

BAD IN BED
(A Fairy Tale)

A comedy in two acts

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CHARACTERS:

- Betsy Kukanich:** (KOO-kuh-nitch) A woman in her early 40s, recently divorced and the author of a novelty bestseller. Witty and successful, but still self-conscious about her young self.
- Charles Flak:** Successful local news producer in his 40s and Betsy's college friend. Charles is intelligent, caring and driven, but is often clueless about the effect he and his words have on people.
- Annie Jo:** Mid to late 30s, Charles' third and current wife. She's an attractive and successful media salesperson. She is frustrated and more than a little passive-aggressive.
- Jack Parker:** Charles' best friend, a local sports director also in his early 40s. He went to college with Charles and Betsy. He's a newly divorced smartass and a good friend.
- Deb:** Female, late 30s to early 40s. Betsy's old college friend, the "Cardinal Goddess" of a self-created coven. She has a strong upper Michigan accent, and is slow and deliberate in everything she says and does. She could be the wisest person you've ever met. Or maybe simply smarter than you think.

SETTING

Madison, WI & Marquette, MI, a recent fall and winter

- Act One, Scene One: Charles and Annie Jo's bathroom, Thursday morning
- Act One, Scene Two: Jack's house just outside of Marquette, Friday morning
- Act One, Scene Three: A book reading/signing in Marquette, Friday afternoon
- Act One, Scene Four: Jack's house, Friday evening
- Act Two, Scene One: Jack's house, Saturday morning
- Act Two, Scene Two: Jack's house, a few minutes later
- Act Two, Scene Three: A café in Marquette, Saturday afternoon
- Act Two, Scene Four: Jack's house, two months later
- Act Two, Scene Five: A book reading/signing, a tour stop somewhere

ACT ONE
Scene One

(Lights up on CHARLES and ANNIE JO's bathroom. They've just had sex. They are getting ready for work. Annie Jo looks like a pot about to boil over as Charles talks.)

CHARLES

That was amazing. I'm so lucky. I really wish I didn't have to go to work today. But I guess the newscast isn't going to produce itself. I've got Andy Acklesworth covering the Gunderson Trial. Last week I asked him if he's ever attended a trial before and he asked if Judge Judy's studio audience counted. Oh well. Everyone has to start somewhere, right?

(Annie Jo brushes her hair, irritated. Charles gets dressed, not noticing.)

Aw, you're tired. What do you have going on today, Madame Senior Account Executive? You're just rising right up the ranks at the station. Next thing you know, you'll be General Manager and officially "the boss of me."

(He starts kissing her neck. She cringes.)

Thank you for this morning. What should we do tonight?

ANNIE JO

... I don't know.

CHARLES

I could cook. Or we could order in. There's that new Indian place down the street that delivers.

ANNIE JO

But I hate curry.

CHARLES

No you don't. I swear we've gotten Indian before.

ANNIE JO

We have.

CHARLES

Huh. Maybe I could cook tonight, if you don't mind a late dinner. I'll probably stay through the six tonight just in case Cindy Sommersby doesn't get back to the station in time for her live shot. She's been doing this series on the craft brew boom and I suspect she's been doing her research

(*cont'd*) little too well. Anyway, I know a tofu curry recipe that just might change your opinion. If it doesn't, (*kissing her arm*) I'll make it up to you.

ANNIE JO

Oh my god! Stop it! Just stop talking, Charles!

CHARLES

Annie Jo, what's wrong?

ANNIE JO

Just ... stop! I don't want tofu. I don't want curry. And I ...

CHARLES

What?

ANNIE JO

I don't want to have sex with you anymore!

CHARLES

Wait, what? Was this morning not a good time? I thought, I thought it was.

ANNIE JO

Seriously? Did you hear anything that sounded like an orgasm this morning? Anything?

CHARLES

I ... I ... sometimes you're really quiet.

ANNIE JO

No! I'm not. My college boyfriend affectionately nicknamed me the Howler. But I haven't howled in three years. How long have we been together? How long?

CHARLES

Three years.

ANNIE JO

I can't take it anymore, Charles. I just ... I've tried, you don't seem to get it.

CHARLES

What are you talking about?

ANNIE JO

Don't you make me say it so you can play the victim.

CHARLES

Annie Jo, I don't know what you mean.

ANNIE JO

Okay, Charles. I'm gonna come right out and say something hard. You leave me no choice.

CHARLES

You're leaving me.

ANNIE JO

Charles. You're a good man ...

CHARLES

Shit. Here it comes.

ANNIE JO

But you're a terrible lover.

CHARLES

Annie Jo!

ANNIE JO

When I first fell in love with you, you blew me away. Your drive. Your intelligence. Your loyalty. And I loved you. I thought, maybe it's me. Then I realized no, it was you. I thought we could work on it. But every time we've ever talked about trying something new, a position, a technique, anything ... you tell me this night is going to surprise me ... and then boom, you're done. You look at me all smug after and I'm like ... do you think something just happened here?

CHARLES

That's a terrible thing to say.

ANNIE JO

It's a terrible thing to live, Charles! My great grandmother Francine told me when I was 13, "You'll know you found the one for you when he cares about what makes you happy when he's not around."

CHARLES

I do.

ANNIE JO

"And if you can't wait for him to work up your hoo-ha."

Lovely.

CHARLES

What she lacked in tact, she made up for in truth.

ANNIE JO

I can't believe you're saying this.

CHARLES

But Charles, I've said it all before.

ANNIE JO

You didn't say it was me.

CHARLES

I was trying to be supportive! But ... you just don't seem to listen. How many times have I said, "please don't touch me ..." in, you know, the spot. I hate it.

ANNIE JO

It's an erogenous zone!

CHARLES

Not for everyone! For as long as I can remember, when anyone has tried to touch me there, all I feel is annoyed. *And* I've told you. *And* you continue to do it.

ANNIE JO

I want to be the one who makes it work for you.

CHARLES

It's never going to work for me! I'm a grown woman! I've had, what, forty different partners in my life.

ANNIE JO

Forty?

CHARLES

I was in a sorority! The point is I know what I like and what I don't. For example, I like orgasms!

ANNIE JO

Okay, okay. I get it.

CHARLES

ANNIE JO

You do. I don't. That's the problem!

CHARLES

It's not like I don't try!

ANNIE JO

But you're trying to get me to like things you think I'm supposed to. You pick and choose what you hear, Charles. I've started to realize how much that happens outside this bed too. You don't listen to me.

CHARLES

I listen to you all the time!

ANNIE JO

Okay. What book did I just finish reading?

CHARLES

Oh, come on.

ANNIE JO

I've been talking about it constantly.

CHARLES

You ... you've talked about it, but ... I don't think you've ever actually said the title.

ANNIE JO

Yes, I have.

CHARLES

It's about World War II. Hitler's in it.

ANNIE JO

That's your best guess.

CHARLES

I didn't read it. You did!

ANNIE JO

I talked about it the whole time I was reading it! Through its boring first chapters to its riveting plot twist. I talked about it every morning and every night and posted about it on facebook.

CHARLES

(Thinking) This isn't fair.

ANNIE JO

Stones from the River. It's about a dwarf girl growing up in Nazi Germany.

CHARLES

Okay. Can you name the last book I finished?

ANNIE JO

No.

(Charles gives her a look.)

You read two books a week. And you never talk about them. It's different.

CHARLES

Of course it is.

ANNIE JO

It is. You breeze through books. I savor them.

CHARLES

I thought you were just a really slow reader.

ANNIE JO

Shut up! It's just that it mattered to me. I talked about it every day and it didn't register with you at all. You'd just tell me about another book I should be reading instead.

CHARLES

So on top of not satisfying you, I don't listen.

ANNIE JO

That's not what I said.

CHARLES

What?

ANNIE JO

I was pretty blunt. I said you're a terrible lover. And it's *because* you don't listen.

CHARLES

How long have you felt this way?

ANNIE JO

Charles, I've been trying to talk to you about this since we were new. Back then, I just accepted it was part of the package. I decided, well, maybe sex is overrated. It's the other stuff, the coffee in bed and random love notes that matter more. I was wrong. The sex is just ... indicative ... of the real problem.

CHARLES

What real problem?

ANNIE JO

Question. How many times have I said I hate mushrooms? It's a fungus. And yet you continue trying to trick me into eating them. I don't want them with butter. I *will* notice them under the cheese. Portabella, shiitake, button ... they all look like a deformed penis to me.

CHARLES

Okay, I'll stop trying to make you eat mushrooms!

ANNIE JO

Another thing. I can't wear long earrings.

CHARLES

You love long earrings!

ANNIE JO

Yes, but I can't wear them!

CHARLES

That makes no sense! *I heard you* say you miss wearing long earrings. So I buy you long earrings and you never wear them!

ANNIE JO

I've told you this! Yes, I miss wearing them. But I can't wear them unless I want my earlobes ripped in half. My earring holes are all screwed up from too many years of wearing big earrings.

CHARLES

That's insane! That can't happen!

ANNIE JO

Yes, it can! Come here and look at my damn earlobes.

(Annie Jo steps toward him, holding out her earlobe.)

CHARLES

Oh.

ANNIE JO

Oh? Did you think I was making it up? God! The first pair of long earrings I let slide because you didn't know. So I told you. The next birthday, long earrings. Okay, maybe you forgot. The third pair, I threw them at your head.

CHARLES

What?

ANNIE JO

Well, where your head had been. I waited until you left the room.

(They go quiet for a moment.)

CHARLES

So.

ANNIE JO

So.

CHARLES

I'm sorry. I thought things were fine.

ANNIE JO

Charles. I know. But they haven't been. And I can't do it anymore.

CHARLES

Please, give me another chance.

ANNIE JO

(Coming to terms with the moment) I'm done, Charles.

CHARLES

I'll go to therapy. A sex therapist. Whatever it takes.

ANNIE JO

No, I'm sorry. I hit my wall.

CHARLES

What do you mean?

ANNIE JO

I don't want to be with you anymore. I kept hoping it would change. Or that I could just change. Today, Charles, I resent you. But if I stay, I'll hate you.

CHARLES

Are you quoting a self-help book?

ANNIE JO

No. But I don't want to hate you.

CHARLES

I'll have to tell Sam.

ANNIE JO

I can tell her if you want.

CHARLES

She loves you. You're more than a stepmother to her.

ANNIE JO

I love her. She's part of why I've stayed this long.

CHARLES

She gets back from Paris in a few weeks.

ANNIE JO

If you can't listen to me, listen to her. She needs you.

CHARLES

She's sixteen. She disagrees.

ANNIE JO

She's wrong. Be patient.

CHARLES

(Groaning) God.

ANNIE JO

I'm sorry.

CHARLES

No, it's ... telling my mother.

ANNIE JO

She won't be that surprised. Um. I mean ...

CHARLES

Wait. You've talked to my mother?

ANNIE JO

Of course! You know how close we are!

CHARLES

You don't talk to her about ... us, you know, us ...

ANNIE JO

No.

CHARLES

Thank God.

ANNIE JO

I mean, not in detail ... I allude to things and she figures it out.

CHARLES

You mean to tell me that you allude to our sex life with my mother?

ANNIE JO

She's no dummy, Charles.

CHARLES

This is ... disgusting.

ANNIE JO

We're friends, Charles. I don't share the gory details. She's the one who warned me in the first place that you're a bad listener. I mean, she still sends birthday cards to your first two wives.

CHARLES

Is that what you talk about while you're washing dishes after Easter dinner? So if she knows, then ... my whole family.

ANNIE JO

Don't worry. We don't tell Emily. Even your mom knows better than to tell your sister.

CHARLES

So I'm a bad listener. I don't satisfy you and apparently never have. And my mother knows!

ANNIE JO

I knew it. I knew you'd turn yourself into a victim. I'm just another woman who's wronged you now.

CHARLES

Great. I'll add selfish to the list.

ANNIE JO

Charles, you're not selfish. Not in general. You're self-centered. There's a difference.

CHARLES

I can't make you stay, can I?

ANNIE JO

(Removing her ring) I'm sorry it went down like this. I didn't mean it to.

CHARLES

Three marriages. What do I do now?

ANNIE JO

Stop trying to change people. Stop imposing what you want, and just ... listen.

(Annie Jo leaves.)

(Lights out on Charles, alone.)

ACT ONE
Scene Two

(Lights up on the kitchen and living area of Jack's house in Marquette, next morning. JACK is seated at the table, reading something on his tablet. Charles enters from a guest room, a bit worse for wear.)

JACK

Morning, sunshine.

CHARLES

Hey. You get a paper?

JACK

(Holds up tablet) Right here.

CHARLES

Ugh. Doesn't anyone get a real newspaper anymore?

JACK

Sorry, grampa. I like trees.

CHARLES

I do smell coffee though, right?

JACK

That, I can offer.

CHARLES

(Getting his coffee) God. I feel like shit. I can't drink like that anymore. You drank more beer than me. How are you functioning?

JACK

As of yesterday, I've been officially divorced for six months. I figure I have another six months of excuses for gluttony. After that I turn into Oscar Madison.

CHARLES

Judging by your guest room, you're off to a good start.

JACK

Sorry. I haven't gotten around to organizing it yet. No one usually sees it but me. You could sleep in Jamie's room instead.

CHARLES

I can't sleep on Winnie the Pooh sheets.

JACK

Understood.

CHARLES

Sorry this is my first visit. You bought this when?

JACK

Six months ago yesterday.

CHARLES

The same day?

JACK

Meg and I had an amicable coffee, took Jamie to the park, and went our separate ways. She bought a lawn mower. I bought a log home that is way beyond my pay grade.

CHARLES

You two still get along?

JACK

What are we going to do? We have a kid. When are you telling Sam?

CHARLES

When she gets back from her exchange trip.

JACK

Poor kiddo.

CHARLES

Shit. I hate that she has to go through this again.

JACK

She's a tough girl. You're giving her grounds for a fascinating memoir someday.

CHARLES

I'm giving her grounds? What about her mother and two stepmothers?

JACK

And a near stepmother. Don't forget about Jordyn.

BOTH

(High voices, imitating her) With a 'y'!

CHARLES

God. Three divorces. How did you stay married as long as you did?

JACK

I swallowed my rage until I got an ulcer.

CHARLES

Is that true? I didn't realize it was that bad.

JACK

It helped that we worked well together in, um, certain ways. No matter what.

CHARLES

You're saying sex is what kept you together so long?

JACK

Yes! I mean it helps if you actually love the person you're fighting with all the time. When you don't like them anymore, it gets harder. Who wants to get it on with someone who just told you your face looks like a vagina?

CHARLES

What?

JACK

She really hated my goatee.

CHARLES

It's Saturday. No games today?

JACK

Hah! That's where being a sports director in a small market pays off. I can assign all the newbies to cover high school football and our division two college teams. I only cover the big stuff now, like state championships and our alma mater's hockey team.

CHARLES

You ever wish you'd stayed in Chicago?

JACK

God, no. I tried it. It was fine. But it would have taken me years there to get to where I am now.

(cont'd) Plus, when I came back to Marquette, they made me sound like a freaking rock star. "TV6's new sports director will look familiar. Jack Parker returns!"

CHARLES

Jack Parker, huh?

JACK

Easier to spell than Polakowski.

CHARLES

Marquette's grown the last couple years.

JACK

You should see campus.

CHARLES

I'd love to pop into the broadcasting labs and see what they're like now.

JACK

Uh yeah. About that. There's no broadcasting department anymore.

CHARLES

Really?

JACK

Think about it. Broadcasting is an antiquated term. It's all digital and video now. Intro to Broadcasting is probably considered a history class.

CHARLES

Shit. We're old.

JACK

Speak for yourself. You wanna go out for breakfast, then see campus?

CHARLES

Sure. And did I see a new brew pub on Hewitt?

JACK

Oh yeah. You wanna see if they do tours?

CHARLES

Why not? I'm keeping reality at arm's length for the weekend.

JACK

My buddy said one of the brewmasters is a very attractive woman.

CHARLES

Great. Another human I can't satisfy.

JACK

Annie Jo really let it fly, huh?

CHARLES

Ripped out of the hangar, tore up the runway and dropped a missile is more like it.

JACK

Yeah. That's rough. I can't believe she told your mother.

CHARLES

I know! My personal stake aside, how is that even a comfortable conversation for either of them?

JACK

I don't even think Barfa would do that.

CHARLES

Martha. She *is* the mother of my child.

JACK

She's a mother-something. She'd break up with you long enough to sleep with some guy she wanted to get with so it wouldn't technically be cheating.

CHARLES

I'm not a fan. But she's a good mother. And that was a long time ago. We're adults now.

JACK

We were all adults then! Just not very bright ones. You ever hear from Sally?

CHARLES

I got a mysterious postcard maybe six years ago. It just said, "I'm great. I'm not in Nebraska." Like, what the hell does that mean? It was postmarked in Oatmeal, Nebraska!

JACK

I still think she's on the lam from something. I said that from day one.

CHARLES

Who knows? Looking back, that one year was my healthiest marriage.

JACK

Maybe you oughta veer away from your type.

CHARLES

It never occurs to me until it's too late. Then I'm in love again. I can't even think of it yet.

JACK

(Finding something on his tablet.) Huh. Well, look at this.

CHARLES

What?

JACK

(Showing the tablet) Look who's in town. Signing copies of her book.

CHARLES

Betsy.

JACK

Atta girl. Ha. Who'd have thought Betsy Kukanich would be our most successful college friend?

CHARLES

You read her first book?

JACK

The essays? Yeah. She's good. Did you?

CHARLES

Not yet. I follow her on social. She's really come into her own. She's hysterical. Remember that girl with the bobby pins who wore the same four sweatshirts all the time Freshman year?

JACK

And wasn't she a Disney nut?

CHARLES

That's right! She was a Disney person when we met her.

JACK

We used to give her such shit. She had Dumbo pajamas.

CHARLES

She was adorable. Such a weirdo.

JACK

I've never seen anyone more excited to buy name brand cereal.

CHARLES

She was really into country music when we met her.

JACK

Oh, right. Who was it that she listened to all the time? What the hell is his name? The guy with the hair.

CHARLES

Right, right. Billy Ray Cyrus! She once blurted out in class that she won tickets to see him in concert. She was so excited.

JACK

And then just when you thought, "is this girl totally okay?" she'd whip out some piece of knowledge that would smack you with how smart she was.

CHARLES

She's from up here and her accent was so strong.

JACK

Dude, she was so in love with you.

CHARLES

What?

JACK

Knock it off. You know she was.

CHARLES

Maybe she had a crush, but she could be so weird, it wasn't easy to tell.

JACK

She did your laundry!

CHARLES

Once! And it was only because I was sick and told her I had no clean shirts or socks. And she just ... did it.

JACK

She was poor. I mean, not just college student poor. I mean, came to college with one bag and a

(cont'd) ton of work-study hours every week. Didn't you ever hear her stories about home? Like how she'd have to use her babysitting money for groceries sometimes?

CHARLES

I guess. It explains a few things.

JACK

Well, look at her now. Let's go see her after the brewpub tour.

CHARLES

To her reading? Yeah. That's a great idea!

JACK

Oh. Wait. *(Pause. Then laughing.)* You may not want to hear the title.

CHARLES

What? Why?

JACK

(Shows him the tablet, laughing) Check it.

CHARLES

What? *(Reading Jack's tablet)* Bad in Bed. A Fairy Tale.

JACK

You two never ... ?

CHARLES

You assume it's about me? No! She's ... Betsy.

JACK

The New Yorker called it "a grown-up fairy tale that charms, amuses and breaks your heart while embracing the awkwardness of youth."

CHARLES

That's Betsy all right. Let's go.

JACK

(Raises coffee mug.) We'll cap off our day with a trip to the bookseller!

CHARLES

(Hoists coffee mug) To the bookseller!

ACT ONE
Scene Three

(Later that afternoon. BETSY, at a podium, with a large scale cover of her book, "Bad in Bed: A Fairy Tale" displayed near her.)

BETSY

A charming young man full of wisdom and life,
Who drew others to him without even trying,
Sadly, befuddled, he can't keep a wife,
Yes, he can land them, but away they keep flying.

Somewhere a woman recalls with a smile,
Her younger self, broken hearted and mad,
She took comfort in new friends if just for a while,
And in their strange magic, written off as a fad.

Upon meeting him, she fell fast and hard,
She followed him everywhere looking for crumbs
Got brave and gave him a Valentine's card,
He found someone else, but was "glad they were chums."

Embarrassed, she flocked to the girls wearing black,
Who played in the woods testing nature and worse,
Encouraged by witches to give it a whack,
She healed her sad heart by concocting a curse.

Reality dawned with the sunrise next day,
"Oh, this is silly," and from witchcraft she fled,
"This black magic could never work. No way!
Like I could render him doomed to be bad in bed."

Life moves on and we change and we grow,
She wondered sometimes if they'd meet again,
Now that she felt she had something to show,
Can we ever really change in the eyes of old friends?

ACT ONE
Scene Four

(Jack's house, that evening. Jack is stocking the bar. We hear a knock.)

JACK

Be right there!

(He answers the door. Betsy enters and he takes her coat.)

Madame. *(Kissing her cheek.)*

BETSY

Oh my. If someone had told me this morning I'd be hanging out with you two tonight, I'd have thought they were drunk.

JACK

It's good to see you, darlin'. In person. I do occasionally stalk you on facebook.

BETSY

Same here. You look well.

JACK

And time has been kind to you, my dear.

BETSY

Well, thank you.

JACK

You look a lot classier than Charles and me. I'm surprised you weren't embarrassed to be seen with us today.

BETSY

Hah! I guess the tables have turned. But thank you, Jack.

JACK

How about a drink?

BETSY

A drink is in order. What do you have?

JACK

I picked something up just for you.

BETSY

For me?

(Jack picks up and sets down a huge bottle of Boone's Farm wine.)

No way. They still make this!

(Jack nods.)

(She starts to laugh.) Boone's Farm!

JACK

Note the flavor.

BETSY

Strawberry Hill. I mean, what's the point, otherwise?

JACK

Set me back a whole three bucks.

BETSY

I can't believe I used to drink this fermented Kool-Aid. Every Friday night. In your dorm room playing trivia.

JACK

But seriously, it's not every day I have a bestselling author in my house. What can I get you?

BETSY

Red wine, please. Zinfandel if you have it.

JACK

Happy to oblige. *(He pours her a glass.)*

BETSY

(Accepting) Thank you. It's so great to be here. I get so homesick for Marquette sometimes. Especially in the fall. And this log home is gorgeous. And Lake Superior is right there.

JACK

(Pouring himself a beer) Thanks. Stupid post-divorce impulse buy. Man alone. Man wanted to be Grizzly Adams.

BETSY

Pretty sure Grizzly Adams didn't have a sunroom. How are you?

JACK

I'm okay. How can such a relief also make you so depressed? What about you? You had a rough time in that department last year too, didn't you?

BETSY

Yep.

JACK

I'm sorry, hon.

BETSY

Thanks.

JACK

Can I ask what happened?

BETSY

Jake slept with my friend.

JACK

Ouch.

BETSY

To his credit, he confessed. He felt terribly guilty. But ... with my friend? Apparently they bonded over being "in my shadow," like it was my fault.

JACK

Damn, hon.

BETSY

Yeah. Well. What about you and Meg?

JACK

Meg and I just became like two beta fish. One night she told me she hated the way I blink. What am I supposed to do with that? It's an involuntary action!

BETSY

Well ... here's to new beginnings.

JACK

Amen. You know, Charles' wife just left him.

BETSY

(Intrigued) Really? I mean ... he can't catch a break, can he? Is this ... three?

JACK

M-hm. Just happened. You know, maybe this is your weekend.

BETSY

My weekend?

JACK

You know what I mean.

BETSY

No. *(Laughing)* Jack, that was a long time ago. I'm no longer the hick with a heart o' gold who was totally aflutter over Charles Flak.

(Charles enters.)

CHARLES

What kind of establishment is this? Pour me a goddamn drink.

BETSY

(Her voice gets higher.) Hi Charles!

JACK

Yeah. Totally unfluttered.

CHARLES

What? You don't want Boone's Farm?

BETSY

It looks like hummingbird nectar.

CHARLES

Probably as much sugar. This *(reading another label)* ... red zin ... does look much better. *(Pouring)* What's it been, Betsy? 20 years? Jesus, we're old.

BETSY

Middle-aged, thank you very much.

CHARLES

(Pouring a glass.) Based on my life experiences and the data therein, I passed my median 15 years ago.

BETSY

How's the world of local news?

CHARLES

I can't complain. I have just enough hot stories to keep it interesting without it running my life. I oversee a news team that sounds like a bunch of teen idols. "Action News at 6 with Andy Acklesworth, Cindy Sommersby, Reggie Reynolds and Stephanie Steinbrenner."

BETSY

How's fatherhood?

CHARLES

Good. It flies by. Samantha is an exchange student in Paris right now. She face-times me once a week and always tries to get a landmark in the background. She's sixteen and she's already more worldly than me.

BETSY

She's beautiful. She looks just like you. I mean ... it's striking.

JACK

Yeah. Thank god she didn't inherit her mother's horns and forked tongue.

CHARLES

Anyway. Fatherhood is good.

JACK

So did you have any luck?

CHARLES

Any luck?

JACK

I assumed you've been trying to reach Annie Jo.

CHARLES

Well. I need to know what's going on. Is she moving out? Is this going to be messy? I don't want messy. I just want it done. It happened so fast, I don't know what she's thinking.

JACK

If you were still hoping to reconcile, I was gonna say your timing is perfect. The window of remorse is probably open a crack.

BETSY

The window of remorse?

JACK

The window of remorse. It happens to women shortly after a break-up. No matter how sure they were it was over, the remorse sets in. They start to have doubts. It's a combination of guilt and the fear of being alone. You want one last chance? If you know what you're doing, you can pry the window up in your favor.

CHARLES

The "window of remorse," huh?

BETSY

He's right. Dammit, Jack. You're absolutely right!

CHARLES

How did I miss this? I could have saved at least one or two marriages before this!

BETSY

Maybe. You might have just delayed the inevitable.

JACK

Not necessarily. Meg broke up with me in grad school. I got through the window just in time and six months later we were married.

CHARLES

How is this a success story?

JACK

It worked, didn't it?

CHARLES

But you're divorced.

JACK

Yes. After fifteen years. What's the longest of your marriages?

CHARLES

Shit. I don't want to get divorced again.

JACK

The window will open. Be ready.

CHARLES

Maybe. Hey. *(To Jack.)* I think we're being remiss here. *(Indicating Betsy)* Come on. A toast to the current shining star of the NMU Communications alumni.

BETSY

Aw, thank you.

(They raise their glasses.)

CHARLES

To our friend, the author. *(They all drink.)* Congratulations, Betsy. It's very good to see you again.

JACK

Hear hear.

BETSY

Cheers. I'm delighted to be here.

CHARLES

Sorry we missed the actual reading. Our brewery tour went a little off the rails.

JACK

Yeah, our tour guide was a little ...

CHARLES

Not interested in Jack.

JACK

Not true! She kept looking at me!

CHARLES

Are you fourteen? She was looking at you because you kept asking questions she was about to answer!

JACK

I think she was glad to have someone on the tour who understands the complexities of the brewing process.

CHARLES

Or she felt patronized because you kept bringing up things she was about to mention.

BETSY

Were you mansplaining the brewmistress?

JACK

No! I was flirting! I'm just ... rusty.

CHARLES

(Topping off their wine.) Anyway. We were late and we missed the reading. I assume you've been trotted out on campus as a success story.

BETSY

That's Monday. I'm speaking to a few classes and giving a talk at the U.C.

CHARLES

Nice. You going to visit Frank?

BETSY

Hell no. At least, I'm not going out of my way. He ... no.

CHARLES

What? You still have a hang-up with Dr. Franklin?

BETSY

The man nicknamed me Benji. Like the 80s TV dog. And loved humiliating me.

CHARLES

He gave everyone shit. But damn, the man could edit! I learned so much from him.

BETSY

I learned a few things from him, but that was his job. The personal jokes at my expense were ... not appreciated. I don't need his approval.

CHARLES

So a book tour has to be exciting, huh?

BETSY

It's going well. It's crazy. I have a publicist now. I never ever thought it would take off like it did. It's a 42-page adult fairy tale. Who'd have thought? *(Pause)* Have you, um, read it?

CHARLES

Bad in Bed? No, sorry. That's some title. Where'd you get the idea?

BETSY

Um, well, you know. Life. Just ... life.

(Jack picks up the book and peruses it through the following.)

JACK

So my signed copy will be worth something.

CHARLES

Good for you, Betsy. I'm happy for you. You've come really far. It's a nice surprise to see someone like you finding success.

BETSY

Someone like me?

CHARLES

Well. Your background, I mean. College was a big deal for you. I mean bigger than for most of us. You were pretty rural, first in your family to go, right?

BETSY

You mean I was poor white trash.

CHARLES

No! Oh, God no. You just hadn't had exposure to much of the world. Academia was kind of a culture shock. I mean. *(Laughs.)* You dressed up to go to Target.

JACK

(In a strong north Midwest accent) "Oh, geez! Is that an Olive Garden? I've only seen those on the TV."

BETSY

Yeah, I was pretty small town.

CHARLES

You were a goddamn hoot. I still remember when you blew your first work-study check at the Disney Store.

JACK

(Doing the accent again) "You guys. It's an Eeyore sweatshirt!"

CHARLES

The Eeyore sweatshirt! Oh my God! Your accent too. You worked so hard to lose it, I had kind of forgotten about it.

BETSY

Everyone gave me such a hard time about it. When Frank singled me out in class ... as an example of how not to present yourself as a broadcaster ... I was still a freshman ... ugh.

CHARLES

Right. He kept making you say hockey coach.

BETSY

(Reenacting) Kukanich, say hockey coach. *(Thick northern accent)* “Hoa-kee coach.” Everyone laughed. Say hockey coach. “Hoa-kee coach.” I couldn’t hear the difference and I didn’t understand why everyone was laughing at me. I almost cried in class, I felt so stupid.

CHARLES

Yeah, I remember.

BETSY

I also remember someone bringing me a cup of hot chocolate in the dorms that night. And telling me the theatre department offered a voice and diction class.

CHARLES

See, Jack? I have my moments. Anyway, Betsy. You had to work harder than some of us and you’ve done very well.

BETSY

You make it sounds like I had special needs or something. I might have been poor and gone to a second-rate high school. But I wasn’t challenged, not that way.

CHARLES

No, you definitely weren’t.

(Jack quietly becomes more interested in Betsy’s book.)

You just had some really ... interesting ways of looking at things.

JACK

(Looking up from book) Terrible taste in music though.

CHARLES

Yes! Hah! *(Laughing.)* Jack and I were talking about that time you burst into the room to tell us you won tickets to see Billy Ray Cyrus. You were so excited.

JACK

I believe a celebratory line dance was involved.

BETSY

(Embarrassed) These are the things you remember about me?

CHARLES

Billy Ray Cyrus. You were genuinely thrilled.

JACK

I called you and played “Achy Breaky Heart” on the phone every day for a week.

BETSY

That was you? You asshole.

JACK

Hey, it was twenty years ago. *(Beat)* And it’s still hilarious.

CHARLES

You also did a line-dancing demonstration for production class. “Welcome to the OK Corral.” I ran studio camera and I couldn’t stop laughing.

BETSY

(Growing uncomfortable) I was such a dork. Why exactly did you guys let me hang out with you?

CHARLES

Why wouldn’t we? You had great taste in films and were funny, even though sometimes you didn’t mean to be. You made me appreciate the Coen Brothers, for which I’m forever grateful. Plus, you were right down the hall and made a good addition to Trivia Night.

(Jack has become more engrossed in Betsy’s book, occasionally glancing up and looking at Betsy and Charles.)

It’s just, um, a delightful surprise that you may be the one of the old guard who makes the biggest name for themselves.

BETSY

Fair enough. I have made a living now out of exploiting my youth. *(Warily)* You know, Jack, you can just ... read my book later.

(He looks up and shakes his head ‘no.’)

CHARLES

It was fun having you around. But wasn't there was this period of time we didn't see you much? You had this goth hippie thing going for a while.

BETSY

Can we talk about something else? Like maybe the present?

CHARLES

Oh, who was that girl that lived on third floor? What was her name? You started hanging out with her for a while. She was a trip. We had a nickname for her. Martha swore she was a witch.

(Jack closes the book and holds it up and looks pointedly at Betsy. Charles doesn't see as Jack points at him.)

It must have been D and D? I mean, if anyone had "gamer" written all over them it was you back then. But what was her name?

JACK

(Quickly, standing, looking at Betsy) Abraca-Debra!

CHARLES

Yes! Abraca-Debra!

JACK

She wasn't a gamer. She was a witch!

BETSY

Yeah, well. I went through a phase. I had a class with her and we used to chat. I was ... upset about ... a thing ... and she invited me to her coven meeting.

CHARLES

Right! Didn't she have like, a Wicca club?

BETSY

Yes! No ... she tried, but didn't have enough for it to be considered an official student club. Right? There were like, four girls, in it.

JACK

The girls wearing black!

BETSY

And it wasn't really Wicca. Exactly. It was kind of an off-brand. Deb started out Wiccan but

(cont'd) wanted to embrace her Finnish heritage more. She also believed that certain mythical creatures existed, so that got wrapped in there too. God, we had a name, what was it?

CHARLES

So you were a member of a Shur Fine Wiccan cult for a while? How did we not know this?

BETSY

You were ... busy.

JACK

Ah. With Barfa.

CHARLES

Mother of my child, please.

JACK

Who wants a drink?

CHARLES

Betsy, you're a good sport. Ladies first, Jack.

JACK

I'm a little afraid not to.

CHARLES

(Laughing) I'm trying to picture this underground witch council of Northern Michigan. Led by high priestess Debbie. A room full of bad perms and Mists of Avalon fans.

BETSY

Okay, okay. Let's talk about something else now.

CHARLES

Probably lots of spells about avenging high school bullies and rebuffed advances. I'm trying to picture sweet little Betsy as a witch and it's hilarious.

BETSY

Now, yes. Not at the time.

CHARLES

What order of witch were you? Endora? Sabrina? Buffy?

BETSY

It was twenty years ago! So I was a dork, and I dabbled in witchcraft. And then I ... then it was

(cont'd) done. New subject, please. Also, Buffy is not a witch. She's a vampire slayer.

CHARLES

I'm sorry. It's just funny. You should really write a book about this.

JACK

Hah!

CHARLES

I'm surprised you didn't suddenly have suitors coming out of the woodwork. Didn't you ever try your hand at love potions? Or love spells? I don't recall you dating anyone back then.

BETSY

Charles!

CHARLES

A love spell to soothe your ... "Achy Breaky Heart?"

BETSY

I am no longer enthralled by your incessant talking!

CHARLES

Seriously. Look at you now. I'm just ... proud of you. What happened to the girl who confused forensics with fencing? Or who got lost on a five square mile campus every day her first month?

BETSY

(Forcefully) That's enough!

(Charles tries to stifle a chuckle.)

Seriously? Okay, I'm gonna tell you. You broke my heart and I dabbled in witchcraft just long enough to curse you. "Bad in Bed" is about you!

CHARLES

Wait ... wait, what?

BETSY

A grown-up fairy tale based on a sex curse I put on you. To make you, well ...

JACK

Holy shit. Wicca works?

BETSY

It wasn't Wicca! And no, of course not.

CHARLES

You ... cursed me? That can't be ... Why? How did I break your heart?

BETSY

Why did you have to take me back in time tonight? I was really looking forward to this. Man. Charles, I followed you around like a pathetic stray. I finally got up my courage up and bought you a Valentine's card. You didn't even open it. We rode to this party together and I thought it was a date ... You met Martha and I had to watch you fall in love with her right in front of me. I was naive, and so angry and embarrassed, I ... I ...

JACK

Joined a coven. Natch.

CHARLES

This is a joke, right? The day after my *third* wife leaves me, telling me I'm a lousy lay, I discover a book titled *Bad in Bed* is about me. Where are the cameras?

BETSY

Oh no. *(To Jack)* Really?

(Jack nods, rather amused by this whole thing.)

I'm ... sorry. It's just a silly fairy tale, if that helps. It's not like it's true.

JACK

What inspired you to write it now?

BETSY

I came across one of my old magic books in the attic and had a chuckle. I thought, "remember when I became a witch and cursed Charles?" Ha ha ...

(Charles stares at her.)

Well, it was funny at the moment. Anyway, I started thinking there's a story here."

CHARLES

Three times. I don't want to be a middle-aged guy who's been divorced three times. All because of some slight I caused when I was twenty years old?

BETSY

Whoa. Charles, I'm sorry. But ... you're not thinking the curse actually worked, are you?

CHARLES

(Piecing it together) We did a story on this once. These women who practiced black magic were holding meetings in the back room of this art store. They cursed a guy who cheated on two of them with each other and he had to be operated on the next day. Emergency appendectomy. He tried to sue.

BETSY

Charles, I really don't think ...

CHARLES

They all leave! Martha. Sally. Annie Jo. You cursed me! I'm freaking cursed!

(Charles' phone beeps.)

Who's this? Harry Potter?

(Checks his phone.)

Perfect! Ex wife ... almost number three! *(Reading.)* She's coming through town. That's right. She went to Michigan Tech, and is going to alumni weekend. She says ... she wants to talk.

BETSY

Oh. Well, good. See?

CHARLES

Hey. So if you cursed me, can the curse be undone?

BETSY

What? I don't know. I'm sure there's some ritual ...

CHARLES

Who would know? How can we find out?

BETSY

I don't know, Charles. I could ... google it?

(Charles is texting with Annie Jo.)

JACK

Are you still in touch with *(ominously)* the coven?

BETSY

No, well, I'm facebook friends with Deb, who I think still lives here in Marquette.

(Jack gets on his tablet and starts searching.)

JACK

Deb. What was her last name?

BETSY

Paarkkonen. Two a's, two k's. It's Finnish. I guess I can send her a message? I don't know how often she's on here. What do I say?

CHARLES

(Reading his phone) We're meeting tomorrow afternoon!

BETSY

She may not even remember me.

CHARLES

I can get to her during the window!

BETSY

(To Charles) What?

JACK

The window of remorse!

CHARLES

Of course! But not unless the curse is removed.

BETSY

Charles, I ...

CHARLES

(Desperate) Please.

BETSY

(Pitying him. On her phone) Okay. I'll send a message ...

JACK

What are you gonna say? Hey, still a witch?

BETSY

Something like that. *(She types.)*

CHARLES

Worst case scenario, I can get another chance. Best case scenario, curse gets removed and I can convince Annie Jo I'm, well, cured.

JACK

Please tell her you suck in bed because a witch put a hex on you.

CHARLES

Any luck yet?

BETSY

It's been twenty seconds. Looking at her facebook page, it appears she is now a ... cardinal goddess ...?

JACK

What? Is that like a witch pope?

(Betsy types. Jack looks over her shoulder.)

BETSY

She's responding ...

CHARLES

What does she say?

BETSY

(Pause. Reading) "I think I can help you. You will need a box of black salt, a hand mirror and a rock from the ground near a churchyard tree, of course."

JACK

Of course. Third shelf in the pantry.

BETSY

There's more. "Do you have the graven image of the curs-ed one?" *(She pronounces cursed with two syllables.)*

JACK

Ooh, the curs-ed one.

CHARLES

Hey! This is my life!

BETSY

(Typing.) We have the curs-ed one in person. Will that work?

(Pause as they all watch Betsy's phone for a response)

Ah! "Marvelous. Then no hand mirror will be needed. I can arrive tomorrow morning at ten on the hour."

CHARLES

Where the hell do we buy black salt?

BETSY

(Reading) She says she can have the black salt delivered.

JACK

Good. I'm fresh out.

CHARLES

Who delivers black salt?

BETSY

Okay. Sent her the address. She'll be here at ten tomorrow, to ... get you uncurs-ed. If it ... makes you feel better.

CHARLES

Good. I'm ... I'm hopeful about this.

JACK

This has been one weird fucking visit.

BETSY

I'm going back to my hotel. I'm sorry, Charles. I'm not sure what else to say. I'll see you tomorrow. Bye, Jack. Thanks ... for the wine.

JACK

Bye, Bets. *(Betsy leaves.)*

CHARLES

What the goddamn hell just happened?

JACK

(Handing him Betsy's book.) Here. A little light reading.

(Lights out.)

(End of Act One.)

ACT TWO
Scene One

(Lights up on Jack's living room the next morning. Charles is drinking coffee and reading "Bad in Bed." A knock at the door. He goes to answer it. It's Betsy holding a box.)

BETSY

Hi.

CHARLES

Morning.

BETSY

For what it's worth, I brought donuts.

CHARLES

Thanks. Jack has nothing but Cheerios here.

BETSY

I suppose. It's just him.

CHARLES

Seven boxes! All open!

BETSY

Weird.

CHARLES

So thanks. There's coffee on the counter.

BETSY

Where is Jack?

CHARLES

Out for a ... run.

BETSY

Jack runs?

CHARLES

More like ... traipses. I've never seen anything like it. I happened to look out the window. He looks like Pepe' Le Pew.

BETSY

When is he coming back?

CHARLES

God knows. How long does a three-mile prance take? *(Bites a donut)* That's delicious. *(Reading box)* Donut King?

BETSY

Formerly known as Captain Donut. The, um, ambience hasn't changed though.

CHARLES

Still sketchy?

BETSY

The woman who served me had five hickeys and a face tattoo.

CHARLES

You know what I just remembered?

BETSY

(Also biting a donut) Maple donuts?

CHARLES

Didn't we bond over this?

BETSY

We ended up at "the captain" after some party. We found out we were both fans of maple glaze and there were two left. *I* thought it was fate.

CHARLES

Think what you'd have done to me if there was one and I'd taken it.

BETSY

How are you today?

CHARLES

I'm optimistic. I guess. I'm meeting Annie Jo at one. I just want to convince her to give me one more chance.

BETSY

'Kay. I'm really sorry you've gone through so much.

CHARLES

Every time, you think this is it. This is the person. Even back when I met Barfa ... I mean, Martha. Dammit, Jack. I mean, you find someone who puts up with you and knows how and when to set you straight when you need it, makes you laugh. That's all most of us want, right? I thought I had it every time.

BETSY

Well. Just because they ended doesn't mean you didn't. People move on.

CHARLES

Yeah. Away from me. I don't want to go through this again.

BETSY

I get that. I've only got one divorce under my belt but it was a doozy.

CHARLES

I read your book.

BETSY

(Making her way to a window.) You did? The whole thing?

CHARLES

It's a little surreal knowing ... what I know. But the ending ...

BETSY

It's a fairy tale. It needed a happy one. The inspiration may have come from life but it's just a fantasy.

CHARLES

Whose?

(Betsy looks out the window and starts laughing.)

BETSY

Oh my god. You weren't kidding.

CHARLES

(Joining her at the window) Is he back?

BETSY

(Both laughing) Is he okay? What is he doing with his hands?

CHARLES

He's so serious.

(They continue laughing.)

He's coming back in.

(Jack enters in running gear.)

JACK

Ah. That felt great.

(Betsy hands Charles a donut. They both take huge bites to stifle their laughs.)

Do I see donuts? Thanks, Betsy.

(Jack makes his way to the donuts and takes one.)

BETSY

You're eating a donut right after ... whatever you just did?

JACK

Yeah, of course. I only flog because I get anxiety issues if I don't exercise.

BETSY

You only ... what?

CHARLES

Did you say flog?

JACK

Yeah. Flogging. It's the latest exercise trend.

CHARLES

Where? Tibetan monasteries?

JACK

No, smartass. It's a combination of flailing and jogging. The point is your arms are getting a workout too.

BETSY

From beating yourself with an imaginary stick?

JACK

I know it looks a little odd, but I burn 400 calories every time. That earns me a donut.

CHARLES

Why haven't I heard of this fitness sensation?

JACK

I don't know. I was interviewing some hockey players for a story and they told me about it.

BETSY

Did they demonstrate it?

JACK

No. They explained it. Why?

CHARLES

Flogging? They totally punked you!

JACK

They were not. Shut up. *(Pause)* It's working anyway so I wouldn't care if they did.

CHARLES

Hey, I have a question. How come you have seven open boxes of Cheerios on your shelves?

JACK

I have a thing about getting crumbs from the bottom of the bag when it gets too low. It ruins the whole cereal experience.

CHARLES

You're a fascinating man, Jack Parker.

JACK

I like to think so. I'm going to shower and change. It's almost time isn't it?

BETSY

Yeah. Deb will be here soon.

(Jack shrugs and enters his bathroom.)

(To Charles) Are you sure you still want to do this? You don't think it's a little ... crazy?

CHARLES

(His fervor returning) I'm not taking any chances. Did she say how long it'll take?

BETSY

Not really, but she made it sound pretty routine ... as these things go. Do you think we'll have to pay her?

CHARLES

To undo the curse she helped you put on me?

BETSY

You'd think we'd need to cover gas and uh, the materials. How much is that, I wonder.

CHARLES

Don't know. I'm not sure the going rate of black salt and church rocks.

(There is an ominous knock on the door. Betsy and Charles look at each other.)

CHARLES

Maybe this *is* crazy.

BETSY

You want to chance it?

CHARLES

No!

(Charles answers the door. DEBRA enters. She looks nothing like what you'd expect a practicing witch to look. She could be a Walmart DMV worker. She wears faded jeans and either a sweatshirt with a faded design or a flannel shirt. She carries a rubber tote and a duffel bag. Debra is slow and deliberate in all she does.)

BETSY

Hi Deb.

DEBRA

(Nodding slowly) Yah. Hello there, Betsy. It's marvy to see you.

BETSY

It's ... marvy to see you too. Thanks for coming on such short notice.

DEBRA

(Taking a breath) Well, yah. Where's the curs-ed one?

CHARLES

That's me.

DEBRA

Yah. I remember you. You used to date that one girl. Bertha?

CHARLES

Martha.

DEBRA

Now that was a witch. Different kind. But geez. I caught her drawing a pentagram on my dorm room door.

BETSY

Charles, I know she's the mother of your child, but ... that totally sounds like something Martha would do.

(Charles nods.)

So, Deb. I'm out of practice. What can we expect here today?

DEBRA

Well. First we gotta make sure what spell we're breaking. There's a few that are similar. So we might need to review. Once we get that figured out, we'll make a circle of black salt on the floor. No delivery yet, eh?

BETSY

No. How will it arrive?

DEBRA

By truck. I got a guy in Frankenmuth. He's sending his courier.

BETSY

You have a black salt guy?

CHARLES

With a courier?

DEBRA

Yah. Back room of any gaming supply store. You'd be surprised what you find behind the bingo chips. They also do rare herbs and crystals.

CHARLES

So after the black salt arrives and you make a circle, then what?

DEBRA

You'll get in the middle of the circle with a possession you would have had when you were cursed.

CHARLES

Shit! I didn't know that part!

BETSY

Yeah, you didn't mention that.

DEBRA

Oh, geez. Huh. Sorry. Well, in a pinch, you could hold a rock.

CHARLES

A church stone!

DEBRA

Nah. Any rock. But I just can't guarantee *total* removal of the curse.

CHARLES

What? So there's a chance you can't totally remove it?

DEBRA

Without an artifact, yah.

CHARLES

Shit! An artifact?

BETSY

Charles, this is Jack's house. He's Mr. Nostalgia. You guys were roommates for how long? He'll have something.

(Jack emerges from the bathroom just in time to hear.)

JACK

What will I have? Hello, Debra.

DEBRA

That's Abraca-Debra to you.

JACK

Heh. So you knew I called you that.

DEBRA

You don't get to be a Cardinal Goddess without knowin' a coupla thing or twos.

JACK

Sorry.

DEBRA

It was a long time ago, Sporty. So do we have an artifact?

JACK

An artifact?

BETSY

Something Charles would have had back when the curse was made.

JACK

I don't know. I finally tossed a lot of crap before I moved in here.

CHARLES

Can you look? My sex life, er marriage, depends on this!

JACK

Okay, okay. I'll look. *(He enters his junk room.)*

DEBRA

Well, once we get our artifact and our black salt, me and Betsy'll do some incantations. We'll give you the kiss of blessing and you're done.

CHARLES

How long will all this take?

DEBRA

Half hour, tops.

CHARLES

Okay. It's about 10:30 now. I need to leave a little after noon if I want to find parking. Plus, Annie Jo is always annoyingly early.

BETSY

Oh. One of those.

CHARLES

Yeah, it's really great if you're five minutes late. You get to hear how she's been waiting almost half an hour.

BETSY

So ... what exactly are you gonna do when you see her?

CHARLES

Well. We're meeting for lunch at the Chamberlain Inn.

BETSY

Okay.

CHARLES

I'm going to try to win her over. And if all goes well ... maybe we get a room. We sort of "test drive" ... things.

BETSY

What if she doesn't go for that?

CHARLES

Well, plan B is I crack open the window of remorse just enough that she agrees to talk when we both get back home.

BETSY

Isn't she on her way to Houghton? Will she have time?

CHARLES

Like I said, Annie Jo is annoyingly early. She has time. That I'm going to try to buy.

(Jack emerges from the "junk room.")

JACK

You'll never believe it!

CHARLES

You found something?

JACK

Get a load of this!

(Jack holds up a Vanilla Ice t-shirt.)

CHARLES

Oh my god.

BETSY

Vanilla Ice? That's yours?

CHARLES

I won it at some student life event. It was really comfortable and I used to sleep in it.

BETSY

Jack, why do you have it?

JACK

Because he made the mistake of walking down our hallway once and was seen in it. Everyone started calling him 'Nilla Wafer. He tried throwing it away a bunch of times.

CHARLES

It would keep coming back.

JACK

I'd always take it out of the garbage, hang on to it for a while and then put it back in one of his drawers.

CHARLES

He gave it to me as a wedding present. Twice.

BETSY

Who knew it would come in so handy?

DEBRA

Y'know. Vanilla's real name is Rob Van Winkle.

(No one is quite sure what to do with this.)

BETSY

Anyway, we have your artifact. We just need the salt.

CHARLES

He's late. Can we call the guy? Maybe just check on him?

DEBRA

Let's give him a little more time. Now. Betsy. You gotta help me here. I think we used one of

(cont'd) these curses. *(Hands Betsy some old notebook papers)* Read 'em and tell me what you remember.

BETSY

(Taking and reading the papers) Hm. This one seems kind of familiar. *(Muttering)* The curs-ed will not satisfy ... blah, blah ... always wonder why ... I think this is it.

DEBRA

Okie doke then.

JACK

So ... it just hit me. You're doing witchcraft in my house. Is my home ... gonna be okay?

DEBRA

Yah, sure. I spit on your doorstep before I came in.

JACK

Oh. Well, in that case ...

CHARLES

No turning back!

JACK

Yeah, yeah. So what happens next?

BETSY

Well. When the black salt arrives, we'll sprinkle it in a circle on the floor. Then Charles will get in the center while we chant the reversal incantation. And then ... we kiss him?

DEBRA

Y'know, we could get a head start by making a space for the circle. And the curs-ed one, can don his artifact.

JACK

Here you go, curs-ed one. *(Handing Charles the shirt)*

(Charles goes to change. Jack and Betsy start moving things around.)

DEBRA

I hope ya got a good vacuum. That black salt can be a bugger to get out.

JACK

Great.

DEBRA

You guys do that and I'll get workin' on the translation here.

BETSY

Translation?

DEBRA

Well, yah. Don't you remember? We were a Finnish coven. We did everything in Finn.

BETSY

Oh god! That's right!

(Charles enters wearing the t-shirt, which is way too small.)

CHARLES

Not a word, Parker! What needs to be translated?

BETSY

The curse. We ... did it in Finnish and have to translate the reversal into Finnish too.

CHARLES

Jesus! I'm on a deadline here! How long is this gonna take?

DEBRA

Alrighty. Let's just fire up good ol' Google Translate here. Got a pen?

JACK

Ah. A pen.

CHARLES

Of course not. Pens are so twentieth century.

JACK

Do you have one, smart-ass?

BETSY

I might have one. Let me go check my purse. *(She goes to look in her purse.)*

(There is a knock at the door.)

I'll get it.

(Betsy answers the door. We do not see the courier through any of the following.)

(A box is pushed through the doorway.)

BETSY

Oh! This must be the black salt, right?

(Nodding) Yes? Great. *(Pause)* Deb? Um. What do I do here?

DEBRA

Pay the man.

BETSY

Okay. So how much do we owe you? *(Pause)* I'm sorry. I ... oh, are you deaf? Um. I don't know sign language.

DEBRA

Oh boy. Hey, let's take a look at that salt.

(Debra comes to the front door. She looks at the box.)

(To courier) Oh, hon. I only needed five pounds. Not ten.

BETSY

He's deaf.

DEBRA

It's okay. I know sign language.

CHARLES

What the hell is happening here?

BETSY

Ask him how much we owe him.

DEBRA

Well, he might've got a wrong order. Whatcha gonna do with five extra pounds of black salt?

CHARLES

Good god! I'll take up witchcraft, myself! Can we please keep this moving?

DEBRA

Okay, then. I'll ask him how much we owe.

(Debra begins to sign. She keeps signing. And signing.)

CHARLES

How long does it take to ask how much it costs?

DEBRA

Well, I only know the alphabet.

JACK

You have to spell everything?

DEBRA

Well, yah.

(Deb is focused on the courier's signing.)

Wait, wait. Slow down there. I missed that.

(Jack fixes a drink and settles in for the ensuing entertainment.)

CHARLES

I don't care how much it costs!

(Charles takes out his wallet, removing bills and joining them at the door.)

Is twenty good? Fifty? Fifty. Here.

DEBRA

(To courier) Hey, as long as you're here ... *(reading his nametag, then spell-signing, slowly)*
Burt ... do ... you ... have ... a ... bushel ... of ... fresh ... sage ... in ... your ... truck?

(Charles is starting to panic as Debra talks to the courier. He pulls Betsy aside.)

CHARLES

It's after eleven! I thought this was going to be quick!

BETSY

Sorry. I forgot. She was always a little, well, deliberate.

CHARLES

Deliberate? Try glacial!

BETSY

Charles, you're going to be fine. She's a cardinal oracle or whatever. I'm sure she knows what she's doing. Try and be a little patient.

CHARLES

(Losing it) Patient? You're not the one with three ex-wives and a Finnish Wiccan sex curse on your head!

BETSY and DEBRA

It wasn't Wicca!

DEBRA

It's called taika.

JACK

Anybody else want a bloody Mary?

DEBRA

(Spell-signing to courier) Thank you, Burt. Say hi to Financy.

JACK

Financy?

DEBRA

Well my children, let's get this show on the road.

CHARLES

Yes! Let's do that!

DEBRA

Shh,

(Debra lugs the box of salt to the space they've cleared.)

(This is a bit of a production. She removes a special trowel from her tote. She uses it to make a circle of black salt.)

Okay now. The curs-ed one needs to stand in the center.

CHARLES

Do you have to keep calling me that?

DEBRA

Would you prefer Nilla Wafer?

BETSY

Um. What can I do?

DEBRA

Fetch me my tote.

(Betsy obliges.)

Me 'n' Betsy shall don the robes of our sisters. As we recant the spell cast long ago.

BETSY

My Finnish is a little rusty. Will that be okay?

DEBRA

Yah, sure.

(Debra opens the tote. She removes two robes. She puts one on and hands the other to Betsy.)

Robes first.

(They put on the robes.)

And now our paahines.

JACK

What are your paahines?

(Debra takes out two winter toques that each have a pine cone where a tassel might be.)

Ooh. Pretty.

(Jack is enjoying a Bloody Mary and snaps a picture of Betsy with his phone.)

BETSY

Shut up, Jack.

(Next, Debra removes a faceless ragdoll, which she hands to Charles.)

CHARLES

What is this?

DEBRA

It is a poppet.

JACK

Why does he need a puppet?

BETSY

It's a poppet.

CHARLES

What the hell is a poppet?

DEBRA

(Suddenly formal) A poppet signifies a place and time. This poppet was my first, made not long after the spell was cast. Its cloth was cleansed in the great lake and stuffed with dried leaves and herbs I discovered in the woods near our quaint college town.

CHARLES

(Sniffing) It smells like weed.

DEBRA

And weed. I used to hide my stash in its butt. Holding this will help deflect the initial power set forth by the curse. Shall we begin?

JACK

(Approaching with phone in hand.) Hold it up.

CHARLES

(Starts to) Jack!

DEBRA

(To Jack) Hmm. Might you record this? This would be a very helpful training video.

JACK

(Positioning the phone as he holds his drink) Oh, please, can I?

CHARLES

Parker, you asshole.

DEBRA

Betsy, read with me.

BETSY

Good luck, Charles.

DEBRA

Let's begin.

(She and Betsy join Charles in the circle.)

We'll say it three times.

BETSY AND DEBRA

Nuorten on typerää. Loitsu oli stron. Mutta olet vahvempi. Ole rakastaja. Curse mennyt.
 Nuorten on typerää. Loitsu oli stron. Mutta olet vahvempi. Ole rakastaja. Curse mennyt.
 Nuorten on typerää. Loitsu oli stron. Mutta olet vahvempi. Ole rakastaja. Curse mennyt.

DEBRA

(Stepping to Charles) As the cardinal goddess of the order of the Orbits of Pegasus, with this kiss of blessing, your curse is now removed.

JACK

Orbits. Of. Pegasus.

(Debra kisses Charles on the cheek.)

DEBRA

(Hands paper to Betsy) You say this part.

BETSY

(Reading) As the sorceress who cast the spell, with this kiss of blessing, your curse is now removed.

(She freezes for a moment, then kisses Charles, lingering maybe a second too long.)

CHARLES

I feel like an idiot.

(Blackout)

ACT TWO
Scene Two

(Jack's living room, minutes later. Deb is packing up. Betsy still wears her hat and robe while helping Deb. Charles paces while Jack sits rewatching the curse removal on his phone.)

CHARLES

I don't feel any different. Should I?

DEBRA

I dunno. This one's a first for me.

BETSY

Hey, Jack. Where can I find a broom?

JACK

Planning on taking it for a spin?

BETSY

Very funny. Deb wasn't kidding about this black salt.

JACK

(Pointing off) Pantry.

(Betsy goes to fetch a broom.)

CHARLES

Are you sure there's not ... a way to ... check?

DEBRA

I guess you could do a test drive.

CHARLES

A test drive? Like before I see Annie Jo? How? Wait.

DEBRA

I'm not offering. I'm a married woman.

(Betsy returns with a broom.)

BETSY

Call me crazy, but this paahine is really cute. I would wear this.

(Jack walks up to her and snaps a photo of her.)

JACK

And y'know. This isn't even the most incriminating picture I have of you.

CHARLES

Betsy.

BETSY

Huh?

(Charles approaches Betsy and puts his hands on her shoulders.)

CHARLES

I need a favor. You cursed me. I think ... I think you owe me.

BETSY

Charles, seriously, this whole thing ... what are you talking about now?

CHARLES

I need a test drive.

BETSY

A what?

CHARLES

I need to make sure I can, y'know, before I see Annie Jo. I mean, my plan won't work if I'm not, cured.

BETSY

Charles, you're still married ...

CHARLES

Separated! Technically. And please. Maybe we don't even have to go ... all the way. I can just see if I can ... um, move you. And, really, we had a moment back there, right? When you gave me the kiss of blessing.

DEBRA

Yah, I caught that too.

BETSY

A test drive?

CHARLES

What do you say? Time is tight, but .

BETSY

(Still holding broom) A test drive. I am not a Jeep. Wait, no. Silly me. You see me more as a pick-up truck, don't you? This whole weekend, you've made it so clear that you only see me as

(cont'd) who I was a million years ago. Like it's such a shock that I would ever make something of myself. That's insulting. Sadly, that girl probably would have said yes. But this grown woman is worth way more than that.

JACK

(Clears throat) Broom.

(Debra takes the broom from Betsy.)

BETSY

Have you paid any attention to the events of my life? My husband slept with my friend. And before that, my ex-fiancé dumped me for a twenty three year old. And the person before him had a wife and kids he never got around to telling me about. And you have the nerve to ask someone who wrote a fucking fairy tale about you to be your "test drive." Well, I've changed, Charles. You, however, haven't.

(Betsy removes her robe and hat and goes to leave.)

CHARLES

I'm sorry, Betsy. I got carried away. I ...

BETSY

And what is wrong with you? You would rather believe some ridiculous Scandinavian sex curse had an effect on you than consider maybe you're just a bad lover who might have to change? I'm sorry, but you know what? You got your heart broke again? Maybe you deserve it. Thanks for everything, Jack. I'll see you.

(Betsy leaves.)

DEBRA

I wouldn't call it ridiculous ...

JACK

It's 12:30.

CHARLES

Yeah. I better go.

(Charles goes to get his jacket.)

DEBRA

Yah, so I'm not gonna charge for taking the curse off.

CHARLES

What? Oh, uh, thanks.

DEBRA

I'll even tell you the magic words to say when you see your lady.

CHARLES

She doesn't speak Finnish.

DEBRA

Cute. Just say, *how are you?*

CHARLES

And then what?

DEBRA

And then nothin'.

JACK

That's not bad.

CHARLES

Wish me luck.

(Charles exits.)

DEBRA

While I'm here, sport, I can cleanse the bad goonies out of your house with some sage.

JACK

(Beat.) Yeah, why not?

(Lights out.)

ACT TWO
Scene Three

(Lights up on Annie Jo at a café table. She sips coffee and checks her phone. Charles enters, a bit frantic. He wears a blazer over the Vanilla Ice t-shirt.)

CHARLES

Annie Jo. *(Sitting)* I'm so glad you're still here.

ANNIE JO

I've been waiting for 20 minutes.

CHARLES

It's *(checking)* 1:03. I'm three minutes late.

ANNIE JO

Well, still.

CHARLES

Fine. Sorry. That's fine. So, hey.

ANNIE JO

Hey. How are/

CHARLES

No, how are you?

(Awkward pause)

ANNIE JO

I'm good, actually. Thursday was weird. I'm sorry for how I handled things.

CHARLES

Well. I'm sorry too. That's ... I guess I'm glad you told me. Or, that you made me finally hear. It really made me think about things.

ANNIE JO

How's Jack?

CHARLES

He's the same. We ended up meeting up with an old college friend this weekend. It was, um, an enlightening visit.

ANNIE JO

Is that Vanilla Ice?

CHARLES

What? Oh, my “artifact.” Long story. Someday I will tell you.

ANNIE JO

Charles ...

CHARLES

I was really happy to get your text. I did a lot of thinking on the drive up here. I really hope we can start over and I mean, if you want us ... or just me even ... to see a therapist or something, I will. I will do that.

ANNIE JO

Charles ...

CHARLES

I can prove to you that I will be better. I'll listen. I'll even try to cut down on my work hours.

ANNIE JO

Charles, please.

CHARLES

What will it take?

ANNIE JO

I'm sorry, but it's too late.

CHARLES

There's someone else.

ANNIE JO

No! God, why does every man assume that in a break-up? It's not someone else!

CHARLES

We took vows. Can't we try?

ANNIE JO

Let me ask you this. Why do you want another chance?

CHARLES

Because ... divorce is hard. You haven't been through it, Annie Jo.

ANNIE JO

You see, there's the problem.

CHARLES

What?

ANNIE JO

I ask you why you want another chance. What you should have said was, because I love you and I would miss you, Annie Jo. But your first response was all about you.

CHARLES

I do. I should have said it first, but I do. I will listen better. I love you.

ANNIE JO

But I don't love you anymore. I'm sorry.

CHARLES

(Pause) Really? Not even a little.

ANNIE JO

I married you. I will always care. And I believe you love me, but ...?

CHARLES

Isn't that enough? And I really do want to try and make it better.

ANNIE JO

I know this is hard. After not being heard for so long, I have no desire for you anymore.

CHARLES

Ouch.

(Long pause while Charles thinks.)

You want to hear a funny story?

ANNIE JO

No. Not really.

CHARLES

Okay. So when we're back ... home?

ANNIE JO

I found an apartment. I think you should tell Samantha. Let me know when you do. I'd like to keep in touch with her ... if she wants.

CHARLES

Do you have a lawyer?

ANNIE JO

I've been looking. I don't really want anything. I mean, the house was yours to begin with, so. Well, maybe the armoire in the living room. And the china. But ... let's talk about that next week. I should get going. I really just wanted to say this in person.

CHARLES

Yeah.

ANNIE JO

Have a safe drive back. Goodbye, Charles. I'm sorry you're hurting. I hope you ... do what you need to do. I really do wish you well.

(Annie Jo exits.)

CHARLES

I'm sorry too.

(Lights out on Charles alone.)

ACT TWO
Scene Four

(Jack's house, two months later. It's winter.)

(Jack and Betsy enter from the front door. He carries a bag.)

BETSY

Ah! Warmth! I forgot what twenty below feels like!

JACK

Right? God's country, my frozen ass.

BETSY

Well, it'll be freezing, but at least it will be beautiful. You arranged for glistening snowflakes and northern lights for me, right?

JACK

Success has really gone to your head. Make yourself at home, dear.

BETSY

It's funny. I grew up just two hours away from here. But the place I get homesick for is Marquette.

JACK

It's where you became you. Or started to.

BETSY

I guess so. Thanks for the offer to stay here.

JACK

Any time! You sure you don't want to join us?

BETSY

Thank you. But it's been a crazy few months. Publicity gigs and starting a new book. I need some quiet.

JACK

Can I get you a beer? I have some good stuff on tap.

BETSY

Nice! Did a certain brew-mistress provide the beer?

JACK

(Grinning) Yeah.

BETSY

I'm so happy for you. Has it been, what, a month?

JACK

Six weeks. My endless questions on the tour actually wore her down. Her name's Jolene. She called me!

BETSY

I know! You said.

JACK

I'm supposed to pick her up about now. I should get going. I'm staying at her place this weekend but we'll probably pop in at some point. Resist the urge to clean. And by all means, don't look at that framed photo on the bar.

BETSY

I'm scared now. I'm just happy to have some peace and quiet. Thanks, Jack.

JACK

(Kisses her cheek, then knowingly) You're welcome.

(Jack exits. Betsy wanders the living room a minute. She goes to the bar and finds the framed photo and laughs.)

(The front door opens and Charles enters. Betsy turns, surprised. They look at each other a minute.)

CHARLES

Betsy.

BETSY

Charles. Hey.

CHARLES

What are you doing here?

BETSY

Jack invited me to stay. I needed some quiet time.

Really. CHARLES

He invited you too? BETSY

Yeah. CHARLES

I didn't know. What a stinker. BETSY

What do you have there? CHARLES

(Betsy hides the photo behind her back and steps from the bar.)

BETSY
What we have here is a decision. There is a lovely assortment of micro-brews, courtesy of Jack's new girlfriend, Jolene. I see a Copper Range APA, Not-Your-Gamma's-Oatmeal Stout and Logger's Lager.

CHARLES
(Steps to the bar.) I'll try the Logger's Lager. *(Begins to pour)* And for you?

BETSY
I like my hops. I'll have the APA.

(Charles pours them both a beer.)

I like that you pour it into a glass without even thinking about it.

CHARLES
Drink it from the bottle? What are we, heathens?

BETSY
We're all a little heathen.

CHARLES
Speak for yourself, Sabrina. *(He hands her a beer.)* Well, here we are. Cheers.

BETSY
Cheers.

(They clink glasses and stand there.)

To awkward moments.

CHARLES

I think I know what this is.

BETSY

I hope you know I didn't have anything to do with this. I'm sorry, well, no, I'm not sorry I blew up at you. But I'm not sure what Jack was thinking here. I guess he just wants to make sure we can be friends again.

CHARLES

Jack is happy and he wants all to be well. He's a pain in the ass, but he's a good friend.

BETSY

And a clever bastard.

CHARLES

Betsy, I ... How are you?

BETSY

Tired. I'm working on a new book and the research is completely draining.

CHARLES

What's it about?

BETSY

Meth addiction in rural America.

CHARLES

So another comedy then.

BETSY

(Jazz hands) More fun than you can shake a crackpipe at.

CHARLES

I was so busy ribbing you last time, I didn't make it clear how much I really think you deserve your success.

BETSY

Thank you.

CHARLES

Now, what are you hiding behind your back?

BETSY

(Revealing the photo) It's a little embarrassing.

CHARLES

You're embarrassed! Look at me. I look like I weigh 90 pounds!

BETSY

I'm straight up gazing at you from behind my coke bottle glasses. Jack was right. This is way more incriminating than me wielding a broom in an old choir robe.

CHARLES

You did look cute in the paahine.

BETSY

I would wear it. I'm going to make one for myself.

CHARLES

Can't you just summon one from the ... Orbits of Pegasus?

BETSY

I wonder if I need black salt for that.

(They start to laugh.)

CHARLES

Well, I know a guy in Frankenmuth.

I'm sorry, by the way. For everything. For years ago and months ago. If the failure of another marriage has made me see anything it's that Annie Jo was right. I miss important things. It's not that I don't care. I just get single-minded. It's helped me in my career but it's really made a shit-show of my relationships.

BETSY

Charles. Sounds like you're learning. And you're not the worst.. Sometime my freshman year, I got really sick and missed a few days of school. You brought me your notes from class and filled me in on what I missed. You were the smartest person I knew and you were supremely nice to me. And let's be frank. I kind of deserved some of the kidding.

CHARLES

Thanks for that.

BETSY

You should keep working on being a better listener though.

CHARLES

Of course.

BETSY

Anyway. I'm sorry too. I just got the idea for the book and went with it. I never thought it would catch on. I just followed a silly idea and had fun with it. Plus, I wasn't sure how to give you a heads-up. "Hi, twenty years ago I put a curse on you and wrote a book about it."

CHARLES

Yeah, they didn't cover that in speech class. *(He starts to laugh.)*

(Betsy starts laughing too. Pretty soon, the ridiculousness of the previous scene hits them hard.)

I hope ya got a good vacuum. That black salt can be a bugger to get out.

CHARLES

(Pretending to spell-sign.) Do you have fresh sage in your truck?

BETSY

This poppet represents ... time and place. It is stuffed with sacred leaves and herbs ...

BOTH

And weed!

CHARLES

(In Debra's accent) Ya never know what you'll find behind the bingo chips.

BETSY

"You don't get to be a Cardinal Goddess without knowin' a couple thing or twos."

CHARLES

"As the goddess of the order of the Orbits of Pegasus, I kiss your curse away."

BETSY

Nuorten on typerää ... ta-dah!

(Charles puts his hands on her shoulders and kisses her. It's a surprise to both of them, and it's good.)

BETSY

That ... that wasn't soggy at all.

CHARLES

What have you heard?

BETSY

No, that was the perfect amount of firmness and um, interlocking ... um. It was good.

CHARLES

It was. Should we try again just to be sure?

BETSY

Okay.

(They kiss.)

You're going through a really difficult thing right now. Are you ... sure about this?

CHARLES

I'm pretty sure I want to keep kissing you. But you're right. And I don't want to hurt you, so if you want me to go, or if you don't want to chance it, I completely understand that. Maybe we can plan a time in a few months to get together and see where things are at and if you feel then like you want to take a chance on someone who's been married three times, then ...

BETSY

Shhh.

CHARLES

What do you want to do? *(Beat)* I'm listening.

(Lights out.)

ACT TWO
Scene Five

(Lights up on Betsy, at another reading.)

BETSY

Time plays its tricks, in both good ways and bad
We all evolve into a grown-up one day,
The girl never thought in any daydream she had
That curse would work for her in any way.

The boy she once loved was now a grown man
No longer a girl, she had lived some life too,
She'd done just fine without the touch of his hand
But how pleasant it was when she finally knew

They both learned the lessons they needed to learn
Like how to be quiet and when to let go,
How to know someone well and find love in return
Under a backdrop of glistening snow.

This dream of a young girl long ago dismissed
Would be rekindled with a kiss, a beginning or an end?
Who knows? Who cares? It's just how life is.
How much we can change in the hearts of old friends.

(End of play)