

## **16 Spells to Charm the Beast**

a play in 17 scenes

by Lisa D'Amour

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NO SANDART ANYMORE, no sandbook, no masters.

Nothing in the dice. How many mutes?  
Seventen.

Your question - your answer Your chant, what does it know?

Deepinsnow,

Eepinno,

I - I - O.

Paul Celan, from  
the collection *Breathtum*.

### CHARACTERS

LILLIAN DAVIS, a metropolitan housewife of a mature age.

NED DAVIS, her husband.

NORMA DAVIS, her daughter, aka NORMA RUST and NORMA PLYWOOD.

MILLICENT HICCUP, Lillian's neighbor from the floor below.

THE BEAST, a bona fide fairy tale beast, as in "Beauty and the Beast."

### PLACE

Lillian Davis' apartment and the Beast's apartment, as described in the text of the play.

### TIME

Is not an issue, except as it takes shape inside Lillian's head on the occasion of writing her Last Will and Testament.

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## One.

*LILLIAN DAVIS' living room in a 3 bedroom, garishly decorated apartment on the 26th floor of a building in an enormous city which could be Manhattan. In the middle of the bright red carpet is a pile of snow. Lillian stands knee deep in snow: It is snowing only on her. The beast comes in with his bloodshot eyes and his modest bouquet of flowers. He stands before her. She shivers. He stands before her. She shivers. Slowly, painfully, accompanied painful vocal gymnastics and snapping of bones, he gets down on one knee. She shivers. She shivers. She looks at him.*

LILLIANDAVIS

I, Lillian Davis, being of sound mind and memory leave the following instructions regarding the distribution of my tangible personal property.

The set of hand painted china tea-bowls goes to Millicent T. Hiccup, who fondled them so discreetly during our many languid afternoons at tea.

My collection of handmade obelisks in the hall closet goes to my only daughter, Norma. (and that is all she gets. She is otherwise excluded from this will, an act that I perform in full knowledge of the consequences of doing so.)

The mysterious wooden crate in the back of the walk-in freezer goes to my dear dear husband Ned.

The tabby cat goes to the dear neighbor lady oh dear what's her name...

The ten Randy Warpohl prints are to be divided, equally among my 21 grandchildren in any manner they see so fit.

To Jonathon Keene Archipelago Redbreast: My cello.

*She turns to the beast.*

And you. Nothing for you. You can't have a piece of me even after I'm dead.

*Immediate, heartbreakingly sad reaction from the beast. He is still in love with her. He gazes on her adoringly, lays his bouquet at her feet, stands himself up and leaves. She waits. She shivers. She looks off to where the monster went. She looks back. She shivers. It snows.*

**BLACKOUT**

## Two.

*Lillian and Millicent Hiccup at afternoon tea. Lillian is the perfect host, wardrobe and all. Millicent is an above-average guest and wears clunky, orthopedic looking shoes. Millicent fondles tea bowls discreetly throughout the tea. Lillian does not acknowledge this fondling until the proper moment arrives for her to do so. This scene is accompanied by the drone of the city that seeps in through the crack the sliding glass balcony doors: cars, busses, people, muggings, etc. However, we can't really see much city out the sliding glass balcony door: we can only the side of another high-rise apartment building.*

LILLIAN

Yes well the problem with you see the problem with most cities is that most of their wealthy residents move out of the city and take the money with them. Take the money with them and move out of the city creating what I call an "empty city."

MILLICENT

When June (not the month, my daughter ha ha) went to her senior gala she wore this dress this dress which I swear was dyed with bona fide rosewater from bona fide roses from the Rookline Botanical Gardens.

LILLIAN

It's not just the white people I'm talking about its the money, the color Green I suppose being carted out of the city only not in a romantic or epic fashion such as when the Saralee Indians trudged across their country with their belongings tied to their backs creating a "trail of tears" no its more pedestrian than that pedestrian, I mean, in the "mundane" sense of the word, because they cart their money out in minivans and coupes and sedans, any kind of car they can get their hands on. There's no risk, really, no thought of stakes. They squeeze their feet into whatever shoes might be handy, chuck everything in the van and vamoose!

MILLICENT

The thing about the color of the dress was that the color of the dress was so faint that its effect was subliminal. More of a scent than a color. The scent of bona fide rosewater. She had men literally falling at her feet all about the auditorium.

LILLIAN

More tea?

MILLICENT

Just a spot. I mean she caused such a stir in that rosewater dress it hangs in the downstairs closet to this day inside the plastic casing that my drycleaner recommended a plastic casing he said he had specially designed for the last person

who brought in a rosewater dress to be cleaned and I said "the last person to bring in a rosewater dress to be cleaned?" and pretended to be completely shattered that someone else might have thought of the idea of a dress dyed with bona fide rose water and my drycleaner said "yes, in 1938, when drycleaning was first invented, when my great Grandfather opened this shop an eerie woman in a black veil came in with a rose water dress, and gave a lot of questionable details about why she had such a dress -- too many details, in fact. Even back then people never gave their drycleaners the whole story"

LILLIAN

The problem of this city is not EMPTINESS, of course. This city survives because we live so close together that we overlap, and so the money overlaps as well. You know there are some days when I think there is nothing more in the world that I want more than a bona fide rosewater dress. The problem of this city is not that it is an "empty city" and this is what I am getting at you understand this is where I'm going.

MILLICENT

So I gave that drycleaner a knowing wink you know and said "yes but was that lady's dress dyed with BONA FIDE rosewater from the ROOKLINE BOTANICAL GARDENS" and my drycleaner chuckled and said "she said that it was but I didn't believe her, not for one second." And I said "but you believe me don't you?" And he said, "Ma'am, you have the face of an Australian Lemur, of course I believe you." And I gave him a knowing smile you know and walked out.

LILLIAN

No, the problem with this city is that this city overlaps so much so much that they are slowly but surely taking away my view . It used to be that with binoculars I had a clear view of the Statue of Offended Dignity but not any more, no, that building over there see right there, I watched it go up, floor by floor, for two years until one day my binoculars were a relic of a time gone by.

MILLICENT

June (not the month my daughter ha ha) comes home from time to time now that she has turned 40 and ditched her third husband and she just gets so upset when she opens that closet and sees the bon fide rosewater dress hanging there I means she is just a terror about it, screaming and tearing at her hair as though the dress is some awful skeleton in our closet, some outrageous symbol of some absurdity inherent in the fabric of our family you should see the way she carries on standing in front of the open closet door like that spouting off like a hot teapot. And I just stand there smiling that same smile, you know, that I gave to my drycleaner, and winking from time to time, you know, until eventually she crumbles to the floor,

sobbing like a child and helpless and fragile as a pheasant for me to gather up into my arms and sing to her, the two of us on the hallway floor...

*LILLIAN opens the sliding glass door a wee crack. City sounds stop. A spell seeps in:*

Twicesnow twolips  
in the tear tea  
late babies thaw  
fat suns  
in the sea

*During the second time through, Millicent fondles her tea cup, and Lillian watches (i.e. Millicent fondles the tea cup for Lillian).*

Twicesnow twolips  
in the tear tea  
late babies thaw  
fat suns  
in the sea

*On the third time through, the ladies whisper along with the spell, looking at each other.*

Twicesnow twolips  
in the tear tea  
late babies thaw  
fat suns  
in the sea.

*On the last line, Lillian quickly closes the doors. City sounds resume. The two ladies look at each other. Millicent smiles that smile, you know. Lillian smiles back. Millicent carefully puts down her tea cup. Lillian smiles. Millicent and Lillian stand. Millicent goes to the door. Millicent opens the door. She smiles one last time at Lillian, who smiles back. Millicent exits. Lillian suddenly feels like someone is watching her. She raises her binoculars towards her sliding glass window.*

**BLACKOUT**

### Three.

*The beast is in his apartment. His apartment is his cave, and should contain elements of both types of dwellings. Out of a tiny window in his apartment, you can see the outline of a city, and in the outline of the city, there is a clear view of Lillian's apartment. A telescope sits in front of the window. It is a fancy and expensive telescope. Everything else in the apartment is crappy and Cro-Magnon. The beast sits at a crude table. He has scraps of paper and tiny children's scissors. He carefully folds the paper. He carefully places the tiny scissors in his large hands. He cuts 5 careful cuts, counting them all. He places the scissors down. He places the paper down. He picks up the paper in the proper fashion, so that it unfolds beautifully, into an extraordinarily intricate paper snowflake. He carefully walks over to another section of the apartment, and pulls aside a stained, raggedy curtain. Behind the curtain is a enormous sheet of these same snowflakes, linked together. He kneels (again, with great difficulty and bone-snapping). He picks up a needle and thread (again with great difficulty: the needle is far too small for his hands) and begins to carefully sew this new snowflake onto the bottom. As he sews he chants:*

Fingerhole

Skull

Lady snow

Spine

Soft leather

Skull

Your mine

Spine

Mine your

Skull

Leather soft

Spine

Snow lady

Skull

Hole finger

Spine

Fingerhole

Skull

Lady snow

Spine

Soft leather

Skull

Yourmine  
Spine

*He continues this mirror chant over and over as he sews, for as long as necessary,  
then the lights*

## **BLACKOUT**

### **Four.**

*Back in the Apartment. Lillian and her daughter Norma. Norma is a grown woman. Through the sliding glass doors we can see the grand cityscape, unobscured. The PAUSES in this scene are not necessarily always long, but they are always heavy, like paperweights keeping all the papers underneath from flying away.*

LILLIAN  
Devilish

NORMA  
Cocksucker

LILLIAN  
In

NORMA  
Blue

LILLAN  
Smock.

*They suppress giggles, snorts.*

NORMA  
Unspeakable

LILLAN  
Tort. No, Tart. Tart.

NORMA  
With

LILLAN  
Rank

NORMA  
Meat.

*This time they can't hold it in, they laugh and laugh. Lillian kisses Norma gently on the forehead.*

LILLIAN  
Oh, I just love making up those nicknames for your father. How on earth did you think of that game.

NORMA  
You thought of it, remember mother? We were standing in front of that Zipptchenstein called OOPS! when you said: my my my wouldn't that would be an appropriate nickname for the old man. And it started from there.

LILLIAN  
I said that? God sometimes I glimpse my mean spirit so clearly I begin to despise myself.

*Lillian begins to weep.*

NORMA  
Now now mother you know as well as I do that every human being is born with a mean streak embedded long and deep in one's soul. Personally I think its best to acknowledge and cultivate it in order to keep it in check. Pretending it just isn't there just makes it more wild and unruly. You are more civilized than half those miserable ants crawling around down there so its simply silly to despise yourself.

*Lillian stops weeping. They clink their vodka glasses.*

LILLIAN  
Cheers.

NORMA  
Cheers.

LILLIAN  
It really is good to have you home.

NORMA

So I hear you've taken to sculpting obelisks out of clay.

LILLIAN

Oh, yes. It was your father Ned's idea, actually. I thought he had gone completely bonkers but then to my surprise I actually started to like it. Sculpting that same cryptic shape over and over gives one a feeling of vocation, of devotion to some mystic calling higher ... higher than...

NORMA

Higher than this building?

*Dry, silent laughs.*

LILLIAN

Of course as soon as I started to like it then your father stopped liking it, though he does try his best to pretend he likes it, but you should see him, really, he looks at my obelisks the way one might look at a pile of dogshit. And as you can see:

*She opens up the closet door for a brief moment. We see it is filled with obelisks of various shapes, sizes and colors. She shuts it quickly.*

They are fine obelisks, more than fine, worthy of praise and even adoration.

NORMA

Why do you keep them hidden away in the closet?

LILLIAN

Hidden away? Hidden away she says. They are not hidden away, Norma They are on display in the most cutting edge way of being on display they are on display by NOT BEING on display.

*They look at each other, Lillian looking to make sure her daughter gets it. Norma pretends to get it.*

NORMA

Of course. Oh mother aren't you the mint on the pillow. Now tell me about your days.

*PAUSE.*

LILLIAN

Those are nice shoes your wearing.

*Norma looks down at her shoes.*

NORMA  
Thank you.

LILLIAN  
Did you choose them yourself?

NORMA  
*(still looking down)*  
Why yes, I did.

LILLIAN  
They're nice.

NORMA  
*(still looking down)*  
Thanks.

*Norma looks up.*

NORMA  
And your days?

LILLIAN  
What about my days?

NORMA  
You know, what have you been doing. with yourself and all that.

*PAUSE.*

LILLIAN  
Well. There's the obelisks.

NORMA  
Yep. On display.

LILLIAN  
"On display."

*PAUSE.*

NORMA  
And the skyline?

*PAUSE.*

LILLIAN  
And the skyline?

NORMA  
Has it changed much?

LILLIAN  
Oh the skyline yes the skyline well of course the latest addition to the skyline is the PLAINTAIN BUILDING in mid-town, that's that building over there that looks like a giant, malformed penis, which penis is, of course, supposed to be a plantain. I can only assume that the scale model looked less like a penis or I can't believe they would have gone through with it. The entire city, I kid you not, has their lips zipped about it. Each of us thinks that we are the only person in the entire city who thinks the building looks like a penis, and so we're all afraid to say anything, because we don't want to get laughed at. So we all walk around on the street giving each other these sideways smirks, hoping against hope our smirk will be returned. Do you think it looks like a penis?

NORMA  
I do.

LILLIAN  
Thank God.

*The two burst into laughter for a moment.*

LILLIAN  
It is so good to have you home.

*Another burst of laughter, which ends.*

LILLIAN  
So. That's the skyline. Of course the Statue of Offended Dignity still stands, clear as day, on the horizon.

NORMA  
You can see the Statue from here?

LILLIAN

Oh yes. Here. Take the binoculars.

*Lillian takes a really nice pair of binoculars out of a case.*

NORMA

These are really nice binoculars, mom.

LILLIAN

Thank you.

*Norma raises the binoculars to her eyes.*

NORMA

Yep, there she is. Offended as always.

LILLIAN

But so dignified.

NORMA

Dignified, yet offended. Hence the name.

LILLIAN

Exactly.

*Norma hands the binoculars back to Lillian. Lillian makes a big deal of putting them back in, as though there is some joke to it, some old family joke that Norma doesn't quite get. Norma chuckles and agrees to it, anyway.*

NORMA

So how is Dad?

LILLIAN

Dad is Dad.

NORMA

Good.

LILLIAN

He's either on my lap or absent as a peony.

NORMA  
As a peony?

LILLIAN  
You know –

*Lillian performs some “absent as a peony” gesture.*

NORMA  
Of course.

LILLIAN  
One day I will cause a great cello stir cello.

*Lillian lightly touches or secretly strokes the place where her collarbone meets in the center of her chest and looks at Norma as though she hopes Norma will understand some sort of secret, subliminal reference but alas Norma doesn't get it.*

*PAUSE.*

NORMA  
And Millicent Hiccup?

LILLIAN  
Yes?

NORMA  
Millicent Hiccup. Millicent Hiccup. That silly and altogether frazzled woman, Millicent Hiccup from the floor below does still come around?

*PAUSE.*

LILLIAN  
Yes.

NORMA  
And her downright petulant daughter, what was her name? February?

LILLIAN  
June.

NORMA

Yes, of course, June. Ugh. I remember just before I moved out to go to college, Millicent Hiccup was always stomping up here in those pediatric-style shoes dragging June, freshly made up with some kind of off-brand of makeup, trying to get the two of us to "go out on the town", like I could ever truly enjoy an evening out on the town with a girl named June, a girl named June who was into Geodes, which fact was the only fact I knew about June, because the one time I deigned to visit her she said "What are you into, I'm into Geodes" at which point I stood up from her bed (I was in her bedroom at the time, which was filled with you- know- what) I stood up and walked out of the room without so much as a peep.

LILLIAN

I believe you meant orthopedic.

NORMA

What?

LILLIAN

Orthopedic. Millicent has an unfortunate problem with her feet, which she is working to correct with medical assistance. You said that Millicent wore "Pediatric style" shoes, when I think you meant "orthopedic."

NORMA

Whatever.

*Norma looks puzzled.*

*PAUSE.*

LILLIAN

Yes, Millicent comes up from time to time. We recently initiated a quite regular tea, in fact.

*All at once Norma realizes that she's made a terrible mistake, insulting Millicent Hiccup, the woman who is now, apparently, her mother's only friend. Norma pours herself another drink, wanders about, and looks out the window.*

NORMA

Oh, it looks like there's some construction going on down there, just one block over.

LILLIAN

Oh, yes, I noticed that but I think they're going to leave it blank.

NORMA  
Leave it blank?

LILLIAN  
Yes, leave it blank.

NORMA  
What do you mean, blank?

LILLIAN  
Blank. Just Blank.

*Norma wanders around the room a bit more. She picks up an ashtray.*

NORMA  
Did you buy this ashtray on your trip to Kentucky?

LILLIAN  
Yes.

NORMA  
MOTHER, I CANNOT THINK OF A SINGLE THING LEFT TO TALK ABOUT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING LEFT TO SAY EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE NEITHER SEEN NOR HEARD FROM EACH OTHER IN OVER TWO YEARS AND SO HERE IT GOES I HAVE COME HERE TO TELL YOU THAT LAST YEAR I MARRIED AN ARCHITECT NAMED NAPOLEON RUST AND I AM NOW AT THIS VERY INSTANT PREGNANT WITH MY FIRST CHILD WE HAVE MOVED OUT OF THE CITY AND BOUGHT A HOUSE IN A TOWN CALLED "SOFTSAFEATHERBED" AND WE ARE QUITE NO WE ARE VERY HAPPY.

*PAUSE.*

LILLIAN  
Well, aren't you the zit beneath the Bull's testicle.

NORMA  
This is absurd...

*She starts to leave. Lillian lashes out with a curse.*

LILLIAN

YOU will find yourself prematurely withered.

YOU will not know your left foot from your right.

YOU will grow dull.

YOU will lose first an expensive ring and then an appendage in the garbage disposal.

YOU will lose your sense of smell as the result of some other horrible accident.

YOU will suffer the pains of labor 20 fold and suffer from complications in ever-increasing, excruciating increments, after which torment your husband will leave you.

YOU will eventually find the sight of their precious faces disgusting.

YOU will write your Will at age 55 and feel melancholy, then outrage, and then sickened at the wretch you have unwittingly become.

YOUR feet will never fill the shoes you choose.

YOU will die a quiet, uneventful death and go forever unremembered.

*Lillian is breathless at the end of her curse. Gasping for air, she pours herself a glass of water, and drinks it. Norma stands, shaken, feeling sick to her stomach.*

LILLIAN

You KNOW how I feel about MARRIAGE. All the NOTES I slipped under your PILLOW. All my ADVICE.

NORMA

You don't want me to be happy?

LILLIAN

I want you to keep me company.

*Norma walks out the door. Lillian walks to the sliding glass door, gazing out.*

*PAUSE.*

LILLIAN

Oh now really will you look at that enormous cock!

*She bursts into laughter, which we hear even after the lights*

**BLACKOUT**

**END OF EXCERPT**

