THAT VOODOO THAT YOU DO

He met her on Facebook.

Cutter Kendrik, age 31, was a Samsung cell phone sales associate living in St. Paul, MN. After the recall of the Galaxy Note7 model -- which became a disaster after its battery repeatedly exploded or caught fire and was now banned on airlines – Cutter was continuing to have a tough time convincing new customers that the new Samsung 8s phone models were safe.

One Saturday morning in May, while checking his Facebook news feed, Cutter had a new friend request pop up from an unknown person. Her name was Charlotte Stiles, age 29. Cutter discovered that she worked at the Mall of America (celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, with 520 stores) in nearby Bloomington, as a women’s apparel clerk at Nordstrom’s. She lived in Minneapolis, practically next door to St. Paul. Furthermore, her profile pic looked promising. Charlotte had brown eyes with dark eyebrows and long brown hair. Her face and skin tone looked faintly Central American, from what Cutter could guess. Maybe she was from El Salvador or Costa Rica? Other photos showed her smiling in a variety of feminine dresses, looking slim and fit. Nice body, fresh, attractive. But why did she choose him to ‘friend’? A real mystery. Cutter thought for several minutes, then took a chance and accepted the friend request. What could be the harm? The following morning, Cutter was granted the usual Facebook access to Charlotte’s more complete profile. (Of course, his profile was also available now for her to view.) By that afternoon, he was receiving posts from Charlotte, first thanking him for friending her, then revealing that she was relatively new to Minnesota, having been here for just under a year. The winter was a real shock – so cold and snowy! She had come to the U.S. on an immigrant visa from Panama looking for work, so she was accustomed to tropical weather. She was still trying to make some American friends, and she had chosen Cutter because he was not married and was living relatively close by. Plus, she thought he looked handsome in his profile pic. “You had a kind face, and I sensed that I could trust you,” Charlotte confessed. "Your eyes told me everything I wanted to know."

Cutter was intrigued. He waited a week before asking to meet Charlotte for a date. She quickly agreed. Cutter had been on several blind dates over the years, some fun and repeatable, others rather disastrous – ‘one and done.’ But nothing long-term stuck, even though the sexual aspect of any brief relationship – if he got lucky -- was always thrilling. Cutter truly wanted genuine romantic love, yet he seemed to be slipping slowly and unwillingly into sustained bachelorhood.

The pair met at a local Chevy’s Mexican restaurant for lunch. When Cutter first saw Charlotte in person, he was impressed. She was slightly taller than he imagined, maybe 5’8’’, but he liked tall girls because he was tall too. She wore a subtle but colorful floral-patterned dress with comfortable shoes. Cutter was further impressed when she ordered off the menu in Spanish, but quickly switched back to English when she realized that their perky young waitress was not bi-lingual. Charlotte smiled sweetly and was relaxed, which in turn made Cutter relax. She affected a calm, natural appearance, avoiding the typical female first-date tendency to overdo her make-up, nails, hair, jewelry, and perfume.

While enjoying their spicy enchiladas and cold beers, they talked about their jobs and their families and their hopes for the future. Although Cutter had graduated from a community college with a business degree, Charlotte wanted to ultimately continue her education in the U.S. and to pursue more job opportunities than were currently available to her in Panama. After dessert, Cutter paid the tab, and was sufficiently confident and comfortable to offer Charlotte another date.

Over the next several months, the pair became a couple. Before long, they were sleeping together, alternating at each other’s apartments. The harsh Minnesota winter was perfectly designed for cozy, warming lovemaking, they laughingly agreed. Cutter’s mood was on the upswing, and even his sales quotas were being surpassed as his commissions likewise rose. He even visited Charlotte on occasion at her job at Nordstrom’s, and met her boss and coworkers, who raved about her energy and her potential.

One day, the happy couple got on the topic of where to go on vacation, for they had both earned a week off of work. Charlotte suggested that they visit New Orleans, for she had always wanted to experience that unique American city. Seeing as Cutter had never been there either, the couple decided to select the Big Easy as their upcoming destination. Goodbye, ice and snow! Spanish moss and bayou, here we come...

It was pleasantly warm in New Orleans in April, but not yet miserably hot and humid as it would get later in the summer. Charlotte and Cutter enjoyed strolling through the French Quarter and Jackson Square, rode the old-fashioned streetcar/trolley through the magnolia-scented Garden District with its beautiful mansions, dined on fine Creole and Cajun cuisine at legendary restaurants such as Brennan’s and Antoine’s, and even had some requisite evening drinks on Bourbon Street (with throngs of other similar tourists) while listening to traditional Dixieland jazz.

One morning, over beignets and chicory coffee at Café du Monde near the Mississippi levee, Charlotte mentioned an interest in going to the Voodoo Museum on Dumaine Street. “Some friends of mine in Panama went there a few years ago, and said it was very interesting,” she elaborated.

So finishing up, off they went. It was but a short three-block walk under bright sunshine. After paying $7 each, they entered the darkened museum building, which had first opened in 1972. They learned from their wizened black female tour guide, Sister LaVeau – who claimed was blood kin to the legendary voodoo priestess Marie LaVeau – all about voodoo: the history of zombies, what gris-gris were (good luck/protective amulets in tiny pouches), the use of special voodoo altars and rituals, and who some of the famous voodoo queens of New Orleans were and where their festooned graves were in nearby cemeteries. The last museum section was all about voodoo dolls and curses, and how they were used by some devotees even to this day. The gift shop here was also something to behold: Beads, scented candles, crucifixes, medallions, different kinds of special incense, posters, ’holy cards’ with portraits of priestesses, ‘blessed’ lotions and creams, perfumed oils, charms, crystals -- even plastic bones and skulls. And, of course, small hand-made generic voodoo dolls stuffed with corn husks.

Back at their hotel swimming pool, Cutter and Charlotte worked on their tans as they relaxed in their lounge chairs and got into a broad discussion about religion and spirituality and primitive beliefs in superstitions. They found out that neither had had any church upbringing as children. Their talk then drifted into political beliefs and finances – two topics they had never previously discussed – which was usually a sign that a relationship was getting more serious and possibly committed.

Over a superb shrimp etouffee washed down with NOLA Blonde ale that night for dinner, the couple was enjoying their final night in Louisiana before returning to frosty Minnesota. Out of the blue, Charlotte said, “Hey, how about we play a game? It’s called Tell Me a Secret. Let’s flip a coin to see who goes first.” Cutter laughed and rolled his eyes, then dug out a quarter from his pocket and tossed it. Charlotte called out “tails” and won.

“O.K. my darling, here goes: Ever since I was a little girl, I have had a really strong belief in reincarnation. I also believe in certain aspects of the Occult. I have read a lot of books on these subjects. I hope that doesn’t disturb you. I don’t talk about it much. I won’t embarrass you by bringing up the topic in front of other people, so don’t worry… Now, it’s your turn! Tell me a deep, dark secret about yourself.” Charlotte giggled, just a tad nervously.

Cutter thought for a moment, took a big breath, and then let out a long sigh. “Well, you asked for it, so here goes. I’m going to tell you something that only I and my doctor know. I’m taking a chance here with you, Char, because I care deeply about you and you have a right to know.” He reached over with both hands and lovingly held hers as he looked into Charlotte’s eyes.

“Oh my God, don’t tell me you have a STD, or terminal cancer, or something else horrible!” Charlotte interrupted fearfully, her face a pained expression.

“No, no, nothing like that! Please, you can calm down.” He tenderly kissed both of her hands, one after the other. “No… What I have are periodic panic attacks. They are very common in both men and women. It’s simply a psychological problem, like being hypochondriac. I know when I am having a panic attack, and understand what triggers it, and hence I can take steps to control it. It started a few years ago when I read a magazine article for the first time on the subject of heart attacks. Well, I got so freaked out that I imagined any kind of chest pain as a precursor to having a massive, fatal heart attack! Naturally, the more I thought about it, the worse the panic attacks got. Although these attacks are physically baseless, they do cause actual physical reactions such as sweating, shortness of breath, dizziness, sleepless, and so on. It is linked to the ‘fight or flight’ reflex of our human nervous system. When I told my doctor about all of this, he gave me a though cardiac work-up and found absolutely nothing wrong with either my heart or my overall health. You can imagine my relief! He went on to explain how panic attacks occur and how to thwart them. So I rarely have them now. But sometimes, a new fear or susceptibility to imagining the worst outlook regarding my health comes up, and I have to deal with it, and grapple with the coping steps from the onset until I can control myself again. It is my only flaw – my Achilles Heel, if you will. Other than that, I am in great shape in every other aspect of my life to the best of my knowledge. Now, I hope I didn’t freak you out, Char. I thought you should know.”

Charlotte looked at Cutter for a long time without speaking. Then she smiled, and – seeing as they were still holding hands -- kissed both his hands, and said, “I’m glad you told me the truth, Cutter. It is something I needed to know. Now, how about some dessert? That Grand Marnier sponge cake with fresh strawberries looked good.”

Later, back in Minnesota, Charlotte caught a very bad cold, and Cutter did not see her for an entire month at her request. “I can’t see anyone yet, I’m contagious” she insisted. “Please be patient with me until I get better, and don't call or text me, O.K.?” Cutter ordered a down quilt for her on Amazon, and had it delivered to her apartment to keep her warm, even though it now May. “Maybe you can pretend you are toasty again in Panama until you recover,” he gently messaged on the surprise gift card.

During their month apart, Cutter had a serious realization. He went to a long- established jewelry store in downtown St. Paul and purchased a tasteful sapphire engagement ring. He decided he wanted to marry Charlotte.

When she had fully recovered from her illness, and was back to work at Nordstrom’s, and had her regular appetite back, Cutter picked Charlotte up at her place and took her to the venerable St. Paul Hotel, a city landmark built in 1910. They had dinner at the fancy and expensive St. Paul Grill, because in Cutter’s mind, this was to be a very memorable occasion.

After the meal, Charlotte began acting somewhat odd and appeared distracted and upset about something. Cutter hoped that the engagement ring secreted in his pocket might change the mood. “Charlotte, I have a big surprise for you. I realize that I love you, as I hope you love me. I have thought about us for a long time. I want to be with you for the rest of my life. Will you marry me?” He paused, shyly smiled, then offered her from his sport coat pocket a little purple velvet case with the sapphire engagement ring.

The look she offered him back was totally shocking, even deadly. Charlotte didn’t even touch the case to open it.

“No, I cannot marry you, Cutter. Do you want to know why? Because I have to kill you. That’s right, you heard me. Kill you.” She looked at Cutter with pure hatred and loathing, her dark eyes boring into his.

A stunned Cutter choked out a feeble, “What...what are you talking about, Char? Are you feeling all right?” He felt dizzy and lightheaded, his meal sitting in his stomach like cement. Cutter's heart pounded and he began sweating.

“I never felt better, so let’s get it all out now,” she spat out in barely contained fury. “Three years ago, in Panama, I went to see a famous psychic reader on a recommendation from some friends. I was plagued with insomnia and horrible nightmares about dying, and was desperate for any kind of relief. Remember when I told you about my secret interest in the Occult? This gifted woman went into a brief trance, then hypnotized me and took me back to a past life in an age regression. I discovered that I was part of a pioneer family going west across the Great Plains in the state of Kansas in the 1840s. We were attacked by a band of hostile Indians and everyone was massacred. You were one of the murdering Indians. Your face was burned into my mind. I could never forget it, especially your eyes. I swore revenge before I was raped, gutted, scalped and died. After coming out of the hypnotic trance, the psychic woman told me that my soul would never rest until I found you and killed you, because you were alive now somewhere in Minnesota. So I moved here and got a job and an apartment. I searched on Facebook every day for weeks until your face showed up. Your face was slightly changed, but your eyes were exactly what I remembered. That’s the real reason why I sent you a ‘friend’ request. And the rest of our ‘relationship’ was nothing but an act, a lie. Even when we made love, I hated you, and lived only for the day when I would get my revenge. Well, the day of reckoning is here now, you bastard. And my name isn’t Charlotte Stiles either, just so you know, so don't try to run like a coward to the police.”

This all-of-a-sudden, completely transformed woman looked at Cutter with disgust -- like a cold, unfeeling reptile. “So, you brought me a present? Well I brought you one too.” From her purse, the woman removed a voodoo doll with Cutter’s face pinned on it; it had been cut out of a photograph of him they had once taken together. “Yes, it’s you…filled with some locks of your hair, and some fingernail parings, and other tiny personal objects of yours that I secretly gathered. I went back to New Orleans during the month I was pretending to be sick. This voodoo doll is the real thing, officially cursed by a real voodoo priestess. I’ll stick it with pins every day until you die in agony. Only then can I rest and have relief in this life.” The enraged woman quickly shoved the doll back into her purse and bolted from the table.

“Wait, Charlotte, no, no… you must be crazy. You’re out of your mind. Stop, stop! I’ll get you help. Please, no Charlotte, wait…” Cutter ran after her, and caught up just as he saw her roar away in a taxi. He returned to the dinner table in a daze, and sat alone in disbelief for an hour after he paid the bill.

A week later, her furnished Minneapolis apartment was found vacated when Cutter checked. She had similarly abandoned her job at Nordstrom’s. The woman who once called herself Charlotte Stiles had simply disappeared.

That’s when Cutter Kendrik’s pains began.

Sudden, piercing, stabbing pains in the stomach, the heart, and the lungs. Burning spinal pain. Blinding headaches. Insomnia. Nausea and vomiting. Cutter called in sick at work so frequently that his boss at Samsung Cellular insisted that he see a doctor, which Cutter did. But nothing physically wrong could be diagnosed. When Cutter tearfully told his doctor the whole bizarre saga, the doctor recommended that Cutter see a psychiatrist as soon as possible. Cutter took a leave of absence from his job, and was thankful that they granted him a full month off.

In his misery, Cutter went on-line and searched for anything on Charlotte Stiles. He found many women with the same name, especially on Facebook, but not his intended. Next, he poured over web sites and linked articles about voodoo dolls and their effect – particularly how to remove their dreadful curse. At last, in final desperation to rid himself of relentless, pain and agony, he booked the first non-stop flight to New Orleans he could get.

His destination was the Voodoo Museum. Cutter was frantic by the time he got there by cab from the airport. He quickly sought out Sister LaVeau and asked to speak with her briefly in private after the museum closed for the day. “Yes, I can see you needs my help,” she murmured, peering carefully into his eyes. “You got a very, very bad curse on you, cher. I can see de black cloud on you. You gonna die,boy, unless de spell is broken. Come back at six o’clock, we go to my place. Not too far from here, jes' around de corner."

Cutter had two hours to kill until the museum closed. He thought about going into the nearest bar for a Sazerac or a Hurricane to help him relax, but his stomach was in such pain that he vetoed the idea -- plus, he needed to be clear-headed. So instead, he walked nervously around the Vieux Carre, ignoring the colorful old French and Spanish colonial buildings, many with traditional wooden shutters and cast-iron balconies. By the time church bells chimed six o'clock, Cutter was back to meet Sister LaVeau.

When they arrived at her place and went inside, Cutter noted that her rooms looked similar to the Voodoo Museum, dark and cluttered and smelling of incense, with plenty of candles and gaudy altars and priestess pictures. Sister flipped off her shoes with a grunt ("Lordy, my dogs is beat!), then offered her guest some sweet tea, which he took out of politeness. They sat on a worn teal sofa and Cutter told her the whole sordid story of his relationship with the woman who once called herself Charlotte and its bizarre aftermath. Sister LaVeau listened intently.

"Cher, I'm afraid you is up the creek, sho'nuf. Dis be de blackest of magic here, de work of de Devil." She quickly made the sign-of-the-cross. "But I think I knows someone who can break dis spell. Dat be Madame ZuZu. De most powerful voodoo priestess in Haiti. You gots to go to Port au Prince right away and see her. Only she can stop yor pains and end yor sufferin' forever. You don't needs no address 'cause everyone knows her house. Now you gots to go, cher, and God bless you." Sister rose slowly from the sofa and led Cutter to the door. Cutter pulled out his wallet and gave her a twenty for her help. She winked and shoved the bill in the cleavage of her ample bosom. "Y'all take care now," she finally said as Cutter left. His stabbing pains were back again and getting worse. At this point, he was eating non-prescription painkillers as if they were candy, as well as antacids. He was an anxious, nervous wreck.

At his New Orleans hotel, Cutter Kendrik used a computer in its business center and booked a flight to Haiti and a room at the Marriott in Port au Prince. What else could he do? he thought, pathetically. But why did it have to be Haiti! The absolute hellhole of the entire Western Hemisphere. Unbelievable squalor and poverty, rampant crime, political corruption, and still recovering from its disastrous 2010 earthquake. A total national basket case, among the worst places to visit -- and tough to make it out of alive and healthy. Oh God...

After reading the multiple travel warnings on health and safety from the U.S. Department of State website the following morning (basically screaming: DON'T GO!), Cutter boarded his American Airlines flight to Miami, then continued on to Haiti's capitol, Port au Prince (PAP). He was warned by Marriott not to take a taxi or to talk to anybody once he arrived at PAP, and that a hotel shuttle would identify him and pick him up. Cutter had no luggage other than a carry-on bag, good for three days.

Arriving at Aeroport International Toussaint Louverture , he was quickly spotted by the Marriott hotel driver because Cutter was almost the only white man in the arrival hall. Once on the road with locked van doors, Cutter realized that PAP was worse than he feared as he looked out his window: chaos, noise, filth, heat and humidity, crumbling infrastructure, burning garbage, crowds, nightmarish traffic, mongrel dogs, and the eerie sense that uncontrolled anarchy could erupt any minute. Jacques, the black Marriott driver, warned Cutter about going out after dark alone in most parts of the city: "Just don't do it, man, because crazy people will kidnap you and then kill you just for your shoes." But the hotel was safe and the rooms and food were very good, he boasted.

Cutter checked in and ordered room service, took some more painkillers, then showered and listlessly watched some TV before dropping off exhausted to sleep. As was now usual, he suffered nightmares most of the night.

After breakfast the following morning, Cutter got down to business and asked the front desk where he could meet up with Madame ZuZu. The young female clerk made a quick telephone call, and about ten minutes later, a rough-looking older black man strode into the hotel lobby and came up to the female clerk's station. They spoke briefly in French in hushed tones, then the woman announced that this was Pierre, and that "he will drive you to see Madame ZuZu and bring you back here safely. You must pay him $100 U.S. cash now, however, for this service." Cutter complied, then followed Pierre out to his battered wreck of an old blue Chevrolet.

There was no conversation in the car, mostly because Cutter could speak neither French nor Haitian Creole, the two official languages of the island. Pierre steered his Chevy through dangerous neighborhoods, and Cutter was nervous, fearing violence or worse. The locals were milling about, seemingly looking for trouble, unemployed, restless. The car was hot and stuffy inside, naturally without air-conditioning, the windows rolled up and the doors locked to prevent crime at road intersections and traffic lights.

After about 45 minutes, on a hillside on the outskirts of the city, Pierre stopped at a large shanty made of cinderblocks and a tin roof, shaded by palm trees. He gestured for Cutter to get out and go in. Cutter turned to see the ocean in the distance behind him as he walked up to a red wooden door and knocked. Suddenly he panicked: What if Madame ZuZu doesn't speak English? But instead the door opened and a cheery, barefoot girl about 8 years-old wearing faded orange shorts and an old yellow t-shirt said, "Bonjour! Or do you prefer Hello?"

Cutter replied with relief, then introduced himself and asked to see Madame ZuZu if she was available. "She is taking a nap, but I'll see if she is awake. Please wait and I'll tell her you are here."

A few moments later, the girl reappeared and said solemnly, "Madame will see you now. Follow me."

Cutter was led into a darkened, large room dominated by lit candles and the now familiar voodoo paraphernalia and its associated odors. In the center of the room was a big bed with purple sheets and many pillows, and propped up in the center of that arrangement was a huge, formidable, 400-pound black woman -- the legendary Madame ZuZu, the supreme voodoo priestess here in the voodoo capitol of the world. She was wearing a green paisley silk bathrobe and was barefoot. Her hair was covered by a matching kerchief. She extended her fleshy arms out towards Cutter, offering him an embrace of greeting.

"Yes, yes, I know of you, Cutter Kendrik. I have dreamed about you and know of your sufferings. Someone bad has done evil to you and you need my help. Madame ZuZu is at your service! Come and hug me, then we will talk. Camille, bring this poor man a seat." The door greeting girl reappeared directly with a somewhat rickety wooden chair. Before Cutter sat down, however, he did as he was asked, and went up close to Madame ZuZu for an embrace. She stank of earthy body odor, and one of her eyes looked milky and appeared to be sightless. Her breath was likewise foul, as her teeth were mostly rotten. She had multiple chins. She is probably fifty years old, Cutter guessed. He stifled a gag after the fast, mandatory hug, then sat in the chair several merciful feet away from her bed.

"I see you noticed my bad eye. Yes, I am blind on that side. So was my late mother, a powerful voodoo priestess from Ghana. It is a divine gift, really, because it protects me from the Evil Eye both day and night. Yes, yes, my sainted mother taught me all of my skills. And she taught me the most important secret magic spell in the world too. It is the name of God, backwards. I am the only person alive on this earth who possesses this terrible knowledge. It is terrible because if I ever say the word aloud, the world will instantly cease to exist. I am telling you the truth! Of course, I hope that day will never come. I never married or had children, so this secret will hopefully die with me. Now, you must know that I alone have the power to cure you, and to end your sufferings forever. Do you believe me?

Having no alternative, Cutter meekly replied, "Yes."

"Good, good...I have the potion ready and the necessary spell to break the curse. But these things cannot be shared freely. There is a price, of course." She smiled blandly. "The cost is $50,000 U.S., in cash."

Cutter almost fainted.

"Don't worry, my friend, you Americans can always afford what at first appears to be a shockingly large amount of money. Think about what you are getting in return: freedom from pain for the rest of your life! You are young, with many soon-to-be comfortable years ahead of you. You will likely marry and have a family. You will undoubtedly enjoy much health and happiness. Certainly, you can re-earn your savings!" Madame ZuZu cajoled. "But my offer is for today only, my friend, good until sundown. Pierre can safely escort you a large, well-known bank branch with the ability for same day international cash transfers. I therefore recommend the Banque Nationale de Credit on Route de Delmas. The whole transaction should take no more than two hours there and back. Then Pierre will return you safely to your hotel. Now, do we have a deal, Monsieur Kendrik?"

Cutter was simultaneously in a state of shock and in pain from the continual phantom stabbings all over his body. His mind and will were at the breaking point. There was nowhere to run. He was trapped. "Deal," he agreed weakly.

Later, at the bank, he realized that $50,000 was almost 90% of his liquid assets. He would be nearly broke after this action. Dammit! He tried to push his economic future out of his mind for the time being. He had the required cash placed in a zippered canvas bag, and was escorted by armed bank guard to Pierre's beat-up Chevy. Pierre looked unimpressed at the added fortune and was again silent as he drove back to Madame ZuZu's.

Camille let them back in through the red front door. Madame ZuZu beamed from her bed and said, "There,there, that wasn't so bad, now, was it? I trust you, my friend, so I won't need to count the money and take up any more of your time than is necessary. I have written down the instructions and the healing spell which I guarantee will lift the dreadful voodoo doll curse."(At this point, she called him near and handed him a brown paper bag with all the necessary supplies, and read aloud off a piece of notebook paper.) "Here it is:

\* 3 candles ( 1 each of purple, blue, and white)

\* Myrrh oil

\* Mint oil

\* Sandalwood Oil

\* 3 pieces of quartz

\* 3 small pieces of paper

Anoint each candle with all three oils, then place them in a triangle shape in a sacred altar area. Anoint the stones similarly and place them in front of each candle. Next, write your name on each piece of paper, then place them under the stones. Say the following spell three times --

"Magick mend and candle burn

Illness leave and health return."

Leave the candles burn for three hours, then snuff them out. Do this for three nights in a row. Believe, and your pains will vanish forever. Trust me. God bless you -- Madame ZuZu."

Cutter, exhausted, took the paper bag with the supplies and folded and placed the instruction paper inside. He thanked Madame ZuZu -- mercifully avoiding a hug, instead shaking her pudgy, oily hand with its claw-like red fingernails -- and fled to Pierre's car. Cutter relived the horror of the entire day thus far in his mind as they once again motored through the chaos that was Port au Prince without any conversation, arriving safely back at the Marriott at sunset.

Cutter checked out of the hotel the next day, anxious to get home to St. Paul and break the damn voodoo doll curse once and for all. Jacques drove him to the airport without incident, and they said goodbye. Goodbye, you pathetic excuse for a country, Haiti! Cutter thought with disgust. I'm never coming back to this shithole again, he swore. But he felt sorry that Jacques was probably stuck here for life.

The AA flight was an hour late, but when it finally arrived, the passengers all had to be bussed out to the plane on the tarmac in the steamy heat and humidity.(Cutter had to check his carry-on bag because of the liquid voodoo oils it now contained.) As he was mounting the stairs, he turned around at the top of the ramp for a final look at dismal and depressing PAP.

That was when he saw a young woman near the terminal building catch his eye and give him a single, almost dismissive wave.

It was the woman who had once called herself Charlotte Stiles, and as he took his seat in stunned disbelief on the aircraft and fumbled with his seatbelt, he realized with sickening certainty all that had just happened...

THE END

by Jack Karolewski

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