

The Magician's Apprentice

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A full-length play

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# “The Magician’s Apprentice”

## Characters

Ruth.....	Female. Senior in High School. Wants to be a magician.
Pam.....	Female. Mid-forties. Ruth and Dawn’s mother. Wants Ruth to be independent, and not like her father (who is a traveling magician).
Dawn.....	Female. 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade. Very smart, but socially awkward and superstitious. Is Ruth’s assistant.

## Setting

The play is split between the kitchen and Dawn/Ruth’s shared bedroom. It takes place over the course of the week before their father will arrive home from touring.

## Synopsis

Ruth's mother is a scientist who finds her answer by setting a hypothesis, and letting her experiment run its course, by working 60 hours a week. Her father is a magician who starts with a question, and leads his audience to his answer, by touring 11 months out of the year. Ruth is the product of both who struggles towards her answer while raising her younger sister alone.

## Other Notes

The ‘magic tricks’ in the play are on the ‘basic’ level of a magician’s repertoire of tricks. That being said, there is a flexibility in the staging of it. They can either be done literately or theatrically.

“The Magician’s Apprentice”

SCENE 01: THE KITCHEN

RUTH is performing magic while PAM is watching.

RUTH makes a rod (*a rod is a paper-based cylinder, the same size, shape, and consistency of a cigarette- but not one*) vanish and then reappear.

PAM’s cellphone is on the kitchen table.

PAM

You might want to put some more spit on your finger.

RUTH

It’s holding on pretty good.

PAM

But if you keep doing it, the saliva that you’re using as an adhesive won’t sustain the weight of your cylinder.

RUTH

Rod.

RUTH does it again.

PAM

And when you do make it reappear, you’ll want to incorporate your other hand. It’s a better way to distract.

RUTH

Misdirect.

PAM

Because you need to do it with a flourish.

PAM demonstrates.

RUTH

I think it looks fine, mom.

PAM

Your audience tells you what looks good. I've seen your father do it often enough. He always does it with a flourish.

PAM's phone vibrates. PAM checks it as RUTH tries again.

RUTH

You said you turned it off.

PAM

Ruth-

RUTH

I thought that was the new agreement- the phone would be off while in the house.

PAM

*(referring to the rod)*

I'm sorry, I missed it. Do it again.

RUTH puts the rod away..

RUTH

You said that you wouldn't work at home.

PAM

Do the trick again.

RUTH

It's a task.

PAM

I'm showing interest, Ruth.

RUTH

It seems like you were testing the waters. Are you going to have to leave?

PAM

Maybe.

RUTH

What's the problem this time?

PAM

Monica.

RUTH

It's always Monica. It was a good investment.

PAM

The algae she processes is contaminated. Her built-in cleaning system- there's something wrong. I won't be gone for too long. Ten minutes. Fifteen at the most. It's just a few miles away and John can fix her. *(pause)* What, Ruth?

RUTH

So you've been waiting to leave.

PAM

There was a problem with Monica, I told John to text me with an update.

RUTH

Even though you walked through the door and told me that you turned it off.

PAM

It was an emergency.

RUTH

So when you said you wanted to spend time at home tonight-

PAM

I did-

RUTH

You were just watching me until you had to leave.

PAM

You're being ridiculous.

RUTH

The water's warm enough. You can go.

PAM

You're acting like- I have cut back my hours..

RUTH

Yeah mom. To sixty a week. I know.

PAM

I don't work evenings anymore.

RUTH

Unless it's an emergency. I know.

PAM

I don't bring my work home with me.

RUTH

You brought your work home with you.

PAM

When?

RUTH

Your phone is on.

PAM

It was an emergency.

RUTH

You told Dawn and I that you were working on your schedule, that you wouldn't be working twelve-hour days, that you wouldn't bring your work home with you, that if someone called at night you would find someone else to take care of it.

PAM

And I'm doing-

RUTH

And do you remember why you said that?

PAM

And if you look at my hours four months ago and my hours now, you would see a difference-

RUTH

We were sitting right here, four months ago. When dad had a two week break from his performance and he was coming home. You told us that the head-gasket on his car blew, and that he'd be delayed in Oregon for repairs. That his schedule was so tight he had to miss his two week window. That we had to wait four more months because of a head gasket.

PAM

I remember-

RUTH

Then why is your phone still on? *(pause)* You sent Dawn upstairs, and you talked to me. And you said that I'm an adult, I'm taking care of the house, and I'm taking care of my sister. That if I needed a break, if I needed you to stay home, then I would just have to ask you and you would.

PAM

That is still true. Ruth, it is. But sometimes I have an emergency, and that takes precedent.

RUTH

You have to go. Go.

PAM

Ruth-

RUTH

You have an emergency.

PAM

The text was just an update. I don't have to leave.

RUTH

So you're just waiting to leave.

PAM

Ruth-

RUTH

I'm not going to have a conversation with someone who is counting down the seconds.

PAM

So we're supposed to sit here in silence? *(waiting in silence)* Have you given any thought about this summer?

RUTH

I don't want to talk about this right now.

PAM

The application is on the fridge. Have you even looked at it?

RUTH

Yeah.

PAM

The deadline's tonight. So I can bring it in tomorrow morning.

RUTH

So I have all night-

PAM

I understand that you want to take a year off. Don't go straight to college. I didn't. That's fine. But you have to work.

RUTH

You've told me.

PAM

And you've done it before.

RUTH

As punishment.

PAM

And we'll get to hang-out all day-

RUTH

In a ninety degree room where I wait for mold-

PAM

Algae-

RUTH

To dry while you stalk over me-

PAM

Bonding.

RUTH

I don't want to work in your lab.

PAM

You're graduating soon and I haven't seen you look for work.

RUTH

Well I don't go job hunting at night.

PAM

All I know is what I see and what I don't see.

RUTH

What do you see?

PAM

What I don't see are resumes and applications on the kitchen table. I don't see you asking me questions about references. What I do see is that when I come home, you're just-

RUTH

Playing with paper?

PAM

Yes. You are playing with paper. Making a stick-

RUTH

Rod-

PAM

Disappear-

RUTH

Vanish.

PAM

Instead of looking for jobs.

RUTH

Maybe I don't want your job.

PAM

Okay, that was our agreement.

RUTH

A job was our agreement. Maybe I want to do something else.

PAM

You said you wanted to take a break from school.

RUTH

And I do.

PAM

So what will you do?

RUTH

Maybe I want to *play with paper*.

PAM

You want to be a magician. We agreed-

RUTH

You agreed it's a distraction. That it's a hobby. Well maybe I think it's freedom. Maybe I think it is a job that I want to do.

PAM

Birthday parties aren't jobs.

RUTH

Magicians' work-

PAM

Your father isn't hired as a magician, he's hired as a *distraction*. You would travel from trade-show to expo on a four month schedule. Four months on, two weeks off. All you can bring with you are two suitcases because any tricks that require large props, that require skill, won't fit on the plane.

RUTH

That's just what dad does.

PAM

That's what all distraction's do. This table. Your father used to be able to use it. It was his favorite trick. When he was a magician. Now it has cracks, light bleeds in and it kills the trick. Now that he's a distraction, the *Lockheed Martin Biochip Expo* doesn't care that he can make someone vanish. They care that he distracts the audience long enough for them to forget how bored they are and how much they hate their job. Your father is this table.

RUTH

And dad makes them interested.

PAM

You'll see your father Wednesday night. Two days. He'll show you what it means to be a magician. But this, this job I am offering you, is real. It has actual responsibilities, you can make money, and it has an impact. The algae that we develop will make a car run without gas.

RUTH

And I'm treated to the soundbite you use for fund-raisers.

PAM

What will you do-

RUTH

You were supportive of it a few minutes ago.

PAM

And I still am. You're allowed a distraction. I love distractions. But I don't come home and hang-out with you until my work is done. You are distracting yourself from finding a job.

RUTH

So Dawn and I are distractions?

PAM

That's not what I meant.

RUTH

That's what it sounded like.

PAM

I meant that I don't have fun until I'm done with my work.

RUTH

Maybe I don't want to work in your lab! Maybe I don't want to hope that I get a call so I can leave-

PAM

It's work you know how to do. We'd be able to spend all day together. I would take you to lunch. You'd be making fifteen an hour- enough to save for whatever you want to do after. And it's not time-intensive. I promise.

RUTH

Like you promised to take us to the beach?

PAM

Those two things have nothing to do with each other.

RUTH

If you're going to compromise my hours like you do yours, then those two things have everything to do with each other.

PAM

We went to the beach-

RUTH

After you had to fill out a VRF-

PAM

All vacations need a Vacation Request Form-

RUTH

But it wasn't a vacation because we went to the lab.

PAM

We were there for fifteen minutes.

RUTH

Forty-five.

PAM

And you act like you spent the whole day waiting for me.

RUTH

And when we went to the beach, we went to the one part where there's no sand, no sun.

PAM

It was a cove. A quarter-mile from the beach.

RUTH

And you worked while you were there.

PAM

In the real world, you have to make compromises.

RUTH

You had a compromise this morning, too.

PAM

There was a problem with a technician's paycheck.

RUTH

You were in the middle of an email.

PAM

What are you talking about?

RUTH

On your computer. An email that you were still proofing. You left it up, on your computer.

PAM

I didn't leave an email up.

RUTH

It's the one where you say you don't want to have kids.

PAM

That's not what it said.

RUTH

Subject line-- Why do I have kids?

PAM

You don't understand.

RUTH

Your kids are complaining, your daughter can't handle the stress. She doesn't understand what work is. When you were a kid you knew your place. You never complained as much.

PAM

Ruth-

RUTH

That you'll be working less hours over the next week, but you'll more than make up for it after that. (*as RUTH*) So you want to appease us?

PAM

My email is part of the game that I have to play as a manager. Labwork is part of that game. Monica is part of that game. You have to trust that I don't mean that. That you and Dawn-

RUTH

I've been thinking of your promise to me all day. I've been trying to figure out what I should do-

PAM

Should do?

RUTH

I mean, the question comes down to trust, right? And since you seem to be ashamed of me and Dawn-

PAM

Ruth-

RUTH

Since you are ashamed of us, should I tell you that I have been waiting to get an apology, to get an explanation from you? Should I show you when I'm vulnerable, or will you just put that in another email-

PAM

Ruth, I'm sorry.

RUTH

Because I thought we were having fun, I thought that you practicing with me meant that things were getting better. That you were listening to me. But I guess I was wrong.

PAM

No, Ruth. You're not wrong. That email- I'm sorry that I left it up- I shouldn't have even written it at home. There is a way I am, and there's a way I have to act at work. And I need you to know that I love you, that I listen to you. The beach- I made our picnic, I packed our car, I wanted to spend the day together. And I had it under control. And as soon as I had it under control, I knew I could do more. I listened to you, and I thought I could listen to someone else. I thought I could do both. But you don't need someone to do both, you need me to just listen. Ruth... Ruth, look at this.

PAM takes her cellphone and turns it off.

PAM

It's off. This phone is off, I'm not doing work, so you can talk, and I'll listen. It's just you and me.

RUTH

I work seventy-two hours a week. I get up early. Wake up Dawn if you have an emergency at the lab. So I do that four times a week. I make our breakfast. We go to school. I pay attention during lunch, make sure *the brats* don't take her homework. We get home. I clean. I check her homework, set the table, make dinner do the dishes pack-up the food do my homework, and tuck her into bed. Every day. And I want a break.

PAM

And I know what you're sacrificing-

RUTH

Eight months ago, I was in the garage, I was *playing with paper*. Dad saw what I was practicing, and he smiled. He didn't call it *playing with paper*, he said that what I was doing was *wonderful*. We talked for two hours and he listened to me talk about how much I hate school, how I don't want to waste my time in college, how I'm busy as hell and I'm taking care of my sister, who follows me around writing down what I do in her journal so I don't have one second to myself. And I started to cry and he was cradling me in his lap like I was a child. He told me he was proud of me. I told him that I missed him and asked him not to go.

PAM

Ruth-

RUTH

He said he had to. I told him I wanted to be a performer and tour with him. I'd be his apprentice. He didn't say anything and I buried my head in his chest and held him. And then he said yes.

PAM

You will not be touring with him.

RUTH

I just have to put on a show. To audition. A simple task.

PAM

I will not let you tour with him.

RUTH

I'm graduating. It's my summer. I'll be getting paid, I'll have *responsibilities*-

PAM

I'm serious.

RUTH

I thought you'd be happy. I wouldn't be *complaining anymore*-

PAM

Ruth, that's not what I-

RUTH

And I'm putting on a show because I know that dad listens. Because if I need a break, then dad will give it to me. That if there's a scheduling problem, then dad will talk to me and we will work it out together. He listens.

PAM

I'm listening to you.

PAM's phone rings. She silences it.

RUTH

You turned your phone off.

PAM

Let me explain.

RUTH

You listen to me.

PAM

I didn't think John would call-

RUTH

But you left your phone on.

PAM

If there's something wrong with Monica-

RUTH

As long as there's something wrong with Monica, I can wait-

PAM

You don't understand-

RUTH

I don't understand? You're right. I don't understand how you can fix Monica by watching someone else do it. I don't understand why you need to run into work to handle a payroll problem. I don't understand the games that you *have* to play.

PAM

I'm sorry.

RUTH

Go. Go play your games. That's why I can't work at your lab, because I don't do games, I do shows.

PAM

You're not putting up a show, Ruth.

RUTH

I thought you would support me. I was going to ask for your help. But you see a magician as a distraction. You see me as a distraction. Well Monica is a distraction. You going to the lab when we're on our way to the beach is a distraction. And I am tired of working seventy-two hours for someone who needs a distraction from me. You should go. Monica needs to be taken care of.

PAM

Ruth...

RUTH tears up the application.

PAM exits.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 02: THE KITCHEN

RUTH is sitting at the table with some plates on it. She puts a table cloth over it. Shakes it and then rips it off. The plates are still there.

DAWN is watching RUTH.

RUTH shakes the tablecloth over the plates, removes it with the flourish.

DAWN

You're leaving us?

RUTH

I'm not leaving. I would be touring. After graduation I would leave for a month, I'd be back for a month.

DAWN

You'd keep coming back?

RUTH

Of course. He said he had a table. In the kitchen. If I could make him vanish, then he would take me on tour.

DAWN

And that's why you're firing me?

RUTH

I'm not firing you.

DAWN

Maybe I'll talk to mom about this.

RUTH

I told her last night when I ripped up her application. Go upstairs.

DAWN

This is our show.

RUTH

My show Dawn. And you've helped me. I've given you work to do. And, if you want to help me, you need to give me five minutes of quiet so I can present the *Vanishing Man*.

DAWN

You're firing me because you think you'll be a better magician-

RUTH

I need you. But there is the stage, and there is the backstage. A magician, a real magician is really two people: a performer, and a mechanical. The performer finesses and presents a task. They are onstage. I am a performer. You're the mechanical. The mechanical thinks, they design and they create tasks for their performer and they are instrumental. You are instrumental. And you are backstage -hidden and silent. Because sometimes the performer has to figure out how to present a task on their own. And this is one of those times. I need you to be a mechanical right now. So go upstairs.

DAWN

I fixed the table. You wouldn't have a show without me. You can't kick me out of it.

RUTH

I told you how you can help. Go.

DAWN

Alright. I won't be here. I'll leave.

RUTH

Thank you.

DAWN

I mean, this show's for dad.

RUTH

And you'll still be involved, but just not right now.

DAWN

And I should support you.

RUTH

I'm just asking you to go upstairs. Five, ten minutes.

DAWN

So I'll support you. I'll be dad.

RUTH

You'll be-

DAWN

I'll pretend to be him.

RUTH

You are not dad.

DAWN

Not now, but if I never smile, if I get these big bags under my eyes and never promise anything.

RUTH

Are you serious?

DAWN

That's what he does!

RUTH

You've never met dad.

DAWN

I've met him for two weeks every four months.

RUTH

Then you know dad is a successful performer. Whatever dad says, he does. You were in Warsaw: He took a centrifuge, lifted it ten feet into the air, spun it and made it vanish because he said he would.

RUTH takes out a postcard.

DAWN

Like he said that he would come four months ago?

RUTH

Dawn.

DAWN

And he cancelled because of a headgasket. He's not reliable.

RUTH

He didn't come because I told him not to. *(pause)* I haven't shown this to anyone. But you're my mechanical, so I'm trusting you. Two weeks before he was supposed to come, he sent me this.

RUTH hands DAWN the postcard.

DAWN

*I have an opportunity. I will cancel if you are ready. I will call you soon. Tell me your answer.*  
Ready for what?

RUTH

Dad taught me how to do this show.

DAWN

But he's barely here.

RUTH

From his notes.

DAWN

He performs everything from memory.

RUTH

He gave me thirty pages.

DAWN

Whose were they?

RUTH

His.

DAWN

How do you know?

RUTH

It was in mom's handwriting.

DAWN

Mom's?

RUTH

Mom used to record every task he did.

DAWN

But why did he send the postcard?

RUTH

I needed to give him permission.

DAWN

Why?

RUTH

Because it wasn't a headgasket, it was a booktraders conference.

DAWN

What?

RUTH

He told mom about the conference. And she took it and changed it into a headgasket. I told him not to come because the *Vanishing Man* wasn't fixed. Now it is. Now dad will take me.

DAWN

If you want to be a performer, don't you want to follow a famous one?

RUTH

Excuse me?

DAWN

He's not superman. He's not calling the president. Dad performs at trade shows and lives out of a suitcase. He's not David Blaine.

RUTH

Fuck David Blaine. Dad has a sea of people waiting for him to come onstage, the manager runs to him and says 'they need you out there'. He turns and says, 'when I'm ready'.

Dad lives out of *two* suitcases. With one suitcase, he can make a photocopier disappear.

That is greatness. David Blaine has a camera crew, a set of people working under him, and dozens of mechanicals for every task.

Dad takes a hand, (*RUTH takes a rod from behind her ear*) and a rod. Both of which you've seen before. (*RUTH makes the rod disappear, and reappear*). All to remind you that there is something about a hand that you have failed to appreciate.

DAWN

And you can do that?

RUTH

I'm his daughter, aren't I?

DAWN

Prove it.

RUTH

You be dad. I'll show you the end of my show.

DAWN moves a chair to be an audience member while RUTH clears-off the table of everything except the tablecloth.

RUTH

*(as performer)*

I present to you the *Vanishing Man*. After studying in exotic India, a country known for its mystic's ability to separate the mind from the body, I learned the art of transporting a man's consciousness to his most cherished place of memory. After learning this task, I immediately travelled home, and set about recreating this wondrous feat.

RUTH snatches the tablecloth from the table.

RUTH

To demonstrate, I need a volunteer from the audience.

DAWN raises her hand.

RUTH

Dawn, dad would never raise his hand.

DAWN

He would if he were excited.

RUTH

He wouldn't raise his hand in *this* situation.

DAWN

If he's not excited by now-

RUTH

Dad waits. He wants to see what I'll do. So wait. Look around to see if anyone else has raised *their* hands. Do that.

DAWN looks around slowly.

RUTH

(to DAWN) Which would prompt me to say (*as performer*) What about you, sir? Would you be interested to come up and be transported to your most cherished place of memory?

DAWN

Maybe.

RUTH

Dad would say 'yes'.

DAWN

He started his training as an escape-artist. He would say maybe.

RUTH

He may not say 'yes', but his actual response would be longer, and 'yes' is the closest approximation of it. So say 'yes'.

DAWN

If you don't want me to say what he would *actually say*, then why is it important to have him as your audience?

RUTH

If you're going to help, you need to stop second-guessing me.

DAWN

Then tell me what he would say!

RUTH

He would say.. *For you, Ruth, I might just do anything.* And he would come up onstage, take my hand, and kiss it.

DAWN

(*starting to write it down in her journal*)

*I might just do anything...*

RUTH

I hate it when you write in that. I don't know what you do with it, and it's kind of weird.

DAWN

I'm documenting for posterity. Keep prattling.

RUTH

Don't use that term.

DAWN

You want me to pretend to be dad. I was being dad. *Prattle.*

RUTH

Performers use that term.

DAWN

I'm using it correctly-

RUTH

Start again. And don't use my words. "...transported to your most cherished place of memory?"

DAWN rises, and crosses to RUTH.

DAWN

For you, Ruth, I might just do anything.

DAWN takes RUTH's hand and kisses it.

RUTH

Thank you, sir. If you would be so kind as to lay down on the table.

As DAWN is getting-on.

DAWN

There are cracks in it-

RUTH

It's safe.

DAWN

It doesn't seem-

RUTH

*(softly)*

Other way.

DAWN lays down.

RUTH

Now please think of your most cherished place of memory, and close your eyes. I will transport your consciousness there, but your body will vanish.

You will experience everything as from a great distance, and you will come back, your consciousness *thrown* into your body. In your hand, a piece of what you visited.

RUTH lays the tablecloth over DAWN.

RUTH

On the count of three, I will pull the tablecloth away! One. Two. Three!

RUTH pulls the tablecloth away with a flourish.

RUTH

Dawn, you're still there.

DAWN

What did you do wrong?

RUTH

You didn't pull the latch.

DAWN

What latch?

RUTH

Your left hand. Lift it up, and the false-bottom of the table will roll you below. This is simple stuff, Dawn.

DAWN

To who?

RUTH

We're going to do this again. I'm going to put the tablecloth over you. (*RUTH puts the tablecloth over DAWN*) When I do that, feel for the latch by your left hand. At three, pull the latch and let go, alright? 1. 2. 3. Behold!

RUTH rips the tablecloth off.

DAWN gets up and sits away from the table.

RUTH

Hell yes. That's how to do the *Vanishing Man*! Perfect flourish! (*pause*) And perfect silence.

DAWN

Ruth. It's dark in here and there are stones in my hand.

RUTH

Dawn, stop talking.

DAWN

No, it's dark.

RUTH

It's useless anyway, because I can't understand you.

DAWN

You understand me!

RUTH

You can hear me. I can't hear you.

DAWN

And I can feel both of the walls.

RUTH

Dad would be silent.

DAWN

All around me. Why... Why would you do this to someone you're auditioning for?

RUTH

*(trying to smooth it over)*

You hear our volunteer's soul trying to communicate without a body. It's difficult. Like hearing the wind tell a story that you've forgotten.

DAWN

*(to calm)*

February 5th. Sister didn't go to school. Gave me a note to pass in. Said she was feeling sick, and mom gave it to her before she left for work.

RUTH

But the soul's sound is muffled unless it learns to communicate in a different way. *(pause)*  
Since the table was designed for the lost soul to hear my instructions but never to communicate back.

DAWN

Then how come I can hear you? *(to calm)* February 12th. Sister didn't go to school. Gave me a note to pass in-

RUTH

The soul needs to communicate with her mind.

DAWN

-Said she was feeling sick, and mom gave it to her before she left for work.

RUTH

Christ, Dawn, use the mesmerist's language I taught you. Tap your message

DAWN

*(tapping)*

I hate dark-enclosed-spaces.

RUTH

And now I can understand you. You're tapping on the wrong side.

DAWN

Let me out!

RUTH

Nope. Tap on the left side. This side. *(she taps)* This is the sweet spot. If you tap there, then the vibrations don't carry to the rest of the table and all I need is to touch this spot. *(as performer)* And now he has travelled peacefully to his most cherished place of memory. *(tapping)* It's just a box. You used to play in them all the time.

DAWN

*(tapping)*

It's a dark box! There is no light!

RUTH

I'm not done, yet!

DAWN

*(tapping)*

I'm going to break the table.

RUTH

You can't break-

DAWN hits the table.

RUTH

Wait-

DAWN

*(tapping)*

I need light!

DAWN hits the table again.

RUTH goes and turns the light up.

RUTH

Dawn, listen. I turned up the light. Can you see better?

DAWN

*(tapping)*

Higher.

RUTH

That?

DAWN

*(tapping)*

That's perfect.

RUTH turns it down.

DAWN

That's not funny!

DAWN hits the table.

RUTH turns it back up.

RUTH

It's as bright as the kitchen gets.

DAWN

*(tapping)*

Fine.

RUTH

Fine. (*as performer*) Now that I have separated his mind from his body, I will bring them together again. But he may have brought something over with him. Watch. Counting down to one.

When DAWN is back on the table, the countdown is complete.

RUTH

I am calling you back from the broken cobblestone roads! 3. From packed audiences. 2. From the show you built from nothing. 1.

RUTH pulls the tablecloth off. DAWN is back.

DAWN

Ruth-

RUTH

Dad! Show them stones from the street of the EuroLab Expo in Warsaw! Dad would smile and take a bow.

DAWN

Ruth, you know I hate being-

RUTH

Smile and bow so the task can end.

DAWN

Why would you do that to me? I could see myself. I heard everything I was saying and-

RUTH

It was just a box.

DAWN

A dark, confined, box!

RUTH

I could have gotten you out at anytime. You were completely safe.

DAWN

Did you care that I was trapped?

RUTH

I couldn't hear you.

DAWN

I tapped-

RUTH

And as soon as I realized it, I let you out.

DAWN

Not *as soon*-

RUTH

And you know how the *Vanishing Man* works! And you know it is completely safe. You're my mechanical.

DAWN

Don't say it like it means something-

RUTH

You're my mechanical. Now think, Dawn. *Reason*. You're smart, right?

DAWN

What does that even mean?

RUTH

You fixed the *Vanishing Man* when I couldn't. Right?

DAWN

Yes.

RUTH

Some would say you're a genius.

DAWN

Ruth-

RUTH

The school certainly does. Mom certainly does. Use your genius. Why would I risk you? Why would I ever consciously violate you?

DAWN

I don't know.

RUTH

I wouldn't! That bond between a mechanical and performer is tighter than blood. Famous shows- Henry Dirk's show- fell apart because the trust between him and his mechanical fell apart. I'm not going to destroy this show by having our bond fall apart. The Magician's bond is stronger than blood's. (*relenting*) Do you need a break, you can just tell me and we'll take a break.

DAWN

We don't need a break. We did it.

RUTH

I think we did it.

DAWN

I vanished.

RUTH

I *think* you vanished. I *think* the flourish looked good. I *think* the prattle was engaging. I *think* you vanished instead of just rolling under the table. But I don't *know* because no one watched us. So you get a break before we take the mirror out of the bathroom and move it down here. We'll go through the show, change where the mirror is placed, and go through it again. I'm thinking of sightlines.

DAWN

How much more do I have to be in the table?

RUTH

Twenty more-

DAWN

No!

RUTH

Is dad complaining?

DAWN

Get someone to watch. Or get someone to vanish and I'll watch-

RUTH

You can still vanish if we keep the light on.

DAWN

Use mom as an audience. She's seen dad do the task before.

RUTH

I tore-up the application.

DAWN

Since I refuse to move a mirror, and you're too afraid to talk to mom-

RUTH

I'm not afraid-

DAWN

You'll go in blind. Trying this without an audience.

RUTH

I told her I was leaving.

DAWN

Now this is up to you. You're onstage, I'm just hidden and silent. If you mess it up, then it's not my fault.

RUTH

I'm not going to-

DAWN

And I'm not saying that it'll be a disaster, I'm just asking you to think of the other performers who presented their show live without a practice audience.

RUTH

Dawn..

DAWN

Think of Doc Conrad,

RUTH

I'm not doing the bullet catch.

DAWN

Adam Epstein, killed by his wand. It exploded because he didn't test it.

RUTH

I'm just using a table.

DAWN

Giovanni deGrisy, dead. Arnold Buck, nail through the head. Otto Blumenfeld, HT Sartell-

RUTH

I know the dangers! I know the risk!

DAWN

Then you need mom as an audience member!

RUTH

I can't convince her. I'm not the favorite, I don't make her heart melt with a smile.

DAWN

Stop deflecting. You're my favorite. You know you need mom. And I know you can do it.

RUTH

Dawn, go upstairs.

DAWN

In class, we had to pick a roll model. Do you remember that?

RUTH

Yeah. Marie Curie. Go upstairs.

DAWN

I messed up my hair, I digested everything about radium, I learned how to walk like I had a kidney ailment. I was Marie Curie. I worked and I died to discover Radium, and I was proud of it. But at school, 7th grade, I'm surrounded by Lady Gagas, Megan Fox's, and Elf Princesses. I died to discover radium and they lived to dance in their underwear for money? Their role models were people who let themselves be controlled! I was out of place. Marie Curie was out of place. So I looked around. Who today is Marie Curie? Who is Marie Curie *right now*?

RUTH

I'm not Marie Curie.

DAWN

Marie Curie worked her chores, and when she was done she worked at science. She had obligation and she had her passion. You have to cook, you have to wake me up in the morning. And after your done, you focus your time. You take what you want.

RUTH

When do I have time-

DAWN

That's why you skip school. Every Wednesday.

RUTH

What makes you think that?

DAWN

I know, Ruth. Every Wednesday, I pass in a note. For the last four months. You don't go to the doctor and mom never mentions it.

RUTH

Are you going to tell her?

DAWN

Do you stay home to practice?

RUTH

Yes.

DAWN

Then you're Marie Curie. You work for your practice time. You take it. You work all week so you can work harder on Wednesday. I want to fight, too. I want something that I care about to fight for. And because of this book, I know you. And I know you can figure out how to bring mom in.

RUTH takes DAWN's journal.

RUTH

I don't know if I like this journal.

DAWN

Give it back!

RUTH

Why? What is it?

DAWN

It's my book. It's the best approximation of your traits, history, and habits which make you a performer. It's great.

RUTH

It's creepy.

DAWN

It's a book of facts. A book of someone that I love, that I want to learn more about. It's my copy of you. It is complex, and nuanced, and contradictory.

RUTH

And you understand it?

DAWN

I understand tendencies.

RUTH

And you're mom's favorite. So you know her.

DAWN

No, I'm-

RUTH

You do your homework, your impressionable. She loves you. If you asked mom to be the audience, she would say 'yes'.

DAWN

But she won't listen to me.

RUTH

I will.

DAWN

What do you mean?

RUTH

Tomorrow, mom will get home from work. She'll come home before dinner to get ready for dad. We'll intercept her, and you'll tell me what I need to say.

DAWN

I don't know, sister-

RUTH

And we can have the run before the show.

DAWN

How?

RUTH takes the tablecloth and flourishes it.

RUTH

You'll have light. It will be safe.

DAWN  
No, Ruth.

RUTH  
We'll tap out our responses.

DAWN  
I'm not going to do it again.

RUTH  
It will be for a couple of minutes, and I will be right there with you.

DAWN  
It is still dark. It is a dark box and I can't-

RUTH  
I'll turn up the light.

DAWN  
If the light doesn't work, I want to be taken out.

RUTH  
You're my mechanical- buck up.

DAWN  
And that's all I have to do?

RUTH  
I'll have a note for you in the morning. I need to prepare tomorrow.

DAWN  
I don't-

RUTH offers DAWN her book back.

RUTH  
Are you my mechanical?

DAWN takes the book.

DAWN  
If I'm going to do this right, I need to study.

RUTH

I'll be upstairs in a minute.

Lights down as RUTH practices her flourish on the bare table.

END OF SCENE

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SCENE 03: KITCHEN

RUTH and DAWN sit around the table.

PAM enters.

DAWN

Start with being supportive.

RUTH

Can I get your coat, mom?

PAM

Sit down.

DAWN

What's the matter?

RUTH

*(ignoring DAWN)*

What did I do now?

DAWN

That's not what I told you to say.

PAM

That's how you want to start this conversation?

RUTH

*(correcting)*

What's the matter?

PAM

Better.

PAM takes an envelope from her bag and looks at it.

PAM

This is what's the matter.

DAWN

I can't see it. What is it?

PAM

Every two weeks, my lab pays the field scientists for the work that they do. Not for the work that they said they intended to do, but what they actually did. A reckoning. This envelope is your reckoning.

RUTH

*(tapping)*

No address or writing on it. A little help please.

DAWN

Wait for her to start.

Pause.

PAM

Good. This means I have your attention. Attention leads to listening.

DAWN

Listening leads to obeying.

RUTH

Listening leads to obeying.

PAM

Good. Now listen to this, Ruth. Structure. Bridges have structure.

DAWN

Supportive.

RUTH

I like bridges.

PAM

Me too.

DAWN

Tell her why.

RUTH

Harry Houdini was dangled-off one.

PAM

Magic.

RUTH

*(tapping)*

Bad response.

DAWN

Go for it.

RUTH

Mom, I'm sorry about this week. I know you're trying-

PAM

Reckoning, Ruth. Listen. I like bridges because they are built from a set structure. It is built out of obeying the plans, and when a bridge collapses it is because the plans weren't obeyed, that orders were only *heard*, barely listened to. And the only valuable part of a collapsed bridge is the algae that grows on the bottom. Your sister builds bridges. You measure algae.

RUTH

What's in that envelope?

PAM

With your sister, her obedience allows her another brick for her bridge. That bridge will take her wherever she wants it to go. *You* start to construct one, but then go your own way, it collapses, and you're stuck measuring what was found in the rubble. Do you understand?

DAWN

Agree. And probe.

RUTH

I obey mom.

PAM

Every morning, you *can* add another brick to the bridge. Every morning Dawn *does*.

RUTH

What brought this on?

DAWN

Why is she bringing me up?

RUTH

*(tapping)*

Shut-up, Dawn.

PAM

Before I leave for work, I thank you for making breakfast. You've made it, I acknowledge it and thank you. That is the foundation of your bridge. A brick. Before I leave, I wish you luck on your day at school. You accept that.

RUTH

*(tapping)*

I don't like this. I should go.

DAWN

You have her just where you want her. Keep going.

RUTH

I do.

PAM

Don't interrupt me.

PAM

I got a call today from the principal, wanted me to come in with some questions.

RUTH

*(tapping)*

This is not good.

DAWN

Keep Going. Marie Curie, Ruth.

PAM

Don't tap, Ruth. It's loud and passive aggressive.

RUTH

What were the questions?

PAM

He gave me a form to sign. An application for graduation.

RUTH

I forgot to show it to you. I'm sorry. It's still in my locker.

PAM

I was livid. I was livid because I have a job which requires experience, more than a degree in educational-administration. And he called me for no reason. I signed it. I'm busy.

DAWN

Talk about trust.

RUTH

*(tapping)*

I got it.

PAM

If you tap your finger one more time, the only thing you will use it for until *prom* is for the regulation of green algae. That's the kind whose smell clings to your skin, Ruth. Clings. So tap again.

RUTH

What's the matter?

PAM

The matter is that he started laying-out papers on his desk. Surrounding my permission form. Stationary, post-it notes, scraps of paper- sixteen pages. His desk was covered, the letter he *saw* me sign was in the middle. He asked how you were feeling. Giving me a way out. I heard your bridge collapsing from across town.

RUTH

I can explain-

PAM

The signatures, Ruth! All the same, all not mine. All proof that you cannot be trusted.

RUTH

Mom, wait-

PAM

Do you know how embarrassing it is to be in that situation? He thought that I lie for my kids so he felt he had to trap me. I worked hard to get to where I am right now. I fought younger people out of a position. With the sixteen lies you made, I now look incompetent to a man whose job it is to shepherd *children*.

DAWN

Find a way back in.

RUTH

I'm sorry.

PAM

It goes beyond being sorry. We had a relationship where you would say something, and I would trust you.

DAWN

Rebuild trust.

RUTH

It is.

PAM

You wanted me to listen to you. I want you to talk to me. To tell me what is really going on. If you're even able to do that?

RUTH

Of course I can.

PAM

And then you roped your sister in all of this.

DAWN

Protect me.

RUTH

She wasn't involved. A friend did it. Not Dawn. I would never get her involved in something like that.

PAM

And now I'm supposed to trust you?

RUTH

I'm telling you the truth!

PAM

She confessed to the principal today.

RUTH

She what?

DAWN

I'm not going to lose you.

PAM

You made her lie, and she couldn't be a part of it anymore. She turned you in.

RUTH

I trusted her.

DAWN

And do you know why?

PAM

You are not a system that can run it's own processes, Ruth. You have a set structure that you need to follow.

RUTH

Are you saying I'm Monica-

PAM

I'm saying that I don't know what to do with you. When I left the school tonight I knew what I was going to do. I knew, with all certainty, how you would be punished. And it would start with every night and every weekday at the lab.

RUTH

I need to talk to my sister.

DAWN

Because I'm Marie Curie.

PAM

You will not talk to your sister until you are done talking to me.

RUTH

*(tapping)*

Marie Curie, Dawn? You want to talk about what I'm up against?

DAWN

Ruth-

PAM

Ruth?

RUTH

*(tapping)*

How I fight people that I'm up against?

DAWN

What are you going to do?

RUTH

*(tapping)*

Wait for you to apologize.

PAM

Ruth I am talking to you. What do you have to say for yourself? Choose your words carefully.

RUTH

I want to start. I want to rebuild my bridge. I want to show you that I want to. Tell me what I can do.

PAM

Thank you. After your school I went to the lab. Another emergency. Monica was broken and, John was trying to save our work., fix Monica. I was watching different tanks where water and nutrients are held. I was watching the tubes that connect that to the feeding vessel. Where the algae grows. I watched the feeding vessel push the algae through Monica, where the algae flowed through her tubes, surrounded by light, and were either dumped on the other side or put back into the feeding vessel. Monica is part of this entire reactor, this entire ecosystem. But the algae was getting caught in her tubes. Monica was having problems. John couldn't find what the problem was. I was watching my lab fall apart because Monica, couldn't do it, she was being overworked. John couldn't find anything wrong with her. We worked backwards: checked the vessel- nothing. Finally we were at the beginning and we checked the container that stores the water, and there was a crack, a hole about the size of a dime. It was on top and there was shit in the container, sitting on top of the water. The outside was getting in, was messing everything up and Monica had to work twice as hard to filter it, to get what she needed. And I didn't see it. I didn't see it until I saw the hole and I saw the grime that she had to work through. Ruth, I'm sorry. And it is fucked up, but I didn't understand until I was at the lab, until I thought that I would lose everything and I was examining every inch of this machine. You skipped school once a week because I skipped home every day.

PAM gives RUTH the envelope.

RUTH opens it and takes-out a few papers.

RUTH

What is it?

PAM

It's a VRF.

RUTH

So?

PAM

It's our VRF. This families. After we determined the problem, I left John to fix it. I went to my office, and filled it out. We'd leave in two weeks. It'll be spring break for you. I know a cabin your father and I used to go to. By the beach. I have more than enough vacation days saved-up. We'll all go together. Sand, water, suntan lotion, umbrella.

RUTH

Mom.

PAM

There's a pamphlet in it, too.

RUTH

Is this real?

PAM

I want you to see what I wrote down. I want you to approve it. And I will submit it when I'm at the lab tomorrow. Do you approve it?

RUTH

Does this say couples canoe trips?

PAM

One person has to be over 18, but I think we can wing it.

RUTH

Mom-

PAM

This VRF is a contract, Ruth. You lied you bullied your sister into-

RUTH

I didn't bully her-

PAM

I want to believe you.

DAWN

I'm waiting.

PAM

I want to help you rebuild your bridge. But I need to trust you. And the trust will start with this vacation. Do you want to go?

RUTH

Yes.

PAM

Then you have to go to school. I've talked to Principal Mouch. He won't accept anymore notes.

RUTH

Fine.

PAM

Also, I have to put in more hours over the next two weeks.

RUTH

Fine.

PAM

And I want your help.

RUTH

While dad's here?

PAM

Our fight started because we don't talk to each other. Because I don't listen to you. I have to put in these hours, and I want you there with me. You'll still have the evenings with your father, you'll still have weekends and mornings before school. I just have to get work done so others can take my place.

RUTH

For just the next two weeks. We'll have nights and mornings with dad, and then we'll go.

PAM

Suntan lotion, umbrellas, everything. Two-person canoes.

RUTH

I can do that.

PAM

And I want to plan it with you tonight.

RUTH

Tonight?

PAM

Yes.

RUTH

But my show.

PAM

What about it?

RUTH

I'm surprising dad with it tonight.

PAM

He'll be here for two weeks, Ruth. Surprise him with it tomorrow.

RUTH

But he-

PAM

Will come home knowing that you violated the agreement that we had. You wanted to show him how you sacrificed school for playing around?

RUTH

It's not-

PAM

I know. I'm sorry. Wait a day. One night. Two nights ago you talked to me. I didn't listen. You asked me to stay and I didn't. I should have. I am asking you to stay. (*PAM takes out a pen*) Let us spend tonight planning this trip, finding a cabin, while we wait for your father's train to come. We'll talk about you missing school which I know you don't want to do but I'm asking you. I promise I'll listen. You're not doing drugs, are you?

RUTH

Mom.

PAM

Or pregnant?

RUTH

*Monica* and I thought you would be happy for us.

PAM

*(lame joke)* I knew there was something going on there. *(pause)* So what do you think, Ruth? Will you stay for me?

RUTH takes PAM's pen.

RUTH

Do you mind if I get the lights, I have a headache.

PAM

I can get it.

RUTH

I'll take care of it.

RUTH gets up and dims the lights.

DAWN

I am Marie Curie.

RUTH

Let's start finding cabins. Why did you think of this place?

PAM

Your father and I went there.

RUTH

Why aren't we going with him?

PAM

So you can miss more school? I'm serious about this, Ruth. Are you-

RUTH

I am.

DAWN

I'm fine.

PAM

Plus, I have even better news.

RUTH

What?

PAM

At the lab, I ran into Molly. I talked to her. She's giving you another week to think about the application.

RUTH

What application?

PAM

For the lab.

RUTH

But I don't want to work-

PAM

Just to think about. That's all. There's no pressure. For me.

RUTH

I'll think about it. Is that a cove?

PAM

Yes, but I learned my lesson. It'll be closed.

RUTH

Good.

PAM

The park has a staggered opening-schedule.

RUTH

Like the lake won't be open until then?

PAM

The cove won't be closed until then. John was telling me about it.

RUTH

Why would we want the cove to close?

DAWN

I'm not going to apologize.

PAM

Because then the lab has permission to run some tests.

RUTH

It's for algal growers?

PAM

Only those who petition far enough in advance.

RUTH

Will you be working on your vacation?

PAM

We'll have all evening together. That's why John's coming.

RUTH

John's coming?

DAWN

Sister, I can't breathe.

PAM

I can't get them anywhere else. I can't order them, if I collect a sample then if it's right the lab can negotiate for more.

RUTH

But you said-

PAM

This could be the culture my lab needs. And it's a vacation. It has everything that you want in it. We'll get to spend the time together.

RUTH

Except when you're working-

PAM

It's not for the whole day. While I'm working, you and Dawn can go canoeing-

RUTH

But you said-

PAM

I'll talk to the rental guy. As long as you both wear life preservers- Or John could take you out when I'm in the cove-

RUTH

You scheduled a culture-harvest with your work buddy?

PAM

I couldn't take that week off any other way-

RUTH

But you're not taking it off! You're not changing anything-

PAM

Ruth-

DAWN

I'm sorry!

RUTH

You're just working more so you can work somewhere else?

PAM

I filled out the form so we can go!

RUTH

I'm not going.

PAM

You agreed

RUTH

And you agreed that this would be a vacation.

PAM

You skipped school, you crossed the line and I'm offering you what you want-

RUTH

Then you haven't been listening to me.

DAWN

Ruth, I can't breathe. I can't think. I'm not Marie Curie.

RUTH

I'm going upstairs to practice for my show tonight.

PAM grabs RUTH.

PAM

Then I am done being lenient. You will not work on your show. You will sit down and you will fill-out your job application. After that we will plan this vacation. You will go on the vacation. You will work in my lab. And you will go to school.

RUTH

No.

PAM

Because as long as you are in this house, you follow me. Do you understand?

RUTH

Eight months ago, dad-

PAM

Where is he now?

RUTH

His train is coming in the station-

PAM

Are you sure?

RUTH

He's not you. I haven't watched him work later and leave earlier every day-

PAM

Watch yourself-

RUTH

Now, if you and dad were building a bridge, who would get a brick and who measures algae?

PAM

So made you a promise?

RUTH

Yes, he did.

PAM

And you're familiar with mesmerism?

DAWN

*(audible)*

February 28th, sister missed school again today.

PAM

What was that?

RUTH

*(ignoring PAM's reaction to DAWN's voice)*

Mesmerism-

PAM

In it, the performer reads your mind, tells you what you want, what you're thinking. And you think you know the answer but you only know the answer because he gave it to you.

RUTH

Say it.

PAM

To get taken away, did David say that all you had to do was something simple?

RUTH

It was simple.

PAM

Was it?

RUTH

Just a vanishing man.

PAM

And this simple thing is the only thing that was separating you from your promise. Did he phrase it just right so that if you weren't perfect than you shouldn't waste his time? That he forgives you and that everything will be alright? Did you punish yourself and forgive him when he didn't come four months ago? Was the Vanishing Man harder to do with a table that had been broken for eight months?

RUTH

Stop it!

DAWN

*(louder yelling)*

Help! Help! Let me out!

PAM

Dawn? Is that?

RUTH stays where she is.

PAM takes a table cloth, puts it over DAWN, and takes it off DAWN is free.

PAM gets water to DAWN and tries to calm her down while RUTH is 'yelling' at her.

RUTH

*(tapping)*

Listen very carefully. I want you to transcribe this. So you can remember this when you fill out your pathetic little book.

PAM

You knew she was there?

RUTH

*(tapping)*

I hope that you enjoy when dad is here for two weeks and then leaves. I hope that you see him get into his car and remember that you did it.

PAM

I said did you know that your sister was in there?

RUTH

*(tapping)*

You had the chance to keep him here. You had the chance to have him help us with our homework, of cooking with us, of making us breakfast in the morning, we were so close.

PAM

Did you hear me, Ruth?

RUTH

*(tapping)*

Can you remember that?

DAWN

I didn't want you to leave!

PAM

Stop hitting the table and explain yourself!

RUTH

Dad is a performer! And the only people who have lied to me are right here!

RUTH goes to leave. PAM stops her.

PAM

Where do you think you're going?

RUTH

To the train station. To meet dad.

PAM

Ruth! I'm not coming after you!

RUTH

Another difference between you and him!

RUTH EXITS

END OF ACT 1

SCENE 01: THE KITCHEN

PAM enters, looking for her address book.

PAM

God-damn Jesus Christ. (*sees that DAWN isn't there*) Get in here now!

DAWN enters.

DAWN

You just left me in the car.

PAM

Help me find my address book.

DAWN

Ruth is fine.

PAM

It's 7:30 in the morning and she is not in this house.

DAWN

The police said-

PAM

The police are idiots-

DAWN

She didn't run away.

PAM

*And the amber alert isn't for runaways. Maybe she's with your husband, talk to him. Why did you let her leave in the first place? She'll come back. Don't just stand there. Find my address book.*

DAWN

She didn't runaway mom.

PAM

Check the cabinet.

DAWN

She's with dad.

PAM

What did she tell you?

DAWN

You heard her! She was going to the train station to meet dad.

PAM

Dawn-

DAWN

And they met, and he took her with him.

PAM

No, he didn't.

DAWN

They are together right now.

PAM

She left to find David. But she didn't meet him. She is not with him right now.

DAWN

No, you said-

PAM

He does not have her!

DAWN finds the address book.

PAM

Give that to me.

DAWN

Why doesn't he? That's what makes sense.

PAM

Your father wasn't coming back last night. He cancelled. So whoever has her, it isn't David.

DAWN

But-

PAM

Dawn! If you're going to get in my way, then go upstairs. Do you understand me?

DAWN gives the address book to PAM.

PAM gets the phone and dials.

DAWN

You said that dad-

DAVID picks up at the other end.

PAM

Where are you? *(pause)* I know where you said you were going to be, I am asking you where you are. *(pause)* Because your daughter left last night to meet you at the train station and she didn't come back. So either she's with you, or you need to fax me a signed letter saying that you didn't take her and that you would be the only place she'd run to so these lazy assholes will send an alert. Yes. The fax machine at the lab. I will let you know when I found her.

PAM hangs up.

DAWN

Mom?

PAM

You're on phone duty. Hold it in your hands and if it so much as beeps, you answer it and talk. Do you understand me?

DAWN

Yes mom.

PAM

You know my cellphone number, right?

DAWN

Mom-

PAM

By the time I get to the lab, David should have already faxed the letter. If anyone calls, you give them my number, and you have them call me. Do you understand?

DAWN

Yes.

PAM

If Ruth comes home while I am gone you call me immediately. Even if she is just here to pick something up. I don't care. You call me. Do you understand?

DAWN

Yes, mom.

PAM

God damnit.

DAWN

Don't go.

PAM and DAWN hug.

PAM

I will be right back, I promise. It's okay baby. We're going to find her.

DAWN

I did it.

PAM

You did what?

DAWN

I made her leave.

PAM

Dawn, stop it. You had nothing to do with it.

DAWN

It's because I'm a child. Because she had to take care of me.

PAM

You're not a child. You are an amazing-

DAWN

And Ruth is my mother. Ruth wakes me up. Ruth does the dishes, Ruth makes sure I go to bed. It's a cycle, and as a child, my only worry is to sustain it.

PAM

Why would you worry about that?

DAWN

Because Ruth started cooking in 7th grade.

PAM

She volunteered, Dawn.

DAWN

What was the alternative?

PAM

I can't have this conversation right now.

DAWN

And you did have to work. But you didn't have to work there.

PAM

I am not apologizing for anything.

DAWN

I'm not asking you to apologize. I'm talking about Ruth.

PAM

We all had to change as the schedule changed.

DAWN

Think of your lab. When the algae's environment changes, the algae adapts to grow. So Ruth started cooking. Then cleaning, then waking me up in the morning when the schedules shifted. After school your sister walks you to the bus, but doesn't get on because she needs to pick-up bread. I don't want that to be me. If she got dad to take her for a month, for two months. What would I do? Who would I have at home?

PAM

No matter what, you always have me.

DAWN

So I told Mouch. I told Mouch, and the last thing that she said to me was that it was my fault, that she couldn't trust me, and she left.

PAM

Baby, come here.

DAWN

Mom, don't go. Don't leave.

PAM

I'll have John pickup the fax. He'll bring it here, and he'll stay here when we go together to the police. We'll drive to the train station.

DAWN

I'm sorry.

PAM

*(to comfort)*

Shh...

RUTH enters. PAM notices her first.

PAM

Where the hell were you?

DAWN

Sister.

PAM stops DAWN.

PAM

Where were you? I have been up all night worried that you were abducted or killed I didn't know what. I have your father writing a letter so I can put you on amber alert. Where were you?

RUTH

I was at the train station.

PAM

We went there. We drove the road to and from there for three hours. You weren't there.

RUTH

I was there last night. When I saw dad.

PAM

David didn't come last night.

RUTH

Dad was coming to see the *Vanishing Man*. I had to show him the *Vanishing Man*.

PAM

He said he wasn't there-

RUTH

I saw him while I was waiting for the train.

PAM

What happened?

RUTH

This tramp in blue jeans and a visor is performing three-card monte. He wants his audience to follow the King, and he moves the cards all over the table. The station manager loses ten dollars, wins five, and I see the pattern.

Dad will get-off the train, and I'll show him a pile of money and show him where that performer was before I cleaned him out. Proof that I made him vanish, I would pay for the cab from the station that brings him home.

He lays the cards down, and every time he flicks his wrist (*she demonstrates*), the manager fucks up and picks the Ace. The wrist-flick tells me when he switches the cards. I get the trick. The manager win five, lose ten.

The manager moved to the side as I came to the table, and the tramp-performer, calls me honey. One dollar, and I can make five. I drop one down, and watch for the wrist flick. King. The performer acts upset, asks me to play again- this is the part where he wants to play. I lay down the five, I watch him do the wrist-flick. King. I get how it works, Performer wants to play for the ten I just got, he doesn't understand that I know how his task works. I drop twenty.

I'm playing for dad. Wrist-flick. I point to the card, Ace. I put ten more down. No wrist-flick. Ace. I didn't see it right. I'm thinking about this cab that I can't pay for. Ten more. Ace. Five. Ace. And then the performer packed-up his task in a suitcase and vanished.

I have run this house, I have taken care of everything and I was standing, in the station, two quarters in my hand, helpless.

I don't *feel* helpless.

DAWN

They conned you, it-

RUTH

A performer doesn't con. They don't trick people. But this one- A performer should pull all the strings, they should know all of the responses but they should give hope! Nine o'clock, the train arrived, left, and dad didn't get off. That tramp was dad's performer. And if I waited there, I'll get taken by him again. (*pause*) So I walked.

DAWN

Dad-

RUTH

Dad is-- mom's right. His time here was his prattle. His trick was that he could leave and I'd still miss him.

PAM

I'm glad you're alright.

RUTH

I slept on top of a deserted line of trains in the middle of a rusted-out track. I thought I'd get attacked if I slept *in* one of the cars.

PAM

So what brought you back? Food? Are you just going to take some and leave?

RUTH

I don't want to get into a fight with you. I'm tired. I had to set bottles around the ladder to the top of the traincar. I thought if someone tried to come up I could hear them.

PAM

Last night was windy. It rattled the windows down here.

RUTH

Broke all of my bottles, too. I wasn't thinking. I thought there was an army coming up on all the sides. The first thing I felt was thanks.

PAM

Thanks?

RUTH

That Dawn didn't come with me.

DAWN

I'm sorry.

RUTH

I love you. *(to PAM)* Why didn't you tell us?

PAM

Clean off the table, Dawn.

DAWN cleans off the table while PAM gets out three cups.

PAM

First thing is to start with three cups, two balls in each pocket, and one palmed in my hand. First, I show three empty cups.

RUTH

I'm serious.

PAM lifts up the middle cup. There's a black ball under it.

PAM

God-damnit.

RUTH takes the ball.

RUTH

Why didn't you tell us.

PAM

I am telling you right now.

RUTH replaces the ball.

PAM

I used to work with a performer, we were double-booked. He was horrible at setting up for my show.

PAM lowers the cup.

PAM

Now, as you can see, the ball is under the center cup, correct?

PAM lifts the cup.

DAWN

Yes.

PAM

A good performer rolls with a bad partner. Picks-up the slack.

PAM lowers the cup. Starts rotating them.

PAM

I continue, the other performer finds the mark. Someone in the audience to use. It has to seem random, but it never is. He would talk to her. The audience would laugh, and I would alter the course of the cups.

PAM brings one cup closer to her.

PAM

Ball falls on my lap. David tells a joke. Audience stops laughing.

DAWN

Dad?

PAM

(as performer) Now come on, dear, don't distract the nice lady, she's just here to have a good time with her father.

Which would always get a laugh, the audience thinks the show is about her. I tell the audience follows where I tell them, and I can continue my trick.

Since you're distracting my husband, maybe you can tell me where the ball is, dear?

Where's the ball, Dawn?

DAWN

In your lap.

PAM

Where should it be?

DAWN

That cup.

PAM lifts up the cup that was pointed at earlier.

PAM

(as performer)

Looks like someone is paying a little-too-much attention to my assistant. *(to herself)* I say this with my hands on my hips, allows me to palm a different colored ball, and as they laugh, they watch her. She's embarrassed and I replace it under a cup. *(she lifts up one of the cups)*

*(as performer)* Don't worry, I'll give you another shot at it. Follow very closely. Are you following, Dawn?

RUTH

You worked with dad?

We worked together.

PAM

For how long?

RUTH

How long have we been married?

PAM

What's the date?

DAWN

The 8th.

PAM

Twenty-two and a half years.

DAWN

For twenty-two years. But now we're talking about the end of the trick. We're not there yet, we're still setting up for it.

PAM

PAM lifts up left cup.

What color?

PAM

Red.

DAWN

PAM lifts up middle cup.

Ruth?

PAM

Blue.

RUTH

PAM lifts up right cup.

Green.

RUTH

PAM

Now I just lifted the cups up, and showed you the different colored balls. What did it feel like?

RUTH

Sudden. Like it's the start of something new.

PAM

And an audience can't take that. A performer can't do anything sudden. They have to blend their tricks together, until one overlaps the other one and their audience doesn't pay attention to the space in between. The audience needs to feel like anything is possible. They need to feel like, if given another chance, they can get it- they can win. But the performer controls what their audience perceives. So as a segway I'll talk to you about magic and science.

RUTH

That's what dad's show is about.

PAM

That's what my show is about. See, my father's father studied physics. Phasing. If you move an object quick enough, it can pass through something solid. And he unlocked the secret. All real magic is science. These cups aren't magic, they separate colors. We started with one black, but I separated the black ball out.

PAM starts shuffling the cups together. Lifting them up, calling out the colors as she does so.

PAM

Red. Blue. Green.

PAM knocks two of the cups together. She lifts one of them up.

PAM

Where did it go?

PAM sets the first cup aside.

PAM knocks the second and third cups together.

PAM lifts the second cup up, and shows that its empty. She sets it aside.

PAM lifts the third cup up, revealing all three balls.

PAM

Phasing. Now.

PAM puts the cup back over it. Does a magical flourish, and lifts it (now empty) and puts it on top of another cup. She lifts up the combined-cup and reveals a black ball.

PAM

Until we're where we started. The two weeks is over, its like the trick never happened.

PAM puts the cup back over the ball.

RUTH

It happened to me. You and Dawn may not care, but I care-

PAM

I know. And that's why I'm doing this trick. For you.

PAM lifts up the combined cup, there is no black ball.

RUTH

Where did it go? How did you do that?

PAM

Phasing. It should be here. Maybe it went to far. My assistant is very distracting.

PAM lifts up the last cup.

PAM

Miss. The woman who's here with the father. Can you turn-out your purse please? Ruth, check your pocket. Can you hold it up?

RUTH holds up a black ball.

PAM

Now this is important. This is the end of my trick. This difference: A scientist sets up the boundaries of an experiment, and lets it run its course. They ask a question, and the experiment answers it. A scientist tries, and they can fail. But there's always the hope of a scientist, that if you research long enough, if you prepare well enough, that *this time*, you won't be wrong. That the experiment will be a success. Now look at a magician.

The performer presents a question to the audience, the mechanical sets up the boundaries. The performer leads the audience to his belief, the mechanical supports him. When the performer and mechanical work together, the trick works, and the audience focuses on whatever the performer tells them to. If they work together, the question is never a question, the audience is watching an answer (pause)  
But the performer can forget that the final choice lies with the mechanical. Is she going to keep going, or has his show lasted long enough?

RUTH

He's not coming back.

PAM

I don't know. I'm not a mechanical anymore, just a scientist.

RUTH

You didn't want to tell us?

PAM

It's more complicated than-

RUTH

How long have you been his mechanical?

PAM

He said he was coming today.

RUTH

But you knew he wouldn't.

PAM

A mechanical protects. I'm not part of his act. So I didn't know.

RUTH

Protect him from what?

PAM

Dawn, it looks like you're about to pass out.

DAWN

I'm fine.

PAM

You didn't sleep last night.

You didn't either.

DAWN

Go up to bed.

PAM

I want to stay.

DAWN

Ruth?

PAM

Dawn, go upstairs.

RUTH

I'm fine.

DAWN

Are you my mechanical?

RUTH

Yes.

DAWN

Then go upstairs.

RUTH

DAWN exits.

Four months ago, your father decided not to come home.

PAM

It was because I wasn't ready. I told him not to-

RUTH

He decided before that, Ruth.

PAM

He left the choice up to me.

RUTH

When does a performer ever leave their choices to the audience?

PAM

RUTH

I am not his audience, I am his apprentice.

PAM

I didn't think I was his audience either.

RUTH

You just watched him.

PAM

You think you're the only one who was misdirected by David? Do you think you're the only one who ran away from home?

RUTH

You've never-

PAM

Felt betrayed by someone who you felt close to, tied down to a place you didn't want to be. I think I can understand the feeling. And I came back, just like you. I know this hurts to hear, Ruth, but we're similar. You are my daughter.

RUTH

But I could have left.

PAM

I got as far as the train station, too.

RUTH

Where were you?

PAM

I had lived here for a few years. I had enough money to go anywhere. My allowance.

RUTH

Allowance?

PAM

Your father gave me when I went back to school.

RUTH

When was this?

PAM

You were ten.

RUTH

You were going to leave me, Dawn? Where was dad?

PAM

David was visiting between shows.

RUTH

And leave him, too?

PAM

He took my show, Ruth. All of it.

RUTH

What show?

PAM

My magic show. My routine. The promises, the prattles, the steals, ditches, everything.

RUTH

You were his audience.

PAM

I was a performer.

RUTH

You would never have given it up.

PAM

I didn't think so when I was starting, either.

RUTH

You hate me doing it. You think it's a waste of time.

PAM

You can't focus on it. Only your father does magic now, and you don't want-

RUTH

You would have made a living at it.

PAM

I did.

RUTH

Then you wouldn't have stopped! If you started then you wouldn't have stopped!

PAM

I was asked to.

RUTH

Dad would never ask you-

PAM

Your father and I were performers. We met on the stage. We didn't care about money, we wanted to work together. But a double-billing. Two performers, that costs twice as much to do a show. We tried. Only a few could afford us, and we wanted to travel. If we wanted to do this, if we were serious about ourselves, our commitment, staying together, one of us would be the mechanical. And he made a compelling point. And he said- We were trying to figure out the best way to handle who the mechanical was. And.. And he said that, I would be the perfect prattle. That the audience would just look at me the entire time. Sometimes onstage he would fumble a trick while he was staring at me. The audience loved it. He said he could wheel an elephant onstage. Bring me out in any outfit that was tight, wheel the elephant offstage while I was working. Have me leave the stage. And everyone would swear the he made the elephant vanish.

RUTH

Mom-

PAM

So he became the performer, and I was his mechanical. And while he was the performer, I became his pregnant-mechanical. And a pregnant mechanical is a different kind of prattle. We used our savings. Bought a house. He got a new mechanical, and I stayed home. And one time I tried to surprise him, hired a sitter for you, and went to his show. Everything he did onstage with her, he had done it with me. The fumbling when he looked at her, the jokes, every word that we had made together he was sharing with her.

RUTH

But it could have meant anything-

PAM

When you've been married for thirteen years, and worked with them for three, you know what every gesture actually means. It's like the lights were shining onstage and they were naked.

RUTH

Mom-

PAM

Instead of vanishing a filling cabinet they were kissing, instead of revealing a printer they were fucking- I threw together what I needed and your father caught up- he stopped me at the door.

He said that he was happy and in love. I slapped him and he didn't stop me. I was out the door and he called after me- what about your daughters? He said that I didn't have to leave. I had a job here. He said that he wouldn't be back, he would leave me alone. But they-you needed him. I hit him again and he let me. I stared at him as he closed the door, got in his car, and drove away. He wouldn't give me the satisfaction of leaving him. I went to the train station, and I was paying for my ticket when you laughed. A little girl came up to me, her mother chasing after her. I wanted to leave him, but that meant leaving you. I stayed. And I worked more, and I returned his allowances that he sent and paid him back. But I had to protect you two.

RUTH

How did you protect us?

PAM

I work to ensure you are taken care of. You work to ensure that Dawn is taken care of. But every once in a while you get a hole in your container. Your father comes in and patches you. He gives you a break. So every four months, I could see him for two weeks. One month of hell for twelve of happiness. You were worth that. When he's gone, I can almost forget. But when he comes home, I hear him move on the floor and I wonder what the hell I'm doing. He missed the last visit. You weren't important enough to him. I protected you. He missed it again so I destroyed that illusion, I let him fall flat on his face. (pause) I promise that I won't work while we're at the beach, Ruth. We'll all take it off. Just us. How does that sound.

RUTH

That sounds great.

PAM

We'll go canoeing-

RUTH

I'll show you my magic show.

PAM

You're still doing the show?

RUTH  
I worked on it.

PAM  
Your father isn't coming.

RUTH  
I know.

PAM  
So why are you wasting your time-

RUTH  
Why do you keep saying that-

PAM  
You started for David-

RUTH  
I started for myself and dad gave me his notes.

PAM  
You mean, my notes?

RUTH  
Dad gave me notes, and I was practicing for him-

PAM  
And he's not coming-

RUTH  
But I did it because I wanted to. Because when you're onstage, everyone is listening- you trapped them-

PAM  
Ruth.

RUTH  
If this trip means that I have to give up my show, I'm not going.

PAM  
Ruth.

RUTH

I'm not going to give up.

PAM

Everyone gives up!

RUTH

You gave up.

PAM

Your father isn't coming back.

RUTH

I'm still a performer.

PAM

You wanted me to listen to you. I've listened to you. The vacation. Exactly how you want it. Us together.

RUTH

But you don't want me to come!

PAM

I do, but without your distractions-

RUTH

Well that's who I am- I am still going to build, practice, and as I'm still going to school and taking care of Dawn, I'm still going to be taking Wednesday off. Because I still need a break.

PAM

That's not a job. That's not a career. It's not real. This. This is real. *(PAM slides the cottage listing to RUTH)* Find one you and Dawn will like.

RUTH

Fine. Can I have a pen?

PAM gives RUTH a pen. RUTH makes it disappear.

PAM

Don't play that game. I'm smarter than you.

RUTH

That was good, right? You didn't even see it.

PAM

This is serious.

RUTH

Can I have another pen?

PAM hands RUTH the pen, she grabs it but PAM still holds on.

RUTH

Watch.

PAM

Ruth-

RUTH

I don't need you to validate what I do. I don't need dad either. And maybe, when I get big, he'll come to one of my shows. But I don't care. Because my path isn't his. Being a magician is in my blood.

PAM let's go of the pen. RUTH makes it vanish.

RUTH

Can I have another pen, please?

PAM grabs RUTH's wrist.

RUTH

They're not up that sleeve.

PAM grabs RUTH's other wrist.

RUTH

I'm better than you think I am.

PAM bangs-her hand on the table-

PAM

God-damnit, Ruth!

RUTH

You should have been open with us.

PAM

These cottages-

RUTH

I just need a pen!

PAM

You don't care what anyone else is doing-

RUTH

Just because I don't obey you, doesn't mean that I don't listen to you.

PAM

Why are you fighting me?

RUTH

I am not dad. I am not trying to emulate him. I'm not you either. I'm your daughter and I am asking for support!

PAM

This vacation is support.

RUTH

I am telling you it's not!

PAM

Ruth, I understand magic. I understand what you want to do. It still doesn't change-

RUTH

No, you don't.

PAM

I have done all the same tricks you have-

RUTH

To you a magician lies. To me, a magician gives hope. I don't care what kind dad is. I know what kind I want to be now.

PAM

I was in your same shoes.

RUTH

You gave up.

PAM

Ruth, this is not something you can sustain.

RUTH

Yes, it is.

PAM

You need other options!

RUTH

I need a suitcase.

PAM

I told you what I went through!

RUTH

If you were my mother you would be encouraging me!

PAM

I am trying to protect you!

RUTH

I'm not asking for your protection. I'm asking you to support me. I'm asking you to listen to me.

PAM

I am listening to you.

RUTH

Prove it!

PAM

Fine. Talk. What are you going to do that's different? How is your path your own? How is what you're doing ever more than a distraction?

RUTH

If you want to see what a performer is, I'll be upstairs.

RUTH snatches the tablecloth off the table.

END OF SCENE

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SCENE 02: RUTH AND DAWN'S SHARED BEDROOM

RUTH  
Are you still up?

DAWN  
I was waiting for you-

RUTH  
You look exhausted.

DAWN  
I can't sleep.

RUTH  
You didn't sleep last night, you have school tomorrow and fourteen hours until bedtime.  
You need a nap.

DAWN  
I can't do it. I can't believe dad isn't coming back I don't want to-

RUTH  
Dawn, shh.

DAWN  
I can't believe-

RUTH  
It's true.

DAWN  
Dad has to be coming back-

RUTH  
He isn't.

DAWN  
Then what will you do?

RUTH  
I'll be fine.

DAWN

What are you going to do with your show?

RUTH

Our show?

DAWN

Sister...

RUTH

We'll have rehearsal tomorrow after school.

DAWN

Tomorrow

RUTH

But that's only if you can stop shaking and get into bed. You have to sleep.

DAWN

I'm not tired.

RUTH

Excuse me?

DAWN

What?

RUTH

Am I a performer?

DAWN

Yes.

RUTH

Are you my mechanical?

DAWN

Yes.

RUTH

Then listen, mechanical, you have to do what I say. Do you understand?

Yes.

DAWN

PAM enters, without DAWN seeing her.

So lay down on your bed.

RUTH

It's too warm for the blankets-

DAWN

Did I say you could get under the covers? Lay down.

RUTH

DAWN lays down.

RUTH presents the tablecloth with a flourish.

I don't want it over my head.

DAWN

Don't worry.

RUTH

RUTH takes the tablecloth, and with a flourish, puts it over DAWN.

I'm not going to be able to sleep.

DAWN

RUTH

You will. You just have to relax. The problem is that your mind is messing with your body. You're still shaking. I want you to think of a location. Now, this is a task I learned while riding a bus to school in the morning. Kids were yelling, I have a grocery list in my head. I wanted to leave. So I figured it out. I just close my eyes, think of a location, and start to breathe. Where's your location?

DAWN

When we saw dad's show in Poland.

RUTH

Now breathe in, and think of those ratty drapes over our windows. Breathe out and remember the chipped-walls.

Breathe in, and picture the newspaper bike that would ride under our window. Breathe-out and remember us sneaking into the trade show. Breathe in and remember us getting front seats. Breathe-out and picture dad onstage. Breathe in, the applause that followed. He brought us onstage. We bowed. It was applause for us. Are you bowing? Keep breathing, keep remembering, and I will be right here in the room.

DAWN

Sister?

RUTH

I can't hear you, you're already gone.

DAWN

*(taps)*

*(silent)* I love you.

RUTH

I love you too. Stay in Poland, Dawn. Keep bowing, sister. Goodnight.

RUTH walks over to where PAM is.

END OF PLAY