

CHARLES

Then, damn it, accept her as she is; this is what she does.

Charles disappears. Rumble.

MAGGIE

Men. Her life was at stake, and he hadn't a clue! You can bet when Igor left his house today, he didn't take an umbrella! My father wouldn't look both ways before crossing the street. Cause of death? A Duesenberg. I was five - if that gives you a clue to my age. He was on business in St. Louis. The phone rang. I heard a clump. Ma had fainted. Even if she'd had a sign to warn her, she wasn't prepared for Dad to vanish. Two days later, she took me – not Casey who was 12 and could pull his own weight - but me, just me, to an orphanage because she couldn't afford to keep me. People did stuff like that back then. Our church got me back by holding a pancake breakfast. People still do stuff like that today. I think I told Kathryn about it once when we were both blind drunk. But I never spoke of it to Ma until Bonnie's wedding. Honestly, I'd listen to Ma go off about the Depression, the War or Casey, and I'd wonder... why things turned out as they did. When he was 12, Casey was the man of the house. But by 19, he was barely a man at all. And me...With Ma's "gift", you'd think she would've known I'd turn out well and keep me. Wife of a successful man. Three beautiful children.

(grabbing her thermos, swigging)

I'm terribly worried about Igor. I don't like it when people disappear.

(passing cookie tray, to the audience)

Nobody's eating. How can you turn your noses up at a recipe that's been handed down for generations?

(pause)

I sent a batch to Kathryn after her twins - I forced myself to pray that time, and she had a bumper crop. Her distinctive thank you note read, "Darling Mags, these magical creations make me feel human again!" Silent people have such a way with words! Bonnie adored my cookies, too. In fact, I hit on them as a bribe to keep her far from her friends in the Forest Preserve - by serving them at adorable weekly tea parties I threw for her and her stuffed bear Fuzzy.

YOUNG MAGGIE

Lady Bonnie, may I pour a saucer of tea for Sir Fuzzy.?

YOUNG BONNIE

Fuzzy's bored. He wants to go outside where he belongs.

YOUNG MAGGIE

Don't put it on the floor, dear. Ask Sir Fuzzy if he'll sit at the table like a knight of the realm.

YOUNG MAGGIE

Fuzzy's a bear, Mom. He HATES chairs.

YOUNG MAGGIE

Sir Fuzzy, sit at the table, and I'll give you one of my delicious cookies.

YOUNG BONNIE

Fuzzy doesn't eat cookies. He doesn't speak English either.

YOUNG MAGGIE

He understands *YOU*.

YOUNG BONNIE

'cause I speak bear. Grrrrrr!

MAGGIE

(defensive)

Hey, I knew where she was. And that she was alive.

(pause)

But then, when she was 10, the day before Christmas break, on her way home from school, she heard a small voice in the wind: "Save me. Save me." She followed the voice through the snow to the Anderson house - the biggest lot in the area. They had a big frozen over garden, and in it, a fountain. The voice seemed to be coming from the fountain, and when Bonnie looked in, she saw something frozen in the ice. The Anderson's little spaniel - eyes wide open, mid-bark. His name? Lucky.

The soft cry of "Save Me" in wind.

MAGGIE

Why the Andersons were away without the dog is still cloudy to me. I just know that Bonnie ran home, and asked the boys to help. Her eyes were glowing, but the boys were too up for adventure to notice. See, Joe, the oldest, had just seen a documentary at school about cryogenics; and they had the idea they could save Lucky if they thawed him out real slow. The boys threw on their parkas and ran about collecting tools. Their energy was like a train. Loaded down with picks and shovels, they marched to the fountain. It was almost dinner time when they returned. Poor little frozen Lucky! They laid him down right in the middle of my dining room table.

YOUNG MAGGIE

(gagging)

Get it outside! Get it outside this minute!

BONNIE

But Mom! He'll die!

YOUNG MAGGIE

(screaming)

He's already dead! Don't bring Death into this house!

MAGGIE

I'll never forget their faces. And Lucky's - so alive, caught in his struggle for air. I found myself wondering if Bonnie, with her glowing eyes, might actually succeed in their macabre task. The thought terrified me. So, as the kids commandeered the garage for their grizzly task, I collapsed at the dining table and prayed...

YOUNG MAGGIE

Dear Lord, I don't believe in you exactly. And I don't believe in signs at all. But I need one. I've vowed to shield my children from death!...But guess what - they found it on their own. Now they're trying to undo it. Lucky's a good dog. I don't want Lucky to be dead, but if you bring that dog back to life, I'll...

CHARLES appears.

YOUNG MAGGIE

(startled)

Charles! You startled me!

CHARLES

Everything's going to be okay, Mags. Take a breath. Good girl. Obviously, you're aware of what the kids are doing in the garage. I'm going back out and...see what I can do. Sweetie, how about making us a batch of your famous cookies?

MAGGIE makes cookies.

MAGGIE

As I baked, I listened. Sometimes there's peace in silence...Sometimes there's just silence... Finally, I heard Bonnie crying.

Tears wrapped in wind.

CHARLES

Kids, I think it's time to take Lucky home.

MAGGIE

What a man! I never knew all the details of that night until his funeral reception. He helped the kids walk Lucky back to the Anderson's. He taught them how to build a cross from twigs, and dig a hole in nearly frozen ground. It's good the kids didn't know exactly how the General picked up those skills.

(pause)

But the way the kids told it as adults, you would've thought it was the best night of their lives. The truth was, that night, dinner was too cold to eat, and no one had a stomach for my cookies. Later, in bed, when Charles and I turned off the lights...

The wind escalates, punctuated with rumbles, thunder, music and rain. In fact, the thunder and rain are so strong they punctuate the air like gunfire.

YOUNG MAGGIE

Charles, what are you thinking about?

CHARLES

My baptism.

YOUNG MAGGIE

I don't understand.

CHARLES

In the army they call your first battle a baptism by fire. The kids got baptized tonight. It was hardest on Bonnie. I don't want any flak for this... but there is no perfect place to raise kids, especially a far-away kid like Bonnie. I wouldn't wish what I went through in Europe on a dog...but your mother was right; Deerfield is a cemetery. So maybe we should get off our high horses and take our kids to a funeral or two.

YOUNG MAGGIE

But...

CHARLES

No flak.

Charles disappears.

MAGGIE

That was the week our tea parties ended. I suddenly found myself too tired to fight with Bonnie. But thanks to Lucky, Bonnie saw Death can be a formidable foe, random and unkind. The glow in her eyes was snuffed out. For a while. She became somewhat cautious of animals and a lot more like the rest of us. Good grades. Home on time.

(disquieted)

Safe.

She discovers another note.

MAGGIE

Please don't tell me Igor's not coming.

She reflexively pulls out her glasses; but before she can put them on...

MAGGIE

Hey! I can see! First my arthritis —now 20/20! Maybe I *did* drink from the fountain of youth. “Darling, you’re running late. But this is a hint as well as a pun...better *late* than never.”

(upset, scrutinizing the paper, sniffing it)

These are *not* from Igor. I don’t think Igor is coming.

MAGGIE scrutinizes the audience.
Then approaches the painting.

MAGGIE

Baby, do you know what this is about?

Lights flicker. MAGGIE touches the painting - a note falls out of it. A musical sound.

MAGGIE

“Remember the 14th.”

(defensive, wheels on the audience)

You think I’m a fool, don’t you? You think I can’t guess what you’re up to. When I talk to you, I feel happy, happier than I’ve felt in twenty years. And that’s bad. Because there’s no reason for it. Unless I’ve been drugged or I’m dreaming or unless I’m...

Lights flicker. Rumbles. Suddenly, music comes from the radio: Perry Como. She shakes the radio, takes the batteries out, but the music continues. She drops the radio on the table or floor. The music stops. Lights flicker. MAGGIE packs her bag - the flashlight, her will, the first aid kit. She tries to add the thermos to the bag, but finds the bag empty. Rumble. Another note falls from the painting.

MAGGIE

(ruefully, to audience, without reading the note)

I know! Remember the 14th. But no amount of Perry Como can make me talk about it.

Lights flicker. MAGGIE looks down at the bag and discovers it full. Thunder.

MAGGIE

Please! I’m too old. I’m older than I look. Much older. And I won’t be fooled! I’ve always known the difference between what I know and what I believe! Even after Charles died. Even back in the days when I *did* spike my tea!

Teen BONNIE walks in and picks up the thermos. MIDDLE MAGGIE is on the phone.

BONNIE

Mom, I found this in the bathroom.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

Silly me. I was bringing it in from the car when I had to go. I must've forgotten it. Thanks, dear.

BONNIE

Who are you talking to?

MIDDLE MAGGIE

Kathryn.

(to Kathryn)

It's totally normal, dear. When my boys were that age, they put beans in the ears of 6 neighbor kids.

BONNIE

(grabbing a cookie)

Tell her one of those kids just asked me out. Don't worry, I turned him down. But I almost said yes because I'm too broke to pay for the movies.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

(an idea, to Bonnie)

Say...you need movie money and Kathryn is swamped with the boys.

Let's kill two sparrows with one stone... I mean, birds.

(to Kathryn)

Kathryn, dear, you need a baby sitter - how about Bonnie? I'll take silence as a "yes."

Later.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

(to Bonnie)

How did it go today, Bonnie, dear? Everything under control?

BONNIE

(grabbing a cookie)

Little boys are so cute! I want to have 6 boys when I grow up. We're going to play Pirates and make pot holders and...

Later.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

How'd it go today, Bonnie, dear? Everything under control?

BONNIE

(grabbing a cookie)

Kathryn didn't feel well, so instead of doing errands she took a nap, and I had to find ways to keep the twins quiet. I gave them some of her homemade snickerdoodles, but it only made them worse. Her cookies aren't as good as yours. Did you know that?

Later.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

How'd it go today, Bonnie? Everything under control?

BONNIE

Sorry. Can't talk.

Later.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

How'd it go today, Bonnie?

(ignored)

Sweetie?

(ignored)

Pumpkin? Want a cookie? I made 'em just for you!

MAGGIE

She blew by me for a couple months, and I thought, "That's normal, right? For that age? Teens rebel, right? I mean, Bonnie was good in every other respect, and Kathryn had written me a gushing thanks for recommending her. So I assumed everything was fine. Maybe it was healthy for my baby to treat me like dirt. But then...

(discovering)

... on December 14th, 1976, the twins found their mommy - in her nightie, without her glasses, under the Christmas tree - dead from an overdose.

Wind. Charles appears.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

Charles, Bonnie wants to go to the funeral with us.

CHARLES

She's 15, Mags. She's not a kid.

MAGGIE

And he was right. It was as if she had prepared for the funeral her whole life. She sat with Kathryn's family as one of them. She kept the boys quiet. She treated Kathryn's

shaking husband like her own father. And I was proud of her. Except I couldn't tell her. My big blabber-mouth wouldn't work. I felt like a ghost at my own funeral. And suddenly, it was midnight. I woke on the sofa with a blanket. Charles must've done that.

Rumble. Charles disappears.

MAGGIE

I made a cup of tea and went to check on Bonnie, just like I did when she was five.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

Bonnie? The light's on. I know you're awake.

BONNIE

Go to bed, Mom.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

Let me in, Sweetie; today has been hard for all of us.

BONNIE

It's all my fault.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

Oh, honey, it's nobody's fault. I knew Kathryn was taking Valium. A lot of the girls take it. But I didn't think...

BONNIE

Kathryn, didn't die of an overdose, Mom. Bob was cheating on her; he wanted a divorce. They didn't think I was still in the house. I heard him tell her. She said she'd do it.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

She would've told me if Bob...

BONNIE

She was a very private person, Mom. Did you know she was married before? To a flier. He died.

MIDDLE MAGGIE

...But Kathryn is my best friend!

BONNIE

She wrote about him. In her suicide note.

BONNIE disappears. Rumbling and Wind. The lights flicker and go out for half a second. Then flicker. And flicker.

MAGGIE

(dawning of an idea)

"With her it's more of a flicker." Kathryn? It can't be.

Thunder! The lights go out. MAGGIE
dives for the flashlight; it doesn't work.

MAGGIE

Damn!

From her bag, she pulls a candle and
matches. She lights the candle - but in
the darkness, a new note appears.
She reflexively reaches for reading
glasses. They are white. They shock
her. Strange music emits from the
radio. MAGGIE grabs for her thermos,
takes a swig, then confronts the letter.
Kathryn's voice occasionally breaks
through.

MAGGIE

"Mags, you told me more than once how much you treasured my hand-written notes. So, after days of trying every trick I could think of - even the late Perry Como - I've taken up my pen. You fell asleep in your chair three days ago and never work up. If you think it's over when it's over..."

KATHRYN (V.O.)

...Like I did.

MAGGIE

"...you're wrong. There are rules! We have exactly 72 hours to review our lives, learn and move to a higher astral plane. People who can't accept they're dead..."

KATHRYN (V.O.)

...like you, dear...

MAGGIE

"...or people who take their lives..."

KATHRYN (V.O.)

...like me...

MAGGIE

"...become miserably bound to the past."

KATHRYN (V.O.)

It's as if I'm stuck in 1970s television. Forever.

MAGGIE

"Have you noticed booze doesn't work when you're dead? So, if you don't want to spend a sober Eternity with Charlie's Angels, let go of life and accept death! You have 20 minutes left."

KATHRYN (V.O.)

Oh, Mags, I've come to save you because I really am your friend."

MAGGIE

(to herself and audience)

What a cruel, monstrous joke! Whoever's behind this wants me to think Kathryn's fiddling with my glasses and sending letters. They forget I saw her body at the wake. Who would do such a thing? Not her cheating husband. He's dead. Not her boys. They're both insurance salesmen.

(to the universe, the perpetrator)

Whoever's behind this, until just the other day, I was a pathetic old woman with bad feet who hardly left the house and talked to her daughter's painting. You can't blame me for Kathryn's death.

(pause)

But... this IS Kathryn's paper!

She crumbles the letter and disposes of it in the flame. It vanishes in a flash of sparkles. This startles her. A new note falls. She picks it up.

KATHRYN (V.O.)

"Let it go."

MAGGIE

(crumpling paper, to the audience)

You know, Kathryn's death is what made Bonnie become an artist. She pulled away from the family and spent all her time drawing and painting. I told her, "There's no security in a life like that." She didn't care. She paid for her supplies with her own money. She even won a scholarship to school. I was beside myself the day she left. I appealed to Charles to change her mind. Know what he said? "It's her life, Maggie! You can't control her. Let it go." How can men just *DO* that?!

She tosses the notes into the flame. A burst of sparkles. The music stops. The candle goes out. She rushes to the painting, to hold it, desperately, lovingly, protectively.