Beth to be looking out for me, I thought, shaking my head to myself. I dropped my head again with my arms wrapped around my knees. I figured I could at least take a peek at what clothes I was wearing this time. When I caught a glimpse of denim, I let out a sigh. Oh my lucky stars. At least I was dressed.

That has been one of my bigger fears since I started waking up in odd locations. The most embarrassing one to date was waking up in the student lounge on campus in my pajamas, compounded by the fact that I then had to walk home. Luckily it had been early enough that traffic was light, and only the early commuters were entertained by my walking the streets ready for bed. Since that happened I tried to at least be aware of what I was wearing before I fell asleep. The only downfall today was I didn't have on my shoes. I was mentally giving myself a forehead slap when the bell to the front door dinged. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Beth stiffen, but she continued with what she was doing.

“Good morning, Vicki,” she and Dale called at the same time.

Dale was coming out of the store room and stepped wide around me on the floor. His movement drew Vicki's attention straight to where I sat.

“What's on the floor Dale?” she asked.

I could hear her footsteps coming in our direction.

“Oh, not much,” he replied.

You could always count on him to downplay any major activity. He could calm down the most irate customers, thus Vicki always wanted him working the morning shifts.

Commuter traffic in the City of Colleges was always heaviest from 6 a.m. until 10 a.m. Starbucks had multiple locations strategically located near the on ramps for the interstate. Our location, on Highway 65 North, was probably the busiest.

I sat there dreading Vicki walking around the counter, and I know I tensed my shoulders thinking I should go ahead and get this over with. “Good morning, Vicki,” I said with my head still hanging.

“Sam? Are you here again?” she asked, and her tone was light.

Huh?

“Yes ma’am. I guess I am,” I replied.

She came into view then with both hands on her hips. That’s all I could see, not wanting to look up and meet her eyes.

“Well, come on. I’ll take you home,” she said.

Glancing up I found she was checking the time on her watch.

“Beth, do you think you can handle opening until I get back? I’ll take Sam home and be right back.”

“Sure. Dale and I have it all under control,” Beth said, coming to stand by Vicki.

Dale joined the duo and leaned down to offer me a hand up. I took it along with a deep breath. I knew this was too good to be true. She was too calm.

Vicki didn’t say anything until she put the car into park in front of my apartment. “Sam, I don’t know what’s going on, but we can’t let this keep happening. This is the third time this week we’ve found you asleep in the store,” her voice was stern but concerned.

I nodded, looking straight ahead at my front door. I just wanted to get inside.

“Vicki, I’m real sorry. I don’t know how I got there either. I know I’m treading on thin ice, so I’ll start looking for another job,” I really didn’t want to lose my job. I loved working at Starbucks. Working there helped me with my caffeine fix as well as earning a paycheck.

“No, Sam, we’re not there yet, but it won’t be long before I won’t be able to help you out anymore. It’s time to get help. You need to see a doctor and get help with your sleepwalking,” she said in a lower voice, this time.

I glanced up at her, wondering how I was going to pull that off. This was finals week and I still had a couple of big tests left, not to mention my evening shift at the store. I started to enumerate the reasons why that wouldn’t work, but she placed her hand on my shoulder before the words could tumble out.

“Sam, no buts. I know money is tight and time is precious this week. If you want to still have a job, you have to do this. I want you to take the day off,” she said, holding up both hands as if to tell me to hush before I could sputter ‘no’, then continued, “and find a doctor. You bring me a note that says you’ve seen a doctor, and I’ll see about letting you come back to work tomorrow. You’ve been sleeping on that floor too much, so I know you’ve not had a good night’s sleep. This is not a request, Sam,” she finished, dropping her hands to grip the steering wheel.

I looked at her for a long time thinking of how to say what I really felt. She was being decent about this I knew, but I needed to work. My rent would be due in a few days and I needed that income.

“Vicki I’ve never been sick before...that I know of, so I don’t know any doctors here except for those I’ve met in the ER.”

“Well the ER won’t see you over this, Sam. You’ve got to see a GP.”

A what? I frowned at the dashboard then. I guess I could dig through the phone book and see if I could find anyone.

“Listen Sam, my family uses Dr. Hardin. He’s an older man, real nice. Look him up when you get inside and call to get an appointment after they open.” She was glancing at me sideways now.

I nodded and reached for the door handle dreading the draw on my bank account. “Thanks, Vicki. I mean it. You’ve been great about this and I really appreciate it.” Appreciate being made to spend my dwindling funds to go see a doctor so I could keep my job. Yeah, this was going to be a great day.

The doctor’s office, the paper gown, the scale... you know the drill. After the nurse had done her triage duties, I was left hanging in the breeze. At least that's what it always feels like to me when you’re kept there waiting. I wasn't even sure there was anything the doctor could prescribe for sleepwalking. Hell, I'm not sure why I had to wear the paper gown for the interview, exam, or whatever they want to call it. I’m not happy to be here, but I didn’t have a choice. My job was in jeopardy if I didn’t keep this appointment, so I was paying dearly for this visit.

College is a financial drain on most students I know. So while I didn’t have the money for this, I definitely couldn’t afford to be out of work. Thankfully, it's spring finals week and I know I can pick up more hours at work next week, which would help me rebound from this healthcare crisis, at least monetarily.

I was nervous, partially nude, and sitting in a paper gown... definitely not a happy camper. But like Vicki said, I had to endure this or be without a job. So I was stuck. Finally, there was a light tap on the door, followed by the doctor entrance.

“Samantha, how are you?”

Dr. Hardin was an older man, not overly tall and slightly slack skinned. He looked like a kindly grandfather, one you would see on a Saturday afternoon taking the grandkids to a movie. He extended his hand to shake, which felt clammy and puffy. Yuck! I was instantly wincing, wondering why I’d picked this man. Oh, yeah, my boss recommended him.

After greeting me, he sat on his little swivel stool and inquired about the reason for my visit. Some thirty minutes later, he was shaking his head. I, Samantha Carpenter, have the doctor baffled. I’m five foot five inches tall, thin, but not too much so. Let’s just say I have curves. I had never been sick in my life that I knew of. I have, however, had lots of accidents and have been to the ER several times with sprained ankles, cuts from accidental slips with a paring knife, and bicycle wrecks. Those were my normal klutzy misadventures. Other than waking up in some very odd locations, I had no symptoms for my ailment.

Dr. Hardin quizzed me about my sleeping habits. He asked if I was rested when I wake each day, and I always am. Being a health care player that he clearly is, he first suggested I see a specialist and go in for a sleep study. I explained my financial difficulties just paying for his services this fine day, and he took pity on me. He decided to go old school...keep a diary. He wanted me to write down everything that happened during the day before I go to bed, and where I am when I wake up. I received all of this advice for only one hundred eighty dollars. Well, at least I had my note so I could stay employed.

I started my diary that day, or I guess that evening. Writing down my daily happenings as part of my pre-bed ritual actually had a calming effect on me. Of course, the fact that finals were almost over might have contributed to it also. The hardest tests had been taken and I was feeling

a little less tense. I started writing in my diary while sitting on the couch that night, and the next thing I knew I woke up in my bed the next morning. Maybe that was a good indicator.

The next night, with another test behind me and feeling less stress, I turned back to my new diary. I reflected on how much I thought the previous nights rehashing of the day may have helped me to at least stay in my own apartment. I started out writing and kind of thinking how this might actually help. Laying the notebook (my cheap version of a diary) on my lap, I started to reflect.

This semester was wrapping up quickly, and yet I had another year of school left before finishing my degree. I'd be able to teach junior high History when I finished. The next year would be spent with fewer classes and student teaching in a local school. Man, would I have my work cut out for me. This summer, I'd have to start developing lesson plans and Rubrics for each learning level. Just thinking about planning for the fall made me tense all over. But considering the changes I'd had over the past year, hormonal junior high students might just be a walk in the park.

Suddenly, I thought of Jeff. I missed and hated him all at the same time. How had things gotten so twisted? With the notebook still in my lap, I realized I'd been absentmindedly scribbling on the page I'd just started. I turned to a clean page and started to write, while my recall of the events of the past year was still crystal clear.

I poured my heart out to the dried pulp. I must've lost track of time as one blink led to an even greater pause between opening my eyes again. As my eyes started the eerie process of not being able to focus, I sighed and laid my head on the couch, too tired to walk to my bed. History plays such a large role in shaping our lives...my last thought before I could no longer open my eyes.

I woke up lying on the couch, with the notebook clutched to my chest. My neck and back were stiff but I'd stayed in the same location! I apparently didn't sleep walk at all. Well if I did, there was no one there to tell me any different. Finals were over, so was my sleep walking...I prayed. I guess there's a lot to be said for stress, I thought, as I closed my "diary" and headed to the kitchen. I needed coffee!

⊖

Sam 102

Weeks later and still cured of sleep walking, new worries grew. I was going to have to do something soon about my lack of funds, but I didn't want to think about moving just yet. My apartment was meager at best, and I've never been a decorating diva. I had the basics, and that was it in my one bedroom, one bath ground-level apartment. My part time job at Starbucks didn't give me enough hours to maintain my apartment, not really, but it fed my addiction to caffeine. I'd leave worrying about moving until the end of the summer, which was only weeks away.

My love of reading was a whole other addiction. Since I'm a poor college kid, I don't have a car. I have a bike, a helmet and several wrecks under my belt. I've kept the sidewalk between the county library, my favorite bookstore, and work busy. When classes were in session, the route to the campus was added to that path.

On this overcast day, I headed to Hastings Bookstore...one of my favorite hangouts. It was Monday, July the 4th, and public buildings were closed for the holiday so the library wasn't an option. I'd worked the early shift and was now free to waste my holiday. It wasn't too hot outside yet, but I could tell that the mild afternoons we were enjoying wouldn't last much longer.

I parked my bike and envisioned the inside of the bookstore. With a free coffee in hand, I would proceed to stroll the aisles...romance, sci-fi, didn't matter, I loved it all. I could find a used book and settle in. Given the book was already used, I'd feel little guilt.

There weren't many people in the store on this holiday, but it felt different as soon as I walked in. It felt crowded, but obviously wasn't as I wandered around mentally ticking off my favorites...Hamilton, Harris, Gabaldon, Kenyon, and Ward.

The hair on the back of my neck started prickling. I glanced around and noticed I had a stalker.

I'd first noticed the attractive lady on the first aisle I ventured down. She was around 5'7", not super skinny, but not as rounded as many women her age. Of course, the first glance you make when someone enters your personal space, in this instance my aisle, you smile, nod, and go back to your own business. But this was different. As I went back to my perusal of the books, I felt as if she were still watching me with sideways glances. Now the hair on my arms prickled as well, but how stupid was that? Yeah, I got weird vibes like that occasionally, but didn't everyone?

Today, I decided on Adrian. Ward had commented on the book, so you couldn't go wrong, right? I strolled back to the empty chairs and chose the one closest to the free coffee. Not totally to my surprise now, my shadow peeked around the end of the aisle. She stood with her back straight and openly surveyed all she could see of the store. Having decided that the coast was clear (if that was her intent), she exhaled loudly, dropped her shoulders, and started walking toward me.

The arm chairs in this section were casually arranged for easy conversation, like you'd find in someone's home. When I realized she was walking my way, I ducked my head back into my book. She stopped in front of the other chair and cleared her throat. It's always irritating when you don't want to be disturbed, but southern manners were something I couldn't avoid showing. I glanced up.

"May I?" she asked, indicating the chair.

"Sure," I replied, noticing she wasn't carrying any books. I pasted on the smile I used when greeting customers at work and turned back to my book. This is so not right...was the thought running through my head.

She crossed her legs and arranged her long billowing gypsy skirt. I was now a little more than irritated and slightly curious where this was going to lead. It didn't take her long to break the silence.

"So, do you come here often?" she asked, placing her elbows on each padded arm of the chair and folding her hands over her stomach.

Mental eye roll.. GREAT, chatty Kathy!

"As much as I can," I replied, trying not to look like I was bothered and kept my head bent.

She took another long breath, sighed, and then plunged in, "I know you don't know me from Adam, but can we talk?"

It was my turn to sigh now. I closed my eyes briefly and opened them as I raised my head. I leaned back in the chair and forced my smile back in place. "How can I help you?"

I looked up and met her eyes...dark brown with flecks of gold. I took in her loose wavy, shoulder length brown hair. She had a kind smile and a twinkle in her eye. She must've been stunning in her younger days. As I raised an eyebrow and returned to her eyes, I was actually captivated. She smiled wider as she took me in as well. My appearance is always lacking. My

clothes are clean, but wrinkles don't bother me much. I'm sure others find it off putting. My hair has always been an unruly, slightly wavy mess. I've never been able to work with it and developed the habit of just tying it back in a ponytail.

A frown slightly creased her forehead, showing more concern than displeasure in what she saw. I really couldn't blame her. She took a deep breath, and the frown which was only present for a brief moment was replaced by her wide smile, showing her perfect, white teeth.

"You really do look just like her," she started out saying.

"Pardon?"

Now it was my turn to glare. She just shook her head glancing at her hands.

"Never mind, there's plenty of time to discuss that later. My name is Ruth, Ruth White-Oaks."

As she extended her hand out to me, I glanced at her hand, then back to her face.

"Sam," I said, as I slowly placed my hand in hers.

I'd only meant to make the briefest of contact, but as soon as my hand touched hers, she brought the other on top of mine. She leaned in while clasping my hand, smiling deeply, and I thought I caught the briefest glimpse of a tear in her eyes. I glanced around to see if anyone else was witnessing this interaction, as the hand holding was taking a little longer than needed, especially for introductions.

When I looked back, she was frowning again, but looking at our hands. She turned my hand over and slowly withdrew hers which was on top now. Not that it was unpleasant. The fact that she continued to draw a finger across my palm is when I realized I really couldn't move. Not my hand or my sudden attention, which was now on the way she was taking in the features of my palm. Suddenly she raised her head and let go of my hand.

"I'm sorry. That was so rude. I don't mean to frighten you." The sadness was replaced by a motherly concern on her features. "It's short for Samantha, is that right?"

"Yeah, it's short for Samantha. Have we met before?" I frowned as her features brightened again.

"Yes, but you were much too young to remember it."

While she was smiling again, a part of me wanted to say she was holding back a certain amount of sadness.

"Really? We've met? Do you mind telling me where?" I suddenly felt trapped.

I'd been raised in foster homes for most of my life. I'd been told that my mother had died during childbirth, and I'd been adopted immediately. The family, who had taken me in, had a series of accidents and illness that again left me in the foster care system when I was twelve. Not many want to adopt preteens, so I spent the rest of my public school life moving from one family to the next. At eighteen the state emancipated me, which had been just a few weeks before high school graduation. The family, I'd been staying with, allowed me to stay through the summer before I entered college.

Ruth, becoming solemn again, glanced away dropping her head. "Sam, this may sound odd, but can we go someplace else to talk?" She finished the last of her sentence almost on an exhaled whisper.

"Why do you want to talk to me?" I could feel my irritation starting to show. "I don't know you from Adam, but I get the feeling you've been following me all over this store. How do you know me?"

To say she was nervous now was an understatement. She moved to the edge of her chair, like she'd just decided to leave, but made no move to stand. She started looking around again, like she was being followed, or didn't want our conversation overheard.

"Granted you don't know me Sam, but I know you. I was there when you were born. I was also the one to select your adoptive family. I really don't want to go into this here and now. I know that's unnerving for you, but this conversation cannot wait any longer."

I knew the whites of my eyes and the whiplash jerk of my head would have caught the attention of anyone passing by, but as far as I could tell, we were the only ones in the area. I moved my mouth wordlessly trying to find which question to start with, because my surprise was monumental. I'd checked the records of my birth and tracked as far as I could to closed adoption records. My fleeting need to find my true family had passed when I turned twenty, realizing I was making my own way in the world.

"Who are you?" was all that I could finally say on an exhaled whisper.

Smiling sweetly, she tilted her head while looking at me. The kind of tilt that asks 'which way do I approach this'.

"Sam, your mother was my sister."

Certain life lessons teach you how to respond to certain situations. Unfortunately, none of my life lessons had taught me how to respond to this. When you're in and out of foster care, you often dream of being rescued by long lost relatives. I was dumbfounded. Here sat my AUNT!

"Not to be rude, and forgive me for being a Doubting Thomas, but how do I know that what you're telling me is the truth?" I thought this was the best way to start...get the facts.

Again she came to the edge of her seat, leaning in toward my chair, and lowering her voice.

"Sam, I really didn't intend for this unfold this way, but I need for you to trust me. We really do need to talk." She started glancing around again but kept going, "I don't want to continue this discussion here. I know you rode your bike, but maybe I can give you a ride back to your apartment and we can talk there?"

"I don't think so!" Fact finding was over. I was astounded and decided to start voicing that opinion, "Apparently you've been following me for some time if you know I rode my bike here, and that I live in an apartment. You stroll in here and expect me to walk out with you?"

I rose to my feet, quickly gathering my purse, coffee cup, and book. No need to leave my mess for some store clerk to have to clean. She rose at the same time, possibly sensing my outrage. As I turned to give her a few more of my opinions, she reached out her hand toward my arm. The moment she touched me, the world went dark.