

An excerpt from *The Necromancer* by Krista Beucler

Introduction to the excerpt: It's Valentine's Day and Silver Nightbrace's parents are coming to dinner, expecting to meet the suitor Silver has dutifully told them of in her letters home. Unfortunately, Silver doesn't actually have a suitor. On her break at the apothecary, where she works as a barista, she decides to raise a boyfriend from the dead. Necromancy can't be that hard, right?

Silver closed the book to look at the cover. The loopy, gilt script on the leather binding read *Solomon Mea's Guide the Black Arts of Magic*. Silver was impressed. Apparently Caton was more devious than she appeared.

Flipping to the contents, Silver ran a finger down the list of spells and potions. A love potion would do if she could only find someone to use it on. She opened the book back to that page and skimmed the directions. She sighed. She didn't have any bat's wings or phoenix feathers. It was the full moon but she didn't have a month to brew it.

She flipped back to the contents. Perhaps she could turn water to rum. She wondered how drunk her parents would have to be to forget that they had not actually met anyone but would believe her if she insisted they had. But no, it was impractical.

Charming rags to ball gowns and mice into horses: all the godmother essentials, truth serum and all the basic poisons, giving animals the ability to speak... no, none of these would do!

Then Silver's eyes fell on the last spell in the book, labelled simply 'Reanimation.' Now that, she thought, could work.

She thumbed to the correct page. It was faded and there was dirt in the crease—probably, she thought, from the graveyard where the last body had been dug up. She ran an eye over the list of ingredients; it was simple enough, almost deceptively simple, and she had everything in the herbalists' stores.

Silver collected the beetle carcasses (to renew the body), the hummingbird wings (to get the heart beating again), the powdered unicorn horn (to rekindle the life-force), and dragon shinbone (to balance the humors), and dissolved them in a pot of hot mercury. She worked quickly since she only had fifteen minutes of her break left and who knew when Caton would be back in from the garden? There was a skull on the table with a stuffed raven perched atop it on the other side of her cauldron. There was also a drippy candle. It made her feel very arcane and powerful. Only real witches worked in chambers such as these.

“Silver, honey, bring out some more pender sap when you’re done, will you?” called Aidolyn and Silver nearly upended her cauldron.

“Uh, yes of course!” she called back, trying not to sound guilty.

She pricked her finger and let the drop of blood fall into the cauldron turning the contents magenta. It was the last ingredient. There was an incantation inscribed at the bottom of the page; she would have to do that at the graveyard. Silver poured the purple liquid into several vials (she’d made a triple batch, just in case) and tore the page with the incantation from the book. She hid the two extra vials under the stuffed raven and tucked the third and the incantation into a pouch at her belt. Then she cleaned out the cauldron and generally tried to look innocent when she returned to the bar with more pender sap.

“What’s with the grin?” asked Aidolyn as Silver handed her the pender sap. “Aren’t you in a bad mood today?”

“Yes,” Silver immediately dropped the innocent grin she had been wearing and tried to arrange her features into a more neutral expression.

Silver managed to beg off work a bit early, claiming an upset stomach and a headache. Caton sent her on her way with a poultice for her head and a strong liquid remedy for the stomach

that smelled so strongly of sulfur, Silver suspected it would probably cure anything she had if it didn't kill her first.

Silver walked to the outskirts to the city where there was a little graveyard that was usually empty of mourners and visitors except at night when the grave robbers, magicians, wizards, and witches came for more dubious purposes.

She opened the creaking gate and the wind picked up slightly, sending leaves skittering over the dry ground. Silver felt delightfully excited. She was just like the daring heroines in the dusty, leather-bound books she liked to read so much.

Silver wound her way up and down the overgrown paths scanning the headstones. Some of them were leaning at odd angles, others were crumbling, the words carved into them barely legible. Creeping vines snaked up stones, claiming them for their own. For all of stone's permanence, Silver suddenly felt that nothing could resist the will of nature.

Eventually Silver found a grave that looked fairly fresh, and indeed, the date of death was barely a week prior. She located a rusty spade in an abandoned gardener's cottage and set to work unearthing Varior Skogil, as his stone proclaimed in tall, austere letters. He was a young man of twenty-four—at least she was assuming he was a man; Varior sounded like a man's name to her—who had died the previous Wednesday. She wondered idly what he had died of.

She had never before considered how deep people are buried. It was hot and hard work. Silver paused to tie up her dark purple hair (she had been blessed by a pixie at birth, but not the competent kind, as she hadn't received any more interesting gifts). Her boots and the hems of her skirts were muddy by the time she reached the coffin. She used the spade to lever off the lid and the cheap wood and nails gave easily. Varior was rather handsome for someone who was dead. The nights had been cold and the body had kept surprisingly well.

Silver climbed out of the hole. She wouldn't be able to lift him out on her own so she'd just have to bring him to life where he was.

"Lords of Hwaar, Gmar and Shrad," she began chanting a bit nervously. "Release to me this soul, upon lighting and thunder. Though the moon doth howl, let this spirit return to the mortal world to once more inhabit his body. Krewix izseod ab unum sres chanbeo Druzworhot et obetruc!"

Silver opened the magenta vial and poured the liquid over the man's face. To complete the charm, she spat a glob of saliva onto his forehead, above the place right between his eyes. The liquid began to hiss and steam and Silver hoped she had done the incantation correctly. That last line had included a lot of words she wasn't sure how to pronounce.

Just as Silver was sure it hadn't worked, Varior Skogil opened his blue, blue eyes. A grin split his face when he saw her.

"Hello, lovely," he drawled, "I didn't know they made witches as pretty as you."

Silver blushed and then hated herself for it. "I'm not really a witch," she said.

"Oh?" Corpse-Boy had stood up in his coffin and was now propping an elbow on the edge of the pit. "Then pray, what are you?"

"I'm a barista."

"How long have I been dead?" asked Varior. "Has the world changed so much that baristas now raise the dead in their spare time?"

Silver offered him a hand and helped him climb out of the grave. His hand was surprisingly warm and alive and she congratulated herself on a job well done. "You died last Wednesday," she told him, deciding not to address the other question.

"Varior Skogil," he said shaking her hand when he was safely on terra firma.

“Silver Nightbrace,” she replied.

“A witch’s name if ever I heard one.” He had very white teeth and somehow he seemed to show all of them when he smiled. It was really a very nice smile.

Silver shrugged. “So, how did you die?”

It was Varior’s turn to shrug. “Oh, I was murdered. But no big deal. Now that I’m back I can make the bastards pay. I must say,” he continued, “you’ve done a marvelous job. I feel just like new. Do this often, do you?”

“Erm,” mumbled Silver, “not really.”

He helped her refill his grave and Silver was slightly nervous that she had brought back such a vengeful corpse. She was suddenly realizing that she didn’t know how to reverse the spell if she needed to.

“So for what dark purpose would a lady such as yourself wish to use a reanimated corpse, especially one so dashing and daring as myself?” he asked as they left the graveyard, both covered in mud.

“Um, well,” began Silver. Her planning hadn’t included the bit where she asked the corpse to pretend to be her boyfriend to meet her family. And what was she going to do afterward? Let him go on his merry way to take vengeance on his murderers? What if he deserved it? What if he was a criminal?

“I’d like you to meet my parents,” Silver said finally.

“Oh,” said Varior, “aren’t you at least going to buy me dinner first? What was your name again? Copper? Goldie?”

“Sil—” Silver started to say before noticing his sly smile and realizing he had been joking. “Very funny. Look,” she said, “I might have told them I have a boyfriend and they might be visiting tonight and I had to do something.”

“Don’t you think your methods are a little drastic? Not that I’m complaining, of course.”

“I’ve always been over-zealous,” Silver said waving a hand. “But the way I see it, you owe me. You would still be dead if it weren’t for me.”

“True enough, fine lady.”

“Quit with the fine lady nonsense! You’re my boyfriend, you can call me Silver.”

“And how long have we been dating, Goldie?”

Silver couldn’t decide if she was annoyed about the nickname so she let it pass. “Five months,” she said.

“Five months! And I haven’t proposed? You should dump me.”

“I will. Later. But I need you tonight.”

“Tell me, is it the full moon tonight?”

“The full moon? Yes, why? You’re not a werewolf, are you?” Silver asked, panicking. A werewolf. That would be just perfect.

“Oh no, no, of course not. Are you?”

“No!”

“Well, it’s worth asking.”

“If I was a werewolf, would I be inviting my parents to dinner tonight?”

“You know, that would be a clever hunting strategy.”

Silver whacked him on the arm. “Watch it! I got you out of that grave, I can put you back!”
Though she wasn’t actually sure she could.

Varior held up his hands in surrender.

They reached Silver's cottage presently. She lived in a little house on the edge of a field by the palace stables. The cottage had just one big room, though Silver preferred to think of it as "open-plan." Her bed was tucked into a corner by the fireplace and the kitchen was grouped around the boiler on the other side of the room. There was a fine oak table in the center of the room that her father had made. The rent was cheap because Silver's house was one field away from the blacksmith's forge and she was something of a night owl. Suffice it to say that Silver had taken to sleeping with cotton stuffed in her ears.

Varior helped Silver prepare dinner and set the table as they awaited the arrival of her parents.

It was all going so well: Silver's parents had cooed over Varior and he had simpered impressively, good impressions had been made, and everyone was now comfortably tipsy. Varior clinked his knife against his glass, "Mr. and Mrs. Nightbrace, it's been so lovely to meet you both and I cannot thank you enough for making me feel so accepted into your loving family."

Silver snorted but managed to turn it into a cough.

"Now it seems only right to do this with you present. I've been thinking about it for a long time but," he raised his wineglass in Silver's direction, "will you marry me and make me the happiest man alive?"

Silver's mouth dropped open in horror as her parents applauded and squealed in delight.

"Come on now, Goldie," Varior said, smirking, "don't leave me hanging."

Fortunately, Silver was saved from answering when a pack of goblins broke down the door with a splintering blast.