

# THE CURSE

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**John Boston**

Lewis and Melissa Fogg had been through more in the last three months than any two human beings should have to endure in ten lifetimes. Their 17-year-old daughter Tiffany was killed in a car accident while coming home from soccer practice. As horrible as that was, it was amplified two months later by the death of their 12-year-old son, Caleb. He died in a freak boating accident. Lewis and Melissa thought it would be a great way to take his mind off the death of his older sister. His best friend's family owned a boat and they took them both out for an afternoon of water skiing on a nearby lake. Somehow, Caleb was tangled up in the tow line and was killed when he crashed into the motor of their boat. Needless to say, things around the Fogg house could only be described as being *quite tense*.

Melissa was on medication most of the day and never left the house. Lewis was now a shell of his former self. They joked that they would both have taken their lives had it not have been for their only surviving child, Jennifer, age 8. Lewis stood guard over her 24 hours a day. She was trying to mentally digest what had just happened to their family as best an 8-year old can. Sometimes she would cry hysterically for an hour in Lewis's arms, then go about as if nothing had happened. She was dealing with this nightmare as best she could.

Lewis was the life of the neighborhood. His house was the de facto go to location for all of the neighborhood kids, as well as neighborhood adults. The entire community shared his pain. A local TV station ran a story on their tragedy and the response was enormous. Cards, flowers, even money showed up on their doorstep. Lewis was blown away one day to find a letter from Vietnam. A woman had read about her story and donated 20 dollars to help. Lewis was brought to tears. That was the woman's weekly salary in her native country.

Lewis's brother, Clayton, was staying with them. He slept in the garage, not wanting to disturb the dead children's bedrooms. Some days he and Lewis would just sit in the garage, smoke weed, and sob together. Clayton did all he could, but it didn't really help. He just wanted his brother to know he was there for them.

There were no answers. No light at the end of the tunnel. This was their life now. Their nightmarish existence. Every morning when Lewis opened his eyes, he would feel enthralled, hoping that the last four months were just a bad dream. Then he would look over at his semi-conscious wife and realize it wasn't a dream.

*This was his life now, counting down the minutes until he could be with his children again. Each day hurt worse than the last. Each minute hurt worse than the last. Each breath hurt worse than the last.*

The police in the town had a cruiser parked outside the house. Lewis was friends with several of the longtime officers. Their kids went to school together and played sports together. The chief of police called Lewis and told him that the entire department was with him and his family. In the days following the death of Caleb, dozens of people had shown up at their doorstep offering their sympathies. Lewis appreciated it, but he and his family needed time to be alone and grieve. Things were bad and getting worse by the minute.

Melissa was borderline insane at this point. She would spend hours combing her daughter's hair until it started to come out of her little head. She had pretty much stopped talking to everyone except Lewis. Even then, their conversations were short and sporadic. She would occasionally if they were out of milk, or what time the game was on. Lewis was beginning to fear for her sanity.

The officer outside their house had to be pulled away for another call. It was just dumb luck. The strange woman who showed up on his doorstep timed it just right. Had she have shown up just five minutes earlier, she would have been stopped and never been allowed inside the house. Just five minutes made such a huge difference. Five lousy minutes and things might have been totally different.

Lewis heard the doorbell ring and walked out of the kitchen to see who it was. Normally, he looks through the peephole first, today he didn't. He just opened the door.

Standing in front of him was a black woman he had never seen before. She had a very strange look on her face. Their eyes met for just a second and in that brief second, she was sure. There was no going back at this point.

"Can I help you?" he asked

"Lewis.....my name is Renee. I.....I can't imagine what you and your family have been through. I would like to speak with you if I could."

"Renee.....this is a very difficult time for all of us. Thank you for your concern, but, please. Just leave us alone." said Lewis, closing the door.

"Please.....please Lewis. Just listen to me for five minutes." she pleaded.

"Goodbye, Renee."

"Dammit! It will take all of you," she said.

John swung the door open. His sadness had been replaced by a wave of white-hot anger.

"What the hell did you just say?" he said angrily.

"Please.....please just listen to me. I drove for five hours to be here. I wanted to warn you....please." she said with tears in her eyes.

Lewis let his guard down and opened the door some more. He motioned for her to come inside.

"Come on in," he said.

She let herself in and they walked into the kitchen.

"Would you care for something to drink?" he asked.

"No....no thank you."

"I'll give you two minutes. Better make 'em count," he said pouring himself a cup of coffee.

Clayton heard the commotion and came into the kitchen. He smiled at Renee and sat down across from her.

"Clayton, this is Renee. Renee, this is my brother-in-law, Clayton," said Lewis.

Renee looked uncomfortable. Squeamish...almost as if she had just been called into the principal's office.

"I wasn't sure until I came here. It got stronger and stronger as I approached the house. I can feel it now, it's so powerful, it's making me sick." she said nervously.

"I'm sorry, I don't understand."

"Don't you feel it?" she asked.

"Feel what?"

"That evil. That black, dark evil that just seems to surround this house. I've never felt anything like this before."

"Well Renee, as you're probably aware, things around the house have been a bit unpleasant as of late. You're probably just reading off of us," said Lewis as he sipped his coffee.

"No.....no I know the difference. This isn't sadness, this is something else. It's not just a feeling, it's like another presence. As if there is someone else in the room with us, only we can't see them."

Lewis and Clayton looked at one another. Neither of them was sure what to do. They had just let a crazy person into their house.

"Renee. I think you better leave."

"Please Lewis.....you have to understand what you're dealing with. This thing isn't going to go away on its own. It isn't going to leave until it takes each and every one of your family." she said hysterically.

"Renee. That's enough. Please leave." said Clayton.

"No.....no. Let her talk," said Melissa at the entrance of the kitchen.

Renee tried to compose herself before she spoke.

"I'm from Hati. My family practiced the black arts for two centuries. I know it might seem absurd, but it's our religion. I became experienced in things that people, such as yourselves could never understand. My grandfather was a real voodoo priest. I learned from him. I'm not lying to you. I'm not crazy or trying to make this situation any worse, I just want to help you."

"How are you going to do that? Bring back our dead children?" asked Lewis.

"By making sure it doesn't take anyone else. Do you have any more children?"

"Yes, we have an 8-year-old daughter," said Melissa.

"Then, you have to let me help you. For God's sake, let me help you."

"How are you going to help us?" asked Clayton.

"Lewis.....are you and your wife doing anything illegal? Selling drugs, kiddie porn, members of the KKK? Anything like that?"

"No."

"Now is not the time to lie. Have you ever hurt someone, or killed someone or done some type of harm to someone else?"

"Renee. I run a chain of floral shops in the city. I'm on the PTA. I'm about as white and boring as you can get. I'm not doing anything illegal." said Lewis.

"You must have. One of you must have done something to someone. There's no way a force this powerful just found you two by accident."

"You're saying that someone did this to us on purpose? Like, put a curse on us?"

"Yes."

"I see. So, how much money do you want to remove this curse from us?" asked Clayton.

"What? No, that isn't what this is about?" she said.

"Of course it is Renee. If that is your real name. Please, get out of my house, before I throw you ass out myself." said Lewis standing up.

Renee got the hint. She slowly stood up and looked at Melissa.

"If you love your daughter, let me help. I'm the only chance you have," she said as she walked by Melissa.

"If you change your minds, this is my number. You can call me anytime," she said as she handed Melissa her business card..

"Please.....please let me help you," she whispered to Melissa.

"Out!" said Clayton.

Renee let herself out of the house without any further fanfare.

"Jesus, just when you think you've seen the lowest form of humanity possible. I can't believe people like her even exist."

"Maybe she was only trying to help," said Melissa.

"Or maybe she was a con artist. No, she was definitely a con artist. I'm going to call the chief and have them pick her up." said Lewis.

"Why? She hasn't done anything illegal?" said Melissa.

"She's a piece of garbage and we don't garbage in our streets," said Clayton.

"I don't think she's wrong. Not completely anyway. I felt it too. I felt something in this house for a while. I felt it before Tiffany died. I felt it even more after Caleb. It's getting stronger. Once in a while it almost pokes you or stabs you, just to let you know it's there. I think she's right." said Melissa.

"She's a con artist. I could almost smell it on her," said Clayton.

"I think we should at least hear her out. At this point, what do we have to lose?"

"Probably a lot of money. People like her are the worst type of people imaginable. Preying on people when they're down. She probably had this scam cooked up for months, she just needed the right family to try it out on." said Lewis.

"Right.....but, what if she isn't a con artist? What if she's right? We could still save Jennifer. Isn't that worth it?"

"Jennifer will be fine. The only thing she needs protection from is people like Renee," said Clayton.

"You two are so sure of yourselves, aren't you. What are the odds of a family losing two children in four months to accidents? Pretty damn tiny. What if you two are wrong? What if by ignoring her we kill Jennifer. How would you two ever live with yourselves?"

"The chances of dying in a plane crash are tiny too and it happens to people all the time. We're just the unlucky ones, just very goddamn unlucky," said Lewis.

"Yeah....maybe a little too unlucky," said Melissa

"Besides, why would somebody put a curse on you two? You're like the only nice people I know," said Clayton.

"That's what I'd like to know. Why would they do something like that, Lewis?" she said

"Melissa please, you're not helping anything here."

"Neither are you Lewis?"

"Do you blame me for their deaths Melissa? Is that what you honestly believe, cause if it, then tell me right now, please.....TELL ME!" Lewis screamed.

Clayton jumped in his chair. Melissa didn't say anything. She just stared back at Lewis.

"I believe this curse is real. I also believe it didn't just find us by accident. Someone brought this goddamn thing right up to our doorstep. Now why would they do that if we are such nice people?" she asked.

"There is no curse Melissa. I'm only glad we found her first before you did. She would have bled us dry." said Lewis.

"What if you guys are wrong? You're basically killing Jennifer."

"What if we're right?"

"The both of you two make me sick. So goddamn arrogant and cocky. Always so sure of yourselves. Well, this time it's different. This time you're not going to gamble when our daughter's life is at stake. I'm not going to let you kill our only daughter.....I won't let you." she said with tears in her eyes.

She stormed out of the kitchen. Lewis and Clayton said nothing and sat in silence for a moment.

"So.....what do you want to do today?" asked Clayton

Lewis knew he was losing his wife of nearly twenty years. Their sporadic conversations became no conversations. She seemed to go out of her way to avoid him. He knew if he didn't do something and do it quickly that their marriage would be just as dead as their children.

Having Clayton here was a lifesaver. He would never have made it through this without him. He had a life back in Illinois. He had bills, and a job but he made it clear to everyone that taking care of his brother was his first and foremost responsibility. One night after dinner, the two of them sat on the porch and opened a couple of beers. Sometimes the two of them would just sit in silence. It wasn't uncomfortable, neither of the men knew the right words to describe how they were feeling. Tonight though, they had something very important to discuss.

"How's the wife?" asked Clayton.

"I wouldn't know. She hasn't spoken to me since Renee paid us a visit," said Lewis.

"She is rather stubborn that way."

"Do you think we made a mistake by sending her away?"

"I found her name on the piece of paper she gave to Melissa. I think Melissa wanted me to find it. I did some snooping on her. Renee LaCroix was convicted of bank and wire fraud in 2012. Seems she was a part of a telephone scam targeting seniors. Can you imagine that? No brother, we made the right call. She's garbage." said Clayton as he finished his beer.

"Yeah. How do I tell Melissa? She never admits she was wrong.'

"I've never met a woman yet that would ever admit she was wrong," replied Clayton.

"I'm losing her man. Every day, we just drift further and further apart. I don't know how to stop it." said Lewis.

"I'm guessing things weren't too great before all this madness."

"Not great, but not this bad either. At least we still spoke to one another. Our whole existence became wrapped up in the kids. I guess we just have to figure out what to do now."

"Wait here," said Clayton.

He came back a minute later with Melissa. She didn't seem too happy about being there.

"I'm not going to just sit back and watch two implode. You need each other now more than ever. Put your goddamn pride in the backseat and just listen to one another."

"Clay, this isn't your battle," said Melissa

"Your family is my battle. I know you two feel helpless right now, I feel the same way, but this is one thing the two of you can control, so start doing it." he said.

Melissa sat down and opened a beer. Clay grabbed another beer and left the porch.

Lewis and Melissa came back inside half an hour later. They seemed to be in much better spirits. She sat down across from him.

"Clay, we've decided to call Renee. We both agree that if she asks us for any money, she's gone. If there really is a curse on this family, we have to get rid of it. We can't lose Jennifer too.....we just can't."

"If you think it will help. Does she know Renee went to prison for fraud?"

"She knows."

"And she still wants to go through with this?"

"She might be our only chance to save Jennifer."

"Guys.....there is no curse here. People have shitty, horrible things happen to them all the time. People die suddenly or get murdered or get terminal cancer. It's all part of the package. Just because some bad things happened to your family doesn't mean there's some type of

otherworldly evil causing it. You guys just got dealt a really, really shitty hand. I just think Renee is using this situation to make a fast buck. No wait, I know she is. She's a con artist Mel. She probably does shit like this to people all the time."

"I won't lose my only remaining daughter. Lewis and I are going to try and have more children. I don't know if it's possible at our ages, but we're going to try. I don't care about money anymore, I just want to have our family back." said Melissa sobbing.

Clayton knew he had to let Melissa win this round. Lewis had agreed to save his marriage.

"Okay, so give her a call."

Renee showed up at their house the next morning with Demetrius, her brother. He was Haitian to the max, complete with the dreadlocks and Rasta pants.

Melissa opened the door and hugged Renee. They embraced one another for what seemed like an eternity. Demetrius had a large suitcase with him. The brothers and Demetrius took an instant dislike to one another. They both wanted to know why Renee brought her brother.

"I'm not a real priest. My brother is. We can't do this without him."

Demetrius seemed hesitant to enter the house as if there was some kind of invisible force field preventing him from entering. He stepped inside the house but seemed very cautious.

"My brother is going to do the ceremony. It's very, very important to listen to what he says. If he tells you to do something, no matter how strange it may seem, just do it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, we understand."

"Do you?" asked Demetrius

"So, how much is this little ceremony going to cost us?" asked Clayton.

"How much is your daughter's life worth to you?" replied Demetrius.

"How much?"

Renee and her brother looked at one another.

"There's something in this house. I can feel it. It's very strong. Whatever the hell you folks got mixed up in....man, this is bad. I'm not even sure it will work."

"So, we're paying you to do a ritual with no guarantees?" asked Lewis

"This just keeps getting better," said Clayton.

"Do you have any idea what I'm about to do?" asked Demetrius

"No, please...enlighten me?" said Clayton



"I'm going to do a banishment ceremony. When the curse is released from this house it doesn't just disappear. It has to go someplace. It will most likely bind to me since I am the one performing the ceremony. I am the one who will inherit this evil. So yes, there is a price to be paid for my services. You've all seen what this thing can do." said Demetrius.

"So, how does this work?" asked Melissa.

"We need to get started. The sooner it is lifted off your family, the better. Just be aware, there are no guarantees with this type of magic. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. all I can do is try." he said.

"Renee.....you're a convicted felon, right?" said Clayton.

"What difference does that make?"

"I'm just curious why you are so worried about helping out a group of complete strangers and why you would rob another group of complete strangers. Seems to me there has to be something in it for you," said Clayton.

"I had a curse put on me once. It was more horrible than you could imagine. I know what you're facing. Yes, I made some mistakes in my life. I came from a slum in Hati. I had to do things to survive that you could never imagine. You have no right to judge me." she said angrily.

"The jury judged you, not me. I only want to protect this family."

"Then let him do his job," said Renee.

"Go ahead, Demetrius. This is your show now."

Demetrius was nervous. Not like regular nervous.....*like shit my pants on prom night type nervous*. He had several containers in the suitcase. He took out one that was very dark and red. He poured it into a circle and sprinkled something on top of it. He took out a notepad and looked over it. He put a very large, very old wooden crucifix in the middle of the circle. He lit three candles and put them in the circle as well. He began to speak loudly in French. Clayton could only understand half of what he was saying. Renee gave him a look of death.

"Don't interrupt him. It's very important that you not speak during the ceremony," she whispered.

Clayton leaned over to Lewis.

"Do you think they looked up voodoo rituals online before they came here? This is ridiculous."

"Just let him finish," said Lewis softly.

*"Mon Seigneur, nous donne la force.....Mon Seigneur, nous donne las force. Bannir, bannir.....bannir. Protect this family and lift the evil that surrounds this house."* said Demetrius.

"We have to hold hands now," said Renee, grabbing Clayton's hand.

Demetrius cut himself with a knife and watched the blood drip into a small chalet in the middle of the circle.

Demetrius kept on speaking in French for nearly ten minutes. He was getting louder and louder. Lewis noticed that the blood in the chalet almost seemed to be boiling as if some invisible force was cooking it.

Melissa noticed that there was definitely some kind of strange energy in the room. Not static electricity, but close. It made her skin tingle.

"*Bannir la mal.....bannir la mal.*" said Demetrius, almost delirious. He looked over at Renee. She seemed to know what to do.

"We have to get inside the circle with him. The circle will protect us," she said.

"There's not enough room. He didn't make it big enough," said Clayton.

"Go ahead. I'll sit this one out," said Clayton, trying to keep a straight face. It took just about every ounce of concentration he had not to just burst out laughing. This had to be the single, most ridiculous thing he had ever seen.

*Like the 3 Stooges performing an exorcism.*

Renee motioned over to Clayton to get inside the circle. He just smiled and stood where he was.

"Say it with him. Say it loud so the neighbors can hear. The demon is about to show himself.....be ready.

"*Bannir la mal.....bannir la mal.....BANNIR LA MAL!*" the group in the circle shouted.

They all closed their eyes and held onto one another for strength. Lewis noticed that the blood in the chalet was now overflowing. Melissa noticed that Demetrius's eyes had turned white. Clayton sat down in a chair and started playing a game on his phone. He figured he should probably skee-daddle. He didn't want to be blamed for screwing up their banishment ceremony.

Lewis went to grab him, but Renee pulled him back inside the circle. Demetrius seemed almost delirious. Renee held him up and he shouted:

*LE DEMON EST PARTI.....LE DEMON EST PARTI! Demon be gone.....I command you!"* he shouted. Lewis held him up for a second. Renee looked at the candles. They were still lit. Melissa felt something she had never felt before in her life. She may not have been able to see the demon, but dammit, she sure as hell felt it. Lewis did as well. The lights in the house flickered and Demetrius collapsed on the floor. Renee rolled him over and helped him to his feet. He was sweating profusely and seemed very confused. He quickly looked over at the candles.

"They stayed lit.....they stayed lit. It worked. Whatever was in this house is gone. We did it." he said.

Melissa threw her arms around him. Lewis hugged Renee. Clayton stood in the doorway sipping a soda. He now realized what he was dealing with. Con men and con women aren't stupid. No, they might be the most heartless people in existence, but they certainly weren't stupid. They played the two of them like a fiddle. Maybe, they just needed something to believe in. He couldn't imagine losing Jennifer as well. That would be more than he could bear. She was like his daughter as well, as were Tiffany and Caleb. Clayton didn't just dislike Renee and her brother.

*He downright hated them.*

The only thing preventing him from strangling the two of them was the fact that it meant something to Melissa. She had to believe in all this. It was part of the recovery process. She couldn't live out the rest of her days wondering if today was going to be the day when they lose their only surviving daughter. Life had been very, very cruel to the Fogg family, but what these two scam artists were doing was even worse.

He knew he had to vacate because now, Lewis and Melissa were going to give these two money for performing their little ritual. Maybe he was in the wrong business. Maybe he become a voodoo priest. It had to pay more than being a bricklayer, a non-union one at that.

He never said anything to Renee and Demetrius as they left. Just what exactly was he going to say?

*Hey gang, thanks for ripping off my mentally unstable sister-in-law. I'll be sure and give you guys a good online review!*

There was one, very brief, very uncomfortable look between him and Demetrius. He wasn't quite sure what kind of look it was. Not anger, not pity, something in between. Demetrius looked like he wanted to say something, but decided against it. Clayton didn't really want to hear it anyway.

That night, the three of them sat out on the porch. Melissa had started smoking again and Lewis had decided he needed something with a little more kick than just a beer. He was now drinking brandy. The two of them were just hollow shells of their former selves at this point. Two very broken people. Two people who have had to endure more than any two people should ever have. Part of Clayton had died too. This family was never going to be the same. He wanted Jennifer to come to stay with his family, while the two of them tried to get their lives back on track if that were even possible at this point.

"I felt it. I know you felt it too, Lewis," said Melissa.

"I don't know what I felt. It was like somebody had me in a headlock and I had just suddenly broken free. I thought I saw something in the circle. It was like.....I don't know, I'm just drunk." he said sipping his brandy.

"I know you think we're idiots. I know you think that whole thing was a joke.....but it wasn't. There was some nasty shit in this house and Demetrius got rid of it. He said the three candles stayed lit. That means the three of us are safe now."

"Good. Guys, I have to leave pretty soon. My boss said if I'm not back by Monday, I'm done." said Clayton.

"Don't worry about us. I think we'll be fine now..... And Jennifer will be fine too." said Lewis.

Clayton left the following afternoon. He wanted to tell his boss to go to hell, but he needed the job and he had his own family and his own drama to worry about. He was never going to be able to put the pieces of their lives back together, but he was there when they needed him and for that, both Lewis and Melissa were eternally grateful. To Melissa, Clayton wasn't a brother in law, he was the brother she never had.

Four months later, some kind of normal had returned to the Fogg house. There were still days when they both broke down and cried. They both went to Tiffany's and Caleb's graves sites once a week. Sometimes they would just sit on the grass and hold one another while they sobbed and tried as best they could, to move on with their lives. Melissa was still smoking and Lewis was still drinking, but they had Jennifer to worry about and that kept them on the wagon, at least for now. Jennifer stopped asking about her siblings. She knew enough to know it was very painful. They were never coming back, no matter how many times she asked God to bring them back. They were gone forever.

One night, the three of them were eating dinner when the phone rang. It was Clayton's wife Anna, who neither of them really cared for. She was almost hysterical. Melissa listened intently. Her eyes seemed to get bigger and bigger. Every time she tried to talk, she stopped herself. Anna sounded almost incoherent.

"Ok.....ok, let me talk to Lewis. I'll call you right back. Five minutes.....ok, bye." she said and hung up.

"What happened?" asked Lewis

"Clayton.....he has some kind of rare parasite lodged in his intestines. Anna lost two of her fingers at some weird accident at work.....oh.....their house burned down last night."

"Lost her fingers? She works in a dentist's office. How the hell did she lose two of her fingers in a dentist's office?" he asked.

Lewis and Melissa looked at one another in silence. They looked over at Jennifer. Lewis went back to eating his dinner.

"Could just be a coincidence. Shit happens," he said between bites.

"He should have just stayed in the circle. That arrogant bastard. Now it's on him and his family."

"What are we going to do? I mean he was there for us," said Lewis.

"Lewis.....you can't go there. He took the curse with him. What if it recognizes you or something and follows you back?" she said with tears in her eyes.

"Do you want me to call Renee?" he asked.

"Yes. I've got her number on my phone."

"Will she even help him? He was kind of a dick to her the last time they met."

"We can only try.....we can only try," said Melissa softly looking over at her daughter's hair and rubbing it.

"He never should have left the circle. He brought this on himself. She told him not to leave the circle." said Melissa

"What circle, mommy?" asked Jennifer.

"The circle that kept you safe, honey."

"Kept all of us safe," added Lewis.

*Only idiots mock what they don't understand. Clayton had to learn that the hard way. If you really want to make an enemy of evil, just mock it. You've made an enemy for the rest of your life.*