

BAD IN BED

(A FAIRY TALE)

By

Karen Saari

BAD IN BED (A FAIRY TALE)

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BAD IN BED (A FAIRY TALE)

For Dave, Max and Ginn

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BAD IN BED (A FAIRY TALE) received a developmental production with Acadiana Repertory Theatre in Lafayette, LA in Feb. 2018, directed by Steven Landry and featuring the following cast:

Charles.....Allen Higginbotham
Annie Jo.....Nicole Waguespack
Jack.....Scott Sonnier
Betsy.....Catharine Arceneaux
Debra Chloe Abbott

BAD IN BED (A FAIRY TALE) received its world premiere through a co-production between Madison Theatre Guild and Madison College Performing Arts in March 2023 at the Bartell Theatre in Madison, WI. The play was directed by Allen Ebert and was part of the 2023 World Premiere Wisconsin initiative. It featured the following cast:

Charles.....Sam Weeks
Annie Jo.....Maya Weatherall
Jack.....Nick Kaprelian
Betsy.....Sarah Edlund
Debra.....Stacey Garbarski

CAST: 3 Women, 2 Men

CHARLES FLAK	30s-40s male, successful, nice guy but not very self-aware
ANNIE JO	20s-40s female, frustrated wife of Charles
JACK PARKER	30s-40s male, Charles' best friend, witty, newly divorced
BETSY KUKANICH	30s-40s female, old college friend, successful writer
DEBRA	30s-40s female, Betsy's college friend, practicing witch

TIME: A recent fall and subsequent winter

PLACE: Marquette, Michigan and Madison, Wisconsin

BAD IN BED (A FAIRY TALE)

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ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

Morning. Lights up on CHARLES and ANNIE JO's bathroom. They're getting ready for work. They had sex this morning. Annie Jo is frustrated. (Note: Annie Jo is already at the boiling point at the top of the scene. When she explodes, she explodes! By the end of this scene, Annie Jo should be dressed sharp for work and Charles should be only half-ready.)

CHARLES. That was amazing. *(He kisses her shoulder.)* I'm so lucky. I really wish I didn't have to go to work today. But I guess the newscast won't produce itself. *(Annie Jo brushes her hair angrily.)* Aw, you're tired. What do you have going on today, Madame Senior Account Executive? You're rising right up the ranks at the station. Next thing you know, you'll be General Manager and officially "the boss of me." *(He kisses her neck as she cringes.)* Thank you for this morning. What should we do tonight?

ANNIE JO. ... I don't know.

CHARLES. We could order in. There's that new Indian place down the street that delivers.

ANNIE JO. I hate curry.

CHARLES. No you don't. We order Indian all the time.

ANNIE JO. Oh, I know we do.

CHARLES. I could cook if you don't mind a late dinner. I'll probably stay through the six o'clock. And I know a tofu curry recipe/

ANNIE JO. /I said. I hate. Curry.

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CHARLES. You'll like this one. If you don't, (*He kisses her arm.*) I'll make it up to you.

ANNIE JO. (*Exploding*) Oh my god! Shut up, Charles! Shut up Shut up Shut up!

CHARLES. Annie Jo, what's wrong?

ANNIE JO. I don't want tofu. I don't want curry. And I don't want you!

CHARLES. What?

ANNIE JO. I said I don't want you! I'm never having sex with you again!

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

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

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

ANNIE JO. No! I'm not. My college boyfriend affectionately nicknamed me the Howler. 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've tried being kind. I've tried to talk. You just don't get it!

CHARLES. Don't get what?

ANNIE JO. Exactly!

CHARLES. Please tell me what's going on!

ANNIE JO. I've been telling you! And don't you dare play the victim.

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

ANNIE JO. You've driven me to this.

CHARLES. Oh no. 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. (*He gasps.*) No!

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ANNIE JO. Yes!

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, she said, "You'll know you found the one 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."

CHARLES. Lovely.

ANNIE JO. What she lacked in tact, she made up for in truth. I once thought we could work on it, Charles. But every time we talk about it, every time you tell me, this is the night you're going to surprise me ... tonight we're going to try something new, something-anything I've said I want ... Then it's Ping! Ping! And boom, you're done. Then you look at me all smug after, and I'm like ... do you think something just happened here?

CHARLES. I can't believe you're saying this.

ANNIE JO. But Charles, I've said it all before.

CHARLES. You didn't say it was me.

ANNIE JO. I was being supportive! But it's like you don't hear me. How many times have I said, "please don't touch me ..." in—you know—the spot. I hate it.

CHARLES. It's an erogenous zone!

ANNIE JO. Not for everyone! Anytime someone has ever tried to touch me there, all I feel is annoyed. *And* I've told you. *And* you continue to do it.

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

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

CHARLES. Forty?

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ANNIE JO. Don't you judge me. The point is I know what I like and what I don't. For example, I like orgasms!

CHARLES. Fine. I get it.

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

CHARLES. I'm trying so hard!

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. And it happens outside our bed too.

CHARLES. When?

ANNIE JO. Constantly!

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 daily.

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

ANNIE JO. Yes, I have.

CHARLES. Uh ... 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 social media.

CHARLES. (*He thinks.*) This isn't fair.

ANNIE JO. Stones from the River. It's about a little person 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! You never talk about them. It's different.

CHARLES. Sure. Of course it is.

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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 and it didn't register with you at all. You'd just tell me about another book I should be reading instead.

CHARLES. So I'm a bad lover *and* I don't listen.

ANNIE JO. That's not what I said.

CHARLES. What?

ANNIE JO. 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. I guess I just accepted it was part of the package and thought the sex would get better in time.

CHARLES. If I was such a lousy lay, why did you marry me?

ANNIE JO. I loved you, you moron! I thought, hoped, the other stuff, the coffee in bed, the random love notes ... I told myself those matter more. I was wrong. The sex is just ... indicative ... of the real problem.

CHARLES. What real problem?

ANNIE JO. Just now. Talking about dinner. Every time you make or suggest Indian food, we have the same. Fucking! Conversation!

CHARLES. Not every time!

ANNIE JO. You're right. Sometimes I just don't have the energy.

CHARLES. Okay, I'll stop trying to make you eat curry!

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!

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ANNIE JO. *I've told you this!* I can't wear them unless I want my earlobes ripped in half. My earring holes are all stretched out.

CHARLES. That can't happen!

ANNIE JO. Yes, it can! *(She aggressively holds out her earlobe.)* Look at my earlobe, look at it!

CHARLES. Fine. *(Taking a look)* Oh.

ANNIE JO. Oh? Did you think I was making it up? The first time I let it slide, then it happened again. And again. The last time, I threw them at your head.

CHARLES. When?

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

CHARLES. *(A long moment passes.)* 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. I'm done, Charles.

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

ANNIE JO. Charles. It's over.

CHARLES. What do you mean?

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

CHARLES. Hey! That's from that self-help guru we had on the show that time ...

ANNIE JO. Her name is Della Beanbaker. She changed my life. Anyway, I don't want to hate you.

CHARLES. I'll have to tell Sam.

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ANNIE JO. I can tell her if you want.

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

ANNIE JO. 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 a teenager. She disagrees.

ANNIE JO. Maybe. But you'll get farther with listening. Take my word.

CHARLES. God.

ANNIE JO. I'm sorry.

CHARLES. No, it's ... telling my mother. Another woman left me.

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. I'm appalled.

ANNIE JO. We're friends, Charles. She's the one who warned me you're a bad listener. Hell, 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've never satisfied you. And my mother knows!

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ANNIE JO. I knew it. Of course you're the victim here. I'm just another woman who's wronged you now.

CHARLES. Great. I'll add selfish to the list.

ANNIE JO. You're not *selfish*. You're *self-centered*. There's a difference. *(By now, Annie Jo is polished, dressed, ready for work. Charles is barely dressed.)*

CHARLES. I can't make you stay, can I?

ANNIE JO. No.

CHARLES. Three marriages. What do I do now?

ANNIE JO. Stop trying to change people. Stop imposing what you want, and just ... listen. *(She leaves. Charles stands there, alone.)*

SCENE 2

Next morning, in Marquette, MI. Lights up on the kitchen and living area of JACK's house. JACK sits at the table, reading his tablet. Charles enters, a bit worse for wear.

JACK. Morning, sunshine.

CHARLES. Hey. You get a paper?

JACK. *(He holds up tablet.)* Right here.

CHARLES. Ugh, digital. 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. *(He gets 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. Six months of sheer gluttony.

CHARLES. Drowning in it?

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JACK. Reveling in it. Sorry my guest room is such a mess. I said you could sleep in Jamie's room instead.

CHARLES. I can't sleep on Winnie the Pooh sheets.

JACK. Understood.

CHARLES. This is my first visit to the new place. You bought this when?

JACK. Six months ago yesterday.

CHARLES. Wait. 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 trip with her mom.

JACK. Poor kiddo. All that one-on-one time with Barfa.

CHARLES. Jack ...

JACK. I know, I know. "Mother of your child."

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

JACK. Sam'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. *(They imitate her with high voices.)* 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. I didn't realize it was that bad.

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

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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 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? That was big time.

JACK. God, no. It would have taken me years there to get to where I am now. 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 comms labs and see what they're like now.

JACK. It's pretty sweet. It's all digital and video now. Remember those crappy old edit bays we learned on?

CHARLES. And the four-ton camera equipment? 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. I think they do tours. You up for it?

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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. Is she still a Della Beanbaker fan?

CHARLES. Yes!

JACK. Yeah-Meg read all her books too. I don't think she ever told my mom about our sex life though.

CHARLES. Right? How is that even a comfortable conversation? For either of them?

JACK. That's Barfa level betrayal.

CHARLES. Martha. Mother of my child.

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

CHARLES. Trust me. Not a fan. But she's a good mother. And 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, "Doing great. I'm not in Nebraska." It was postmarked Oatmeal, Nebraska!

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

CHARLES. Funny, 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.

JACK. *(He reads something on his tablet.)* Huh. Well, look at this.

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CHARLES. What?

JACK. (*He shares tablet.*) Look who's in town. Signing copies of her book.

CHARLES. Betsy.

JACK. Atta girl. Ha. Who'd have thought Betsy Kukanich (KU-kuh-nitch) 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. Remember that girl with the crooked bangs who wore the same four sweatshirts all the time Freshman year?

JACK. And wasn't she really into Fleetwood Mac?

CHARLES. That's right! But only, like, late 80s average-era Fleetwood Mac.

JACK. Oh, and old, like ancient old school country music.

CHARLES. Like a little old lady in a college freshman body.

JACK. Remember her goth period?

CHARLES. The many stages of Betsy. A good friend though. Always.

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. It wasn't easy to tell.

JACK. She did your laundry!

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

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

CHARLES. Her reading? Yeah. That's a great idea!

JACK. Oh. Wait. (*He pauses, then laughs.*) You may not want to hear the title of her new book.

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CHARLES. What? Why?

JACK. *(He shows Charles the tablet.)* 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 and breaks your heart while embracing the awkwardness of youth."

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

JACK. *(He raises coffee mug.)* We'll cap off our day with a trip to the bookseller!

CHARLES. *(They toast.)* To the bookseller!

SCENE 3

Later that afternoon at a bookstore in Marquette, BETSY stands 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,
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 eager for crumbs
Got brave and gave him a Valentine's card,
He found someone else, but was "glad they were chums."

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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,
Someday when she had something to show,
Can we ever really change in the eyes of old friends?

SCENE 4

Later that evening at Jack’s house. Jack stocks the bar. We hear a knock. Jack is wearing a t-shirt and festive hat from the brewery tour, over his regular clothes.

JACK. Be right there! *(He answers the door. Betsy enters and he takes her coat.)* Hello! Madame. *(He kisses her cheek.)*

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

JACK. It’s good to see you, darlin’. In person. I do occasionally stalk you on social media.

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.

BETSY. Those matching brewery t-shirts are pretty hot.

JACK. I’m glad you weren’t embarrassed to be seen with us.

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BETSY. Sure. Sure, I wasn't.

JACK. Funny girl. How about a drink?

BETSY. A drink is in order. What do you have?

JACK. Well. I picked something up just for you.

BETSY. For me? *(Jack presents a huge bottle of wine.)* No. Way. They still make this? *(Jack nods. Betsy laughs.)* 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. Oh, I used to drink this fermented Kool-Aid. Every weekend. In your dorm room playing trivia.

JACK. Shall I crack it open?

BETSY. No. No, you should not.

JACK. It's not every day I have a bestselling author in my house. What can I get you, for real?

BETSY. Red wine, please. Zinfandel if you have it.

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

BETSY. Thank you. I can't believe this day! I get so homesick for Marquette sometimes. Especially in the fall. This log home is gorgeous. And wow—Lake Superior is right there.

JACK. *(He pours 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. Eh, I'm okay. Now. Took a while. How can such a relief also make you so depressed?

BETSY. Love is a crime boss.

JACK. What about you? You had a rough time last year too, didn't you?

BETSY. Yep.

JACK. I'm sorry, hon.

BETSY. Thanks.

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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.

BETSY. Yeah. Well. What about you and Meg?

JACK. Meg and I just became like two beta fish. Constantly fighting. 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. I guess. I took this BuzzFeed quiz. It said I’m 85 percent ready to date again.

BETSY. 85 percent?

JACK. The other 15 wants to live on tacos and X-Files reruns.

BETSY. You’ll get there, Jack.

JACK. You know, Charles’ wife just left him.

BETSY. *(She is intrigued.)* Really? I mean ... he can’t catch a break, can he? Is this ... three?

JACK. M-hm. Just happened. Maybe this is your weekend.

BETSY. My weekend?

JACK. You know what I mean.

BETSY. No. *(She laughs a bit too hard.)* 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. *(Charles enters, still in his own brewery t-shirt over his clothes.)* Barkeep! Pour me a goddamn drink.

BETSY. *(Her voice gets higher.)* Hi Charles!

JACK. Yeah. Totally unfluttered.

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CHARLES. That doesn't look like Boone's Farm.

BETSY. I told Jack to save it for the hummingbirds.

CHARLES. Now, this (*reading another label*) ... red zin ... does look much better. (*Pouring*) What's it been, Betsy? 15 years? Jesus, we're old.

BETSY. Middle-aged, thank you very much.

CHARLES. I like the way you think.

BETSY. How's the world of local news?

CHARLES. I can't complain. Home is Madison, Wisconsin now.

BETSY. Nice town.

CHARLES. Madison has just enough hot stories to keep it interesting. I oversee a news team that sounds like a bunch of teen idols. "Action News at 6 with Andy Acklesworth, Cindy Sommersby and Stephanie Steinbrenner."

BETSY. How's fatherhood?

CHARLES. Good. It flies by. Samantha is with Martha in Paris right now. She face-times me once a week and always tries to get a landmark in the background. She's just a kid and she's already more worldly than me.

BETSY. I've seen pictures. She looks just like you.

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

CHARLES. Ahem. 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? It happened so fast, I don't know what she's thinking.

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

BETSY. The window of remorse?

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JACK. The window of remorse. It opens shortly after a break-up. Especially after 30. No matter how sure the breaker-upper was, the doubt sets in. The guilt. Then the fear of being alone. You want one last chance? 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’ve saved at least two whole 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. After fifteen years. What’s the longest of your marriages?

CHARLES. Touche’. I don’t want to get divorced again.

JACK. The window will open. Be ready.

CHARLES. Maybe. Hey. I think we’re being remiss here. *(He indicates Betsy.)* Come on. A toast to the current shining star of the NMU Mass 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!

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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. (*He tops off their wine.*) Anyway. We were late and we missed the reading.

BETSY. Well, you made it to the signing. In your cute matching shirts.

CHARLES. 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.

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

BETSY. The man who loved humiliating me? Yes. I do.

CHARLES. Aw, he gave everyone shit.

BETSY. He didn't give everyone a horrible nickname.

CHARLES. Yes! What was it again? Play-doh?

JACK. I'll give him this. The man could edit. I learned a ton from him.

BETSY. Well, that was his job. I just never understood the personal jokes at my expense.

CHARLES. Anyway, a book tour has to be exciting, huh?

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

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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. So my signed copy will be worth something. *(Jack picks up the book and peruses it through the following.)*

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 when we met.

BETSY. To say the least. Marquette had a Red Lobster and a Chi-Chi's. It felt like a big city to me.

CHARLES. You were so excited for your first concert. Who was it? The guy who sang Mambo Number five?

BETSY. Lou Bega. I still have my ticket stub.

JACK. You dressed up to go to Target.

BETSY. It was fancier than Walmart.

CHARLES. I'm still trying to remember Frank's nickname for you. Penelope? Tollhouse cookie?

BETSY. Let's not remember that.

CHARLES. I was always impressed with how you lost your Yooper accent. It was strong when we first met you.

JACK. *(He imitates her.)* "You guys goin' to homecomin' then, or what? Oh, geez."

BETSY. Oh, it still comes out. When I'm with my family. Or when I'm mad, like, really mad. You talk about Frank. Remember when he singled me out in class, as an example of how *not to sound* on the air? I was mortified.

CHARLES. Right. He kept making you say hockey coach.

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BETSY. *(She reenacts.)* 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 everyone was laughing at me. It was kind of traumatizing, actually.

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’ve done very well.

BETSY. Thanks.

JACK. *(He looks through Betsy’s book.)* Does this take place up here?

BETSY. It’s um, inspired by up here. Sort of. You don’t have to read it now. *(Jack raises an eyebrow and continues reading.)*

CHARLES. *(Laughing.)* Jack and I were talking about how you were super into old country music.

BETSY. Before it was cool again.

JACK. You loved anything with “hillbilly” in the title.

CHARLES. I have this memory of you lip-syncing to Dolly Parton for homecoming.

BETSY. Hell yes I did. I got honorable mention! And a gift certificate to Beef-a-roo.

JACK. I believe a celebratory line dance was involved.

BETSY. Guys. Are these the only things you remember about me?

JACK. I called you and played “Jolene” on the phone every day for a week.

BETSY. That was you? Aw. I thought I had a secret admirer.

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

CHARLES. Speaking of line dancing, you did a demonstration for

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production class. “Welcome to the OK Corral.” I ran camera and I couldn’t stop laughing.

BETSY. *(She grows uncomfortable.)* Haha. Why exactly did you guys let me hang out with you?

CHARLES. You had great taste in movies. You were funny, though you didn’t always mean to be. You made me appreciate the Coen Brothers, for which I’m forever grateful. And you made a good addition to Trivia Night. You knew the most random stuff. *(Jack has become more engrossed in Betsy’s book, occasionally glancing up and looking at Betsy and Charles.)* It’s a nice turn of events, Betsy. You may be the one of the old guard who makes the biggest name for themselves.

BETSY. My essays. My article series. This book. I guess I am making a living out of exploiting my youth. You know, Jack, you can just ... read my book later. *(Jack looks up and shakes his head ‘no.’)*

CHARLES. You were hilarious. But wasn’t there was this period of time we didn’t see you much? You had this goth hippie thing going.

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? Kinda odd and pokey, I remember. 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.)* Were you into D and D? I mean, if anyone had “gamer” written all over them it was you. But what was her name?

JACK. *(He points at Betsy.)* Abraca-Debra!

CHARLES. Yes! Abraca-Debra!

JACK. She wasn’t a gamer. She was a witch!

BETSY. I went through a phase. We got to be friends and I was upset about ... a thing ... and she invited me to her coven meeting.

CHARLES. *(Tipsy and amused.)* Coven meeting! Right! Didn’t she have like, a magic club?

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

JACK. "The girls wearing black!"

BETSY. And it wasn't witchcraft. Exactly. It was kind of an off-off brand Wicca knock-off. Deb started out Wiccan. Then she wanted to embrace her Finnish heritage more. So she ditched Wicca. Of course she also believed that certain mythical creatures existed, so that got wrapped in there too.

What was our name?

CHARLES. *(He laughs.)* So you were a member of a Finnish magic cult? Right under our noses. 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. *(He laughs harder.)* I'm trying to picture this underground witch council of Northern Michigan. Led by high priestess Debra. A room full of bad perms and Xena fans.

BETSY. Can we talk about something else now?

CHARLES. Probably lots of spells about avenging bullies and rebuffed advances. I'm trying to picture sweet little Betsy casting a spell with her magic wand.

BETSY. I didn't have a wand.

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

BETSY. Okay, okay. So I dabbled in a form of witchcraft. For a month. New subject, please. Also, Buffy is not a witch. She's a vampire slayer.

CHARLES. It's just funny. You should really write a book about this.

JACK. She really should ... *(Betsy shoots Jack a look.)*

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

BETSY. Charles, I'm getting mad!

CHARLES. A love spell to soothe your ... "Hillbilly Heartache?"

BETSY. I am no longer enthralled by your incessant talking!

CHARLES. Seriously. Look at you now. What happened to the girl who got lost on a two square mile campus every day her first month?

BETSY. She moved on!

CHARLES. Or the girl who hadn't been out of Michigan her whole life?

BETSY. You're not even listening, are you?

CHARLES. And you had this white puffy coat, like the *(He remembers something.)* Pillsbury Doughboy ... wait, wait ... and you always popped your p's on the mic! Poppin' Fresh Dough! Yes! Frank's nickname! Hah! Whatever happened to Poppin' Fresh Dough? *(He pokes her belly and laughs like the Pillsbury Doughboy.)*

BETSY. *(Her Yooper accent returns.)* Oh my god! That is it! *(Charles tries to stifle a chuckle.)* I have had it! Okay, I'm gonna tell you. You broke my heart and I toyed with magic just long enough to curse you. "Bad in Bed" is about you!

CHARLES. Wait ... wait, what?

BETSY. Oh, will that shut you up? You are the subject of "Bad in Bed!" *(Charles stumbles.)* A grown-up fairy tale based on a sex curse I put on you. To make you, well ...

JACK. Holy Hogwarts.

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

BETSY. Why did you have to take me back there tonight? I was really looking forward to this. Charles, I followed you around like a puppy. For

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years. I finally got the courage to tell you. We rode to this party together and I thought it was a date.

BETSY. I gave you a Valentine. You didn't even open it. That night you met Martha and I watched you fall in love with her. I was hurt and embarrassed, and I ...

JACK. Joined a coven. Natch.

CHARLES. Where are the cameras? 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.

BETSY. Oh no. *(To Jack)* Really? *(Jack nods, rather amused by this whole thing.)* I'm sorry to hear that, Charles. It's just a silly fairy tale. It's not like the curse worked.

JACK. Or did it? What made you write the book now?

BETSY. I found one of my old magic books in the attic. I thought, "remember that time I became a witch and cursed Charles?" Ha ha ... *(Charles stares at her.)* Well, it was funny at the time. Anyway, I thought, "hey there's a story here."

CHARLES. Three times. I'm about 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. Charles, you don't think the curse actually worked, do you?

CHARLES. We did a story on this once. These women who practiced sorcery 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. What were the odds?

BETSY. Charles, I really don't think ...

CHARLES. They all leave! Martha. Sally. Annie Jo./

JACK. /Jordyn.

CHARLES. Jordyn! You cursed me! I'm freaking cursed! *(Charles' phone beeps.)*

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Who's this? Elvira, mistress of the dark? (*Checks his phone.*) Even better! Ex wife ... almost number three! (*Reading.*) She's coming through town. That's right. She's coming up north for a girl's weekend thing. 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 texts 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. (*She gets her phone.*) I guess I can send her a message? I don't know how often she's on here. What do I say?

CHARLES. (*He reads his phone.*) We're meeting tomorrow afternoon!

BETSY. Deb may not even remember me.

CHARLES. I can get to Annie Jo during the window!

BETSY. Window?

JACK. The window of remorse!

CHARLES. Of course! But not unless the curse is removed.

BETSY. Charles, I ...

CHARLES. (*Desperately.*) Please.

BETSY. Fine. I'll send a message ...

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

BETSY. Something like that. (*She types.*)

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

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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 witch pope? *(Betsy types. Jack looks over her shoulder.)*

BETSY. She's responding ...

CHARLES. What does she say?

BETSY. *(She reads.)* "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? *(They all watch Betsy's phone for a response.)* "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'll 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.)*

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CHARLES. What the hell just happened?

JACK. *(He hands him Betsy's book.)* Here. A little light reading. *(Lights out.)*

END OF ACT 1

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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