

For Better or Curse

Or, when exes attack

LATELY, MY LOVE LIFE SEEMS CURSED. First dates haven't been leading to second dates; my friends' matchmaking attempts haven't made a match; eHarmony has been pairing me with accountants from Sugar Land despite my oft-stated preference for independently wealthy Texans cheerleaders. Sometimes I just feel like giving up.

Recently, however, while flipping through my favorite alt-weekly, I came across a large color ad featuring a disheveled man, his head in his hands. "Am I Cursed?" it read. "Is it just a *coincidence* or is something more *sinister* at work?" The ad provided a helpful checklist of symptoms:

- My life is a cycle of ups and downs.
- I feel that I attract a lot of envy and jealousy.
- I used to be a very strong, confident person but now I don't even know myself.

I nodded in recognition. Maybe I wasn't a lovelorn loser. Maybe I wasn't radioactive. Maybe it was something more sinister. Maybe I was *actually*, not metaphorically, cursed.

Which is how I ended up attending a "Curse Removal Event" at the Succeed in Life Center just off the Southwest Freeway, in a janky strip center with a car stereo shop and a wholesale grocery store. "Depression and Anger GONE!" screamed the church's video billboard, pointing me in the direction of what might have been a Motel 6 or La Quinta in a previous life. Along with the other parishioners—of whom there were four—I entered an auditorium dominated by a giant video screen hanging over an altar.

A few minutes passed. Finally, a trim young man in a polo shirt took to the pulpit. This was Pastor Joel. "The problem that you are facing now in your life is not being caused by God," he declared. "It's being caused by an evil spirit. God has given you this sword, which is faith, to fight against your problem, to cast it out of your life so that you can be free."

Acquiring such faith is not easy, the minister explained. It requires both a substantial time commitment and a substantial donation to the Succeed in Life Center. Pastor Joel regaled us with stories of accursed souls who'd donated their life savings to the church, of people financing exorcisms by selling their cars.

Speaking of cars: "I'm sure that what you're asking God [for] is something big," the pastor said. "A healing of an incurable disease. Maybe you are asking for your financial life to be changed, maybe you are asking for God to restore your marriage. You are asking something of big magnitude. So now, when it comes to using my faith, I cannot use a small faith. It's like if

you go to a dealership and you want to buy a Mercedes Benz, and on the other side you have a Kia. Now, can you use the same amount of money to buy the Mercedes Benz as you can the Kia? Yes or no?" My four fellow parishioners grunted in agreement.

After the service, I approached Pastor Joel about my girlfriend problem. He nodded thoughtfully and asked about my last serious relationship. Had my ex-girlfriend said anything to me when we broke up? I thought for a moment.

"She told me that no other woman would put up with me," I said.

Pastor Joel's eyes lit up. "Something negative came from her to you that has been blocking your life in this area."

In other words, the witch put a curse on me. What to do? Not only was I devoid of life savings, I had neither a Kia nor a Mercedes to sell. Still, the pastor, sounding hopeful, invited me to return twice a week for the next seven weeks, though I wasn't quite sure whether he felt hopeful about eliminating my curse or hopeful that I'd find something to sell.

No matter. In seven weeks I'll be back in the dating game. Until then, ladies, steer clear—I'm cursed. —Michael Hardy



IN & OUT



We ♥ Houston sculpture off I-10



Aquarium ferris wheel off I-45



Irritatingly cute spellings, as Maine-ly Sandwiches expands



Definite articles, as The Methodist Hospital System becomes Houston Methodist



Coloring books by Houston hip hop legends



Hip hop by Houston hip hop legends



Space Montrose



American Apparel



Red Boat gourmet fish sauce (\$6.99 at Central Market)



Chinese duck sauce (free with dinner at Golden Panda Dragon)