

Presto!
a play
by Dana Schwartz

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Characters:

Arlene, late 40's early 50's. A real nice lady
Richard, early-mid 50's. A nebbish with big dreams
Leeza, late 30's early 40's. Fabulous. Probably has an accent
Gary, 40's or 50's. An odd one

Casting any race, identity, ability and size. Should identify as magical, as should we all.

PRESTO!

Scene One

Living Room of a home that has seen two children go from infancy to adulthood and is now an empty nest. Nice, neat, comfortable. Everything you would expect in a Living Room, plus a giant black box that has been professionally decorated with a big glittery “R”. This is the Disappearing Box, a magic trick, and it has been shoved into a corner of the room, likely with coats or laundry draped on it. The kitchen can be seen on stage as well, perhaps a peek-through kitchen hole or whatever it’s called, perhaps an open floor plan that includes a kitchen.

RICHARD, 50’s, a nebbish with big dreams, stands in front of the couch, center, practicing his sleight of hand with a deck of cards. He’s pretty good, but fumbles every now and again. Let’s call him Intermediate. Once he has one or two good passes, he starts to add his patter.

RICHARD

I like to play poker with my friends, and they LOVE to play with me because I’ve lost almost every game for the past ten years. I’m not very lucky at cards, as you can see...

He pulls two un-matching cards. Puts them back.

RICHARD (con’t)

But I was listening to a podcast recently about the power of positive thinking and it made me wonder - would it be possible to use this power while playing poker? So the very next time we played, I said to myself, think positive, think high, think... Ace!

He pulls an Ace.

RICHARD (con’t)

Yeah! Oh good that worked. Ok. Keep going. Ahem. Think positive think high think Ace. Ok, so then the deal went around again, and I said to myself, how pretty two of those would look in my hand!

He pulls two Aces.

RICHARD (con’t)

Yes! Ok, but now what do I do with the -

He puts the cards down and picks up his magic trick notebook from the coffee table, flips through it, reads his notes.

RICHARD (con't)

Right. Ok.

He continues to check his notes and work on the trick. After a moment, ARLENE, a real nice lady with medium dreams, enters. She's had quite a day. Can't wait to take off her bra and have a nice cold glass of wine.

ARLENE

Hi hon, how was your -

RICHARD

- how pretty two of those would look in my - Dang!

He has lost his rhythm and flubs the trick

ARLENE

...

RICHARD

Sigh. I don't mean to... but I'm kind of right in the middle of...

ARLENE

Oh! Sure, no problem. I'll get out of your hair.

She kisses him on the cheek and heads to the bedroom. He sighs again. Tries to get back into it.

RICHARD

I thought to myself, how pretty would TWO of those look... Two of THOSE look... two OF those look... dang.

He throws the cards down with disgust. Waits a moment.

RICHARD (con't)

DANG!

He waits. No response from Arlene.

RICHARD (con't)

You can come out here! I'm done I guess!

Arlene enters, a little more comfy.

ARLENE

Did you call me?

RICHARD

I guess I'm done rehearsing. If you wanted to come back out here.

ARLENE

Oh that's nice! How was your day?

RICHARD

Honestly, it was a little disappointing.

ARLENE

I'm sorry hon, what happened?

She breezes past him get a glass of wine from the kitchen.

RICHARD

Grab me a beer while you're in there?

ARLENE

Sure thing.

RICHARD

Yeah, I'm working on my Magic Castle audition. I'm going to open with the card trick, but I have to get the patter down.

ARLENE

Ooh, sounds exciting!

RICHARD

Well. It will be. I still can't get it right.

ARLENE

I'm sure you'll be great. What does Liza think?

RICHARD

Leeza.

ARLENE

I thought that's what I said.

RICHARD

You always do that. Anyway. Leeza thinks it's a good opener. If I can get the patter right.

Arlene swings back in with Richard's beer

ARLENE

Ooh, do you want to do it for me, I'd love to -

RICHARD

Oh no, no no that's fine. You wouldn't really...

ARLENE

Well I'll just wait for the big show then! Don't want to ruin the mystery!

RICHARD

Exactly.

ARLENE

You're so lucky you found Liza -

RICHARD

Leeza.

ARLENE

Leeza. She seems like a real good helper.

RICHARD

Mentor. Yeah. She really believes in me.

ARLENE

That's great. Is... is it hot in here?

Arlene goes to the thermostat, sees that it is at a normal temperature, and opens a window.

RICHARD

Not really.

ARLENE

I'm burning up! Whoo!

She leans against the wall, fanning herself.

RICHARD

Are you -

ARLENE

Oh you're so sweet don't worry about me, I'm fine, I'm sure I'll -

RICHARD

No I was going to ask if you were going to make dinner.

ARLENE

Ah. Right. Of course!

RICHARD

Leeza is coming over to do a run through later and I want to be sure I'm ready.

ARLENE

Tonight? I didn't realize.

RICHARD

Yeah well. The audition is in three days. So.

ARLENE

No of course. Of course! I'll get started then.

Continuing to fan herself, Arlene goes back into the kitchen and stands in front of the fridge, trying to cool off.

RICHARD

Leeza has really gone out on a limb for me. As my mentor. She didn't have to, you know.

ARLENE

She sure didn't!

RICHARD

Yeah, she has quite a reputation. So for her to put it on the line like this. For me. Well.

ARLENE

Isn't that something.

RICHARD

Pressure is on. I just really want to nail it this time.

ARLENE

Fourth time's the charm!

Pause

RICHARD

Third.

ARLENE

Hmm?

RICHARD

This is my third time. Not my fourth.

Hot flash over, Arlene starts to make dinner.
Something easy. Sandwiches.

ARLENE

No hon, it's four. The first time was nine years ago, with Ken. Then again three years later with Gary, oh he was an odd one wasn't he? >

RICHARD

He wasn't that odd -

ARLENE

Then the third stab was right after Jilly left for college with whozit... Barry? Barley? Bradley! >

RICHARD

Barley?!

ARLENE

And now lucky number four with Liza!

RICHARD

Leeza.

ARLENE

Right.

RICHARD

I guess I forgot about Gary.

ARLENE

Oh I don't blame you hon, he was an odd one.

Arlene brings him a plate

ARLENE (con't)

Ok here you go, I made you a nice sandwich, do you want some soup or -

RICHARD

A sandwich?

ARLENE

On that Hawaiian bread you like with a little extra mayo and -

RICHARD

For dinner?

ARLENE

You said you were in a hurry.

RICHARD

Are you mad at me?

ARLENE

What??

RICHARD

Did I do something?

ARLENE

Richard! I didn't mean -

RICHARD

Because you could just say -

ARLENE

You said you were in a hurry!

RICHARD

Yeah but I mean, a sandwich?

ARLENE

I'll make you something else. No problem.

RICHARD

If it's not too much trouble.

ARLENE takes the plate back to the kitchen. She looks at the nice sandwich, sighs, and rummages in the fridge.

ARLENE

There some of that chicken left over from last -

I'm not really into leftovers.

RICHARD

Pasta?

ARLENE

I guess that's okay.

RICHARD

Great! Ravioli or -

ARLENE

Thanks.

RICHARD

Great.

ARLENE

Arlene starts to make pasta. Richard does some magician's finger exercises.

So something really fun happened today at work.

ARLENE

Mmm hmm.

RICHARD

I won an award!

ARLENE

Oh yeah?

RICHARD

It was so exciting, Howard called everyone into the lounge and said that they had selected Teacher of the Year and it was me! Can you believe that?

ARLENE

It's like that time I won employee of the month at the office. Got that big gift card to Black Angus. Remember that?

RICHARD

Of course! Yeah, there's going to be a big ceremony. Black tie, dinner, you know. Doesn't that sound like fun?

ARLENE

RICHARD

Oh that reminds me, I need to get my tux cleaned. For the audition.

ARLENE

I can drop that off for you tomorrow.

RICHARD

Oh yeah that would be great Arlene, thanks. Listen, I'm going to work in our room until the food is ready. Let me know?

He leaves.

ARLENE

Sure hon.

She takes a bite of the rejected sandwich. Yum!
She takes another bite and checks the water to see if it's boiling. It's not. The front door opens and LEEZA quietly enters. She is confident, striking, magical. Definitely someone who can perform on the main stage at the Magic Castle. And maybe Stonehenge too. She probably has an accent. It might even be real. She looks around the room, sees Arlene in the kitchen and takes a deep inhale. Maybe she tastes the air. With a small nod, she fully enters the room and stands where Arlene can see her.

LEEZA

Hello Arlene.

Arlene jumps!

ARLENE

Oh gosh! You scared me!

LEEZA

Yes.

ARLENE

You must be Liza?

LEEZA

Leeza.

ARLENE

Oh darn it, I keep doing that. Hello! How did you... I thought I locked the door?

LEEZA

Yes well.

She gestures to herself, magically

LEEZA (con't)

Hello. Nice to meet you.

ARLENE

Oh you too! Finally! I've heard so much about you!

LEEZA

And I've heard very little about you.

ARLENE

Oh, that Richard!

LEEZA

Yes.

ARLENE

Let me go grab him!

ARLENE comes into the living room and LEEZA gently takes her hand.

LEEZA

In a moment. May I?

ARLENE

Uh...

LEEZA looks at her palm. Intensely.

LEEZA

I see you work with children. Who adore you. You're a teacher?

ARLENE

Yes! How did you -

LEEZA

Two grown children of your own.

ARLENE

Oh my gosh yes! The older one is -

LEEZA

I see travel in your future. Adventure. And a choice to be made.

ARLENE

Ooh.

LEEZA

And it seems you received good news today? An award I think. It appears that congratulations are in order.

ARLENE

You can see all that in my hand?!

LEEZA

No, I was listening outside the door.

ARLENE

...

LEEZA

Your water is boiling.

ARLENE looks at her for a moment, then gasps,
runs to the kitchen to throw in the pasta

ARLENE

Oh you're so good! Richard said you were a wonderful magician, how did you -

LEEZA

One likes to cultivate an air of mystery, doesn't one.

ARLENE

Oh not me! Nothing mysterious about me. What you see is what you -

Suddenly, ARLENE has another hot flash.

ARLENE (con't)

Oh gosh, it's so hot in here!

The living room window slides open, and the front
door opens and shuts a few times, as if
someone wanted a little cool air. ARLENE doesn't
notice. LEEZA does.

ARLENE

Anyway what was I saying? That's right, what you see is what you get with good old Arlene Venzina.

LEEZA

That has not always been your name.

ARLENE

Well of course I took Richard's name. But you're right. I was Arlene Cohen. Before.

LEEZA

Ah. Cohen. A mystic's name. Very nice.

ARLENE

What's your last name Liza?

LEEZA

Leeza. It's just Leeza.

ARLENE

Ooh like Cher! That's very magical!

Recovered from her hot flash, ARLENE swoops out of the kitchen and heads toward the bedroom

ARLENE

Excuse me for a quick sec hon, Richard's dinner is ready and I know he's eager to get to work!

She sees the open window and stops.

ARLENE (con't)

That's funny. That darn window must have slipped open I guess!

She closes the window as RICHARD comes in from the bedroom.

RICHARD

Hey Arlene, is my -

ARLENE turns from the window as RICHARD moves toward the kitchen. They collide in the middle. The front door slams shut on its own. LEEZA notices.

ARLENE
Oh my gosh Richard, I-

RICHARD
What are you -

LEEZA
Hello Richard.

RICHARD
Leeza! I didn't know you were - Arlene?! Why didn't you tell me she was - I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting!

LEEZA
You don't keep me.

RICHARD
That's not what I -

LEEZA
I was getting to know Arlene. She's very interesting.

RICHARD
Arlene?

ARLENE
Aw, no, you are!

LEEZA
No, you.

RICHARD
Ok that's - Um, so, dinner?

ARLENE rushes back to the kitchen.

ARLENE
The pasta is almost done. Leeza would you like -

RICHARD
You know what, I'll just have the sandwich.

ARLENE picks up the half-eaten sandwich.

ARLENE
... You said you didn't -

LEEZA
I'll bring him the sandwich.

LEEZA heads to the kitchen, winks at ARLENE, and when she turns back around, the sandwich is whole.

LEEZA

Here you go Richard. Thank your wife.

RICHARD

Thank you Arlene.

ARLENE catches LEEZA's eye silently applauds! LEEZA gives her a tiny curtsy. They smile at each other. RICHARD doesn't notice.

ARLENE

Well I guess I'll get out of your hair then, unless you need anything else?

RICHARD ignores her.

LEEZA

It was very nice meeting you Arlene. I look forward to spending time with you again.

ARLENE

Aw, thanks hon. You too!

RICHARD

Ok bye.

He looks pointedly at ARLENE until she exits to the bedroom.

RICHARD (to Leeza)

Thanks for -

ARLENE comes back in, holding up an "I'll be super quick" finger, grabs her wine glass from the kitchen and returns to the bedroom.

RICHARD

Thanks again for -

ARLENE comes back in, holding up an "I'm so sorry just one more thing" finger, grabs a snack from the kitchen and returns to the bedroom.

RICHARD

SIGH. Thank you for -

ARLENE comes back in, holding up an "I swear this is the last thing" finger, grabs the bottle of wine from the kitchen and returns to the bedroom.

A beat.

RICHARD

Sorry about that.

LEEZA

She's lovely.

RICHARD

Should I -

LEEZA

Quite lovely actually.

RICHARD

Should we get started?

LEEZA

Yes Richard. Let's.

RICHARD nervously takes a breath, shakes out his hands a little, and begins.

RICHARD

I like to play poker with my friends, and they LOVE to play with me -

LEEZA

You didn't introduce yourself.

RICHARD

Oh yeah, I'm really more concerned about getting the tricks right.

LEEZA

A true magician leaves nothing to chance.

RICHARD

I mean, I know how to introduce myself.

LEEZA

Do you.

RICHARD

Hello, I'm Richard Venzina.

LEEZA

You've already bored me.

RICHARD

Oh, uh. Good evening Ladies and -

LEEZA

Derivative.

RICHARD

Hi... uh...

LEEZA

And now I hate you.

RICHARD

...

LEEZA

Magic is about persuasion. Distraction. Illusion. Anyone can pull an ace from the middle of a deck of cards, it's simple mechanics. A true magician will make the audience BELIEVE it was magic. Even the people who doubt, who come in as a joke, prepared to scoff and boo and throw stones... well, I guess they rarely throw stones anymore, but those who are ready to point out every mirror and wire and disprove the illusion. Those are the people who are desperate to believe. And it is your job to let them.

RICHARD

... yeah!

LEEZA

If you can do that, then and only then will you be a true magician. One who is worthy of the Main Stage in the Palace of Mystery. Or the Parlor of Prestidigitation. Or the Close-Up Gallery.

RICHARD

I think I'm -

LEEZA

Or the Library Bar on weeknights.

RICHARD

- ready.

LEEZA

Then show me Richard. Show me that you are worthy of the Magic Castle, as I believe in my heart you are.

RICHARD takes a deep breath as, unseen by him, the Window opens by itself again. LEEZA notices.

End Scene One

Scene Two. Next morning. RICHARD and ARLENE are having breakfast. This is a routine they have performed a thousand times. While not super magical, there is something graceful about it, choreographed, almost like an old Buster Keaton & Fatty Arbuckle routine. They anticipate every move. As he finishes a cup of coffee, she is pouring more. As she looks up to ask for toast, he's already handing it to her. He moves his knife to get butter and she has it waiting. While they don't exactly notice or appreciate this, neither is put out by it. Almost 30 years of marriage bruh...

After a bit of this-

ARLENE

What time do you have to go in today?

RICHARD

They're all at that conference this week.

ARLENE

You didn't need to go?

RICHARD

Nah. Just for execs. I'm holding down the fort.

ARLENE

Nice and quiet!

RICHARD

Yeah. So. I'll probably head in around 11.

ARLENE

That's lucky. Give you some extra time to practice.

RICHARD

Yah.

ARLENE

Will you work with Leeza again today?

RICHARD

Lee - oh. You said it right.

ARLENE

She was so lovely. I didn't realize how lovely she was going to be!

RICHARD

She didn't like my intro.

ARLENE

What hon?

RICHARD

My intro. My introduction. She said it was... derivative.

ARLENE

Oh dear.

RICHARD

...

ARLENE

Did she have any suggestions? On how to make it...

RICHARD

... un-derivative?

ARLENE

Unique? Original? Innovative?

RICHARD

Not really.

ARLENE

Oh dear.

RICHARD

Yah.

ARLENE

Do you... can I help?

RICHARD

Oh I don't know.

ARLENE

Want to show me what you have so far?

RICHARD

I don't really have anything I guess.

ARLENE

Well what did you do for her? That was derivative?

RICHARD

Good evening Ladies and -

ARLENE

Oh dear.

RICHARD

What?!

ARLENE

No that's good hon! It's real good!

RICHARD

Forget it.

ARLENE

It's good!

RICHARD

Just... can you help me? Fix it?

ARLENE

Of course!

RICHARD

Ugh.

ARLENE

No now, you can do this. Ok, ask yourself this.

And we see ARLENE really is one of those
teachers. The ones who really make an impact.
The teacher whose name you'll remember forever.

ARLENE (con't):

Who are you? What makes you uniquely you? What are you excited to share with the person
you're about to meet? Why will their life be changed by meeting you? And what will you get
out of this new relationship. How will your life be changed?

pause

RICHARD

Oh.

ARLENE is back in wife mode

ARLENE

Ok hon, well you think about it. We can talk more tonight!

RICHARD

Hey uh... thanks.

ARLENE beams. As she smiles, the light over the table gets very bright for a moment.

ARLENE

Ooh that light is wonky. We're going to need to find a handyman, this place is falling apart! I'll see you later. Have a good day hon.

She blows him a kiss, grabs her stuff and exits.
RICHARD sits. He stands. He paces around a little.

RICHARD

Hello. Hi people in the audience. Sup.

More pacing. More thinking.

RICHARD

Greetings! Ugh. I don't know, I can't do words like she can. (beat) What makes me unique? Lifechanging? Nothing. Man, I just want to do magic. All I've ever wanted to... Ugh. Ok. Ok moron, you can do this, this is the easy part! Prepare to be astounded! No that sucks. Ugh I don't have time for this sh- ha, that's a joke. Right? I've got nothing but time. Nothing. But. Time. ... huh.

An idea.

RICHARD (con't)

Hello everyone, I'm honored that you would take the time to join me here today. We are all given a finite amount of time, and that you would choose to spend some of yours with me... I will try and be worthy. I want so badly to amaze you. To make you wonder. Gasp. Elbow the person next to you and say Holy Moses did you see that? If a single one of you is transported out of your mundane life for even a moment, then that is the greatest trick of all. The greatest trick ever performed. I can only hope to earn your time.

Beat

Oh god they're going to hate me.

RICHARD (con't)

A knock at the door

No thanks!

RICHARD

Richard?

GARY (muffled, off stage)

We don't want any!

RICHARD

Richard?

GARY (muffled, off stage)

What?!

RICHARD

RICHARD flings the door open to find GARY.
He's an odd one.

Oh. Hey Gary.

RICHARD (con't)

GARY walks past RICHARD into the room

Oh hey Richard.

GARY

Pause

Gary?

RICHARD

Oh yes. May I come in?

GARY

Um.

RICHARD

Ta da!

GARY

... Right.

RICHARD

GARY

See what I did there Richard? I entered the room before asking. The element of surprise. It's very important. In magic.

RICHARD

Yeah, great.

GARY

I'll let you have that one for free!

RICHARD

Thanks.

GARY

For old times sake. You know.

RICHARD

Yep.

GARY

Because I used to be your mentor.

RICHARD

No I got it.

GARY

And now I'm not.

RICHARD

So Gary? What's up?

GARY

Oh right. Of course. You always were good at keeping me on track!

RICHARD

Great.

GARY

Ok Richard. I'm going to level with you. I'm here to warn you.

RICHARD

Warn me?

GARY

Not that I owe you anything, you understand, because you fired me.

RICHARD

... I didn't -

GARY

Yup. Fired me. Which is understandable, it really really is. You had an expectation that wasn't met, and that's on me.

RICHARD

Gary -

GARY

Always leave them wanting more. Right? Isn't that the first rule of magic?

RICHARD

I thought it was "never let them see the wires".

GARY

Huh.

Maybe GARY writes this down.

RICHARD

I've really got to get going here, can you maybe finish "warning me" or whatever.

GARY

Oh right! See! You're so good at that!

RICHARD

Uh huh so. Warning?

GARY

This is going to sound crazy. You're going to think old Gar has gone round the bend or something. Yet it's true. Every word I'm about to tell you is the god's honest, hand on my heart, cross my eyes and hope to die truth.

RICHARD

Yes?

GARY

Richard. Whatever you do, under any circumstances, do NOT try and attempt -

LEEZA strides in.

Ta da!

LEEZA

GARY screams.

Leeza! How did you -

RICHARD

LEEZA gestures to herself magically.

Of course.

RICHARD (con't):

You.

GARY

Hello Gary.

LEEZA

Traitor.

GARY

Infidel.

LEEZA

Bitch.

GARY

I see you two have met.

RICHARD

GARY

Richard! Don't let this... woman, talk you into performing the Disappearing Box for your audition.

LEEZA

Ugh. Shut up.

GARY

It will shift the balance of power in the universe!

RICHARD

The box trick?

LEEZA
He's an idiot.

GARY
It will rend the very fabric of reality!

RICHARD
Wow, you ok?

GARY
Beware the Hag in a sparkly dress!

LEEZA
I've told you never to say Hag.

RICHARD
Ok calm down Gar. Take a breath. I'm just gonna to do some card stuff.

LEEZA
"card stuff"?

RICHARD
And like, a couple of other -

GARY
Richard! Heed my warning!

RICHARD
Ok?

GARY
RICHARD!

RICHARD
Man, can you stop yelling my -

GARY
YES! Yes I can stop. No problem. Sorry. Just got caught up in the...

RICHARD
Sure, sure.

GARY
But seriously. Heed it. Ok?

LEEZA

As usual Gary, you have no idea what you're talking about. Richard is not yet ready to attempt The Box. I am fully aware of his limitations.

RICHARD

"limitations"?

LEEZA

How dare you come here and upset everyone with your insane natterings.

GARY

"natterings"?!

LEEZA

You should go.

GARY

YOU should go.

RICHARD

Actually I need to go. So.

LEEZA

Go ahead Richard. I'll lock up.

RICHARD

Yeah, I'm not really comfortable with the two of you alone in my -

LEEZA

GO! You can't be late! Aren't you supposed to be holding down the fort?

RICHARD

How did you -

ARLENE

We'll reconvene this afternoon.

RICHARD

But you don't have a key or anything -

LEEZA gestures to herself, magically.

RICHARD (con't)

Oh right. Uh. Ok I guess. Gary, nice to... yeah. Ok. Bye.

He leaves

LEEZA immediately slaps GARY across the face. They stare at each other for a moment. She slaps him again.

Ok ow. GARY

What do you think you are doing? LEEZA

What do you think YOU are doing? GARY

They stare at each other again. LEEZA starts to slap GARY once more, but he ducks.

Ha HA! GARY

LEEZA slaps him.

Gah! GARY (con't):

Don't test me you little toad. You remember what happened last time? LEEZA

That was so unfair. Quit stealing my bits! GARY

Don't you dare speak to me about your bits. I did what was necessary. And if you were capable, you would have done the same. LEEZA

Probably. (beat) What's it like? GARY

It is more than you could never even dream. LEEZA

That's so mean. GARY

LEEZA

It's not my fault you aren't a woman. That you don't metamorphosize. That you are... stagnant. So sad, to be such a weak little man. You'll never know the glory of transformation.

GARY

Don't.

LEEZA

You asked what it was like.

GARY

I changed my mind. I don't want to know anymore. Ok tell me.

LEEZA

It's like discovering something new, yet ancient. Something shocking and innovative, yet timeless and eternal. Like jumping off a cliff but instead of plummeting, flying.

GARY

Oh.

LEEZA

Like diving into a pool of darkness and finding light.

GARY

Oh my.

LEEZA

Like -

GARY

Like sex?

LEEZA

But better.

GARY

DAMN YOU!

LEEZA

I'm already dammed Gary. And it is WORTH IT!

GARY

So, why are you wasting your time with Richard? What's your game?

LEEZA

I only want to help. You know I can't resist a good card man. He has talent.

Not really. GARY

He has promise. LEEZA

Meh. GARY

He has... LEEZA

Arlene. GARY

So you do know. LEEZA

I suspected. But I was too early. GARY

Yes Gary, as always. You come too early. LEEZA

... GARY

And now you're too late! LEEZA

We'll see madame. We'll see. I'm not going anywhere this time. GARY

Actually we both have to go, I promised Richard I'd lock up. LEEZA

How are you going to do that? GARY

A magician never reveals her secrets. LEEZA

You found the spare key? GARY

LEEZA

...

GARY

Then I will away! But hear this. I shall not be thwarted again.

GARY laughs insanely and throws a flash. When the smoke clears, he's still there.

GARY

Can you, um, can you do the ...?

LEEZA

sigh

LEEZA opens the door for him. They both leave.

End Scene Two

Scene Three - Later that day.

ARLENE is grading papers. She picks up a particularly mangey looking paper from the stack, it's covered in schmutz. She sighs, smiles, brushes a few crumbs off it, maybe flicks something nasty off a corner, smooths it out and smiles as she starts to read.

ARLENE

Grammar Calvin. We've been working on this all -

Suddenly, she laughs. A lamp turns on.

ARLENE (con't)

Cal! That's hilarious! Oh my god your poor sister!

The lamp goes out as her laugh turns to sobbing and the kitchen sink turns on.

ARLENE (con't)

Oh no! Oh kitty!

Sink turns off and toaster pops, she's furious.

ARLENE (con't)

What the hell?! How dare he!

And we're back to laughter and the lamp.

ARLENE (con't)

Well good for you Cal! You sure do know how to tell a story. Schmutz be damned.

She slaps the paper down on the table, and wipes her eyes while cycling through the last few rounds of emotion along with their effects. She takes a deep breath as everything goes back to normal.

ARLENE (con't)

What the hell is wrong with me?! Come on Cohen, get it together! You're going to be grading all night at this rate!

She grades Calvin's paper, probably a strong B, but actor's choice here, and shaking herself out, stands and stretches.

ARLENE (con't)

Come on Cohen. Ha! Whoop, ok. So. Mood swings. Check. Hot flashes. Check. Oh well. If it walks like a duck right?

A knock at the door. Wiping her eyes, ARLENE goes to it, peeks through the peek hole. Smiling, she opens the door for LEEZA

ARLENE (con't)

Oh hi there!

LEEZA

I hope I'm not bothering you.

ARLENE

Of course not, come on in. Richard isn't home yet, but -

LEEZA

I'm not here for him.

ARLENE

Oh?

LEEZA

Arlene, I feel a connection. To you. A deeper understanding.

ARLENE

Aw how sweet.

LEEZA

Do you feel it too?

ARLENE

Uh.

LEEZA

I was drawn here. A pull. A tug. Even had I wanted to, I could not stay away.

ARLENE

Oh.

The window opens and shuts

LEEZA

I could not get you out of my mind last night. I hardly slept.

ARLENE

Oh?

LEEZA

All night long, my restless body bathed in the moonlight, all I could think of was -

A knock at the door. ARLENE calls to the visitor without breaking eye contact with LEEZA

ARLENE

Go away!

Another knock.

ARLENE (con't)

No thank you!

Another knock.

ARLENE (con't)

Goodness, no one ever knocks on our door unless it's an election year! Excuse me for one quick-

ARLENE goes to the door. While Arlene's back is turned, LEEZA exits, mysteriously. ARLENE peeks through the peek hole.

ARLENE

Can I help you?

GARY (off)

Yes Arlene, I believe you can.

ARLENE

Do I know you?

GARY (off)

Don't you recognize me?

ARLENE

Should I?

GARY (off)

Well. Yeah.

ARLENE

...

GARY (off)

It's Gary. You know. Gary? Richard's favorite mentor?

ARLENE

Oh Gary! Of course, hello!

She opens the door and GARY strides in.

ARLENE (con't)

Uh.

GARY

Oh yes, apologies, forgive my manners!

He quickly scoots back outside and stares at her, pointedly.

ARLENE

... come in?

GARY

Don't mind if I do!

He re-enters.

ARLENE

It's so funny that you're here! Gary, this is -

ARLENE starts to introduce LEEZA, realizes she's gone.

ARLENE (con't)

Oh. She's gone. Huh. Anyway, Richard's not -

GARY

Hello Arlene. It's been a long time.

ARLENE

It... sure has.

GARY

I'm sure you're busy, so I'll get right to the point.

Pause

ARLENE
Hello?

GARY
Hi.

ARLENE
...

GARY
Oh right! Yes. What was I saying?

ARLENE
You were getting right to the point.

GARY
Just so. Just. So. (beat) So.

GARY pats his pockets, looking for something

ARLENE
... is this going to take a long time, or?

GARY
DAMNATION!

ARLENE
Excuse me?

GARY
Forgive me Arlene, I find myself without my lucky deck of cards, which I never... excuse me for a moment if you would? I'll return post haste!

GARY exits as LEEZA enters, unseen by each other

LEEZA
I needed to powder my... nose.

ARLENE
No problem.

LEEZA

Where were we?

ARLENE

Your restless body was bathed in the moonlight...

LEEZA

You are on the verge Arlene. I can feel it. Don't you FEEL it?

ARLENE

... maybe once in college?

The window slides open. LEEZA notices.

LEEZA

Oh Arlene. You're going to be a very interesting new friend, aren't you.

ARLENE starts to fan herself. Damn hot flashes

ARLENE

Uh huh, so - sorry, is it hot in here or -

LEEZA

Allow me to get you a cool drink. I won't be a moment.

She exits to the kitchen as GARY re-enters with cards. They don't see each other.

GARY

Found them!

ARLENE

Oh my god I forgot you were here.

GARY

Hurtful. But never mind! I shall - Oops!

GARY drops the deck of cards, bends down to get them as LEEZA enters

LEEZA

Actually. Is it too early for wine? I've a bottle of something naughty.

She swoops out as GARY stands. They still haven't seen each other.

GARY

Slippery little suckers!

He notices a painting on the wall. He admires it for a moment.

GARY

That's wonderful. I don't believe I recognize the artist.

ARLENE joins him, hot flash over.

ARLENE

Oh that was from a Paint and Pinot Party. Silly, but -

GARY

Well well well. A woman of many talents, isn't that interesting? You know, this reminds me of a story.

GARY begins to do a card trick. He's weirdly good. It's weirdly interesting. Through this next, we see GARY is actually pretty great at this. The trick being performed should be a variation on the Gambler vs Magician. The trick follows the story. GARY starts with some fancy shuffling, one handed cuts, etc.

GARY (con't)

A Master and a Forger met in a bar one night. Both the best in the world. They started to buy each other drinks and argue over whose job required more skill. Creating or copying. They went back and forth until the Forger said "Master Artists are all flash. Dazzle. You're about showing off, creating something unique. Priceless."

A fancy card manipulation here

GARY (con't)

"I make exact replicas of uniqueness - so precise, most people can't tell the difference."

Maybe a waterfall shuffle here, something technically precise and cool. LEEZA enters and is transfixed by him. Talent bruh. Kinda hot. She watches the show, still unseen by him

GARY (con't)

The Master replied that the Forger only had to replicate something that already existed, it was mimicry and not skill. She went one step further. "I'll wager this sack of gold coins that you cannot recreate something 4 times in a row. The Forger immediately held out her hand to shake, and the bet was on.

Cuts the deck three times

GARY (con't)

The Forger took a paper, and with a few strokes of her brush, re-created the Master's famous Self-Portrait, "Queen".

Shows the Queen, lays it face down on the table

GARY (con't)

The Forger took a new paper, made a few strokes again with her brush, and showed the Master a second "Queen".

Same as above, cuts three times, shows the top card is a Queen, lays it face down on the table

GARY (con't)

A third paper, a few more strokes, and the third "Queen" was done.

Same

GARY (con't)

Confident, the Forger took a final paper, made some final strokes with her brush, and smugly showed the Master the 4th picture. This one, however, was different, a lesser known portrait entitled "The Two".

Cuts three times, flips over a 2, face up.

GARY (con't)

"Too bad. You were so close," said the Master as she reached to reclaim her sack of gold. "Not so fast," said the Forger with a wry smile. "You didn't say which painting I had to replicate. I decided to forge four copies of the "The Two". If you please?"

GARY gestures to ARLENE to flip the down cards. They are all twos.

GARY (con't)

The Forger said "I don't know why you would assume I would try and recreate "The Queen". It's practically a perfect piece. That's why I always carry a copy in my pocket for luck.

GARY pulls a Queen from his pocket. ARLENE applauds.

ARLENE

Wow! That was great!! I wish you had taught Richard that one, he would have gotten into the Magic Castle for sure!

GARY

Thank you, I -

LEEZA slow claps, loudly, until it's the only sound in the room.

LEEZA

Bravo.

GARY

I hate when you slow clap.

LEEZA

You love it.

GARY

Don't tell me what I love.

ARLENE

You two know each other?

LEEZA

Alas, yes.

GARY

I taught her everything she knows.

LEEZA slaps him.

GARY (con't)

ALMOST everything.

LEEZA slaps him again.

ARLENE

Should you be slapping him like that?

LEEZA

I find it terribly therapeutic. Would you like to try?

Maybe another time. ARLENE

No problem. GARY

Well this has been super, and I don't want to be rude, but I have a huge stack of papers to grade and put online. I promised the kids I'd do it tonight so. ARLENE

They're done. LEEZA

Excuse me? ARLENE

Yes, graded and input. Ta da. LEEZA

What? How? You don't know my rubric! ARLENE

Of course I do Arlene. I knew your rubric the moment I met you. LEEZA

Oh my god. GARY

I really think you both should go now. ARLENE

See, you're upsetting the (*wiggles his eyebrows at Arlene*). GARY

Shut up. LEEZA

Everyone shut up! ARLENE

The painting spins. They all notice.

Whoa. What the heck? ARLENE (con't)

Indeed. GARY

Can you do that again? LEEZA

What are you talking about? ARLENE

Don't! Don't you dare. GARY

Spin the painting. LEEZA

... are you kidding? I didn't do that. ARLENE

Of course you didn't. That would be crazy! Time to go! GARY

Don't you gaslight her. LEEZA

He's right, that would be crazy. ARLENE

Spin the painting Arlene. LEEZA

No! It's too dangerous for you. GARY

I thought you said I didn't do it? ARLENE

Ignore him. You are in control. The window, the lights. Haven't you noticed? LEEZA

That's just... coincidence. ARLENE

Spin the painting. LEEZA

No! GARY

That's not a thing people can do! ARLENE

Spin it! LEEZA

Don't spin it Arlene! There's no going back! GARY

SHUT UP GARY! LEEZA & ARLENE

The painting spins.

Oh. ARLENE

Yes. LEEZA

Wow. ARLENE

Yes. LEEZA

Well this is terrible. GARY

ARLENE slaps him. The painting spins. ARLENE laughs as the painting spins faster.

End Scene Three

Scene Four. Next morning.
Same as all the other mornings for the past 30 years. Almost. While the routine starts the same, Keaton and Arbuckle start to look more like Siegfried and Roy. Or maybe more like Penn and Teller. There is an element of magic now. Perhaps the toast flies in from the kitchen and lands directly on Richard's plate. Perhaps the knife butters itself. Perhaps the spoon stirs the coffee. Richard doesn't notice, but Arlene sure the fuck does. She is loving it. Flexing her magical muscles. As the moment peaks, with all elements working together, Arlene glowing radiantly, Richard finally looks up and sees Arlene, just glowing there. He really sees her. And *that* is really magical. The tricky elements stop gently as Arlene lets herself be seen. They smile at each other.

Hi. RICHARD

Hi. ARLENE

You look... lovely. RICHARD

Oh. ARLENE

Yeah. Wow. RICHARD

That's so nice. Thank you. ARLENE

Is that a new... is that new hair? Or, like, make up? Something. RICHARD

Just me. ARLENE

Huh. RICHARD

ARLENE

What.

RICHARD

No I just. You're lovely.

He gives her a peck on the cheek. Looks at her.
Kisses her again, a peck on the lips. Looks at her.
She smiles. He kisses her again. Well.

ARLENE

Richard!

RICHARD

Yeah, whatever it is, it's great.

ARLENE

You're great!

RICHARD

Nah. But you sure are.

They kiss once more. The painting spins slowly
once around.

ARLENE

Richard. I need to tell you something.

RICHARD

Is it that you want to stay home with me all day?

ARLENE

Richard!

He kisses her again.

RICHARD

Is it that you want to stay in BED with me all day?

ARLENE

No! I mean... yes. But No! A strange thing happened yesterday. I don't -

He kisses her again.

ARLENE (con't):

Oh my. What has gotten into you?!

It's you! RICHARD

What?! ARLENE

God and you smell so good too. Call in sick. RICHARD

Richard! ARLENE

Get a sub. Take a day. Let's... take a day. RICHARD

You're so funny! ARLENE

I'm serious. We'll go to the Observatory. Get that soup you like. RICHARD

Oh hon I wish I could! ARLENE

You totally could. RICHARD

Any other time I would in a heartbeat. But Teacher of the Year is tomorrow and we're supposed to work on my slideshow today. ARLENE

Ah. RICHARD

Any other day. ARLENE

Of course. RICHARD

I'd really love to go to the Observatory with you. You know that right? I'd love to go anywhere with you. Or... nowhere with you. ARLENE

Yeah? RICHARD

ARLENE

Yeah.

RICHARD

Ok. Ok good. Yeah, I've got a day today too. Lots to do before the audition. Try on my tuxedo, practice my patter. Finish the intro...

ARLENE

It's going to be so good!

RICHARD

Thanks. Your thing too.

ARLENE

And you won't even have to change!

RICHARD

That's right! Two events, one tux. I'm practically 007.

ARLENE

Ooh.

RICHARD

Bond. James Bond.

ARLENE

Richard!

RICHARD

Those guys are all so smooth. They don't even need tricks, their chests are enough of a misdirection.

ARLENE

Especially that Pierce Brosnan.

RICHARD

I thought you were a Sean Connery gal?

ARLENE

I'm team Pierce for sure. I just like when you do your Sean Connery impression!

RICHARD

"Shaken. Not stirred."

Arlene laughs, maybe blushes a little.

Ooh!

ARLENE

Ha. That was terrible.

RICHARD

Ask Leeza if you should put that in your act.

ARLENE

Derivative!

RICHARD (in a Leeza voice)

You're going to be wonderful. I know it. I hope you do too.

ARLENE

Ugh.

RICHARD

So exciting! We'll have lots to celebrate!

ARLENE

We'll see.

RICHARD

We will!

ARLENE

Well. Okay. Let's not jinx anything...

RICHARD

So. Rain check? For today?

ARLENE

Sure. Of course. Hey, have a good day.

RICHARD

Ok. You too.

ARLENE

She kisses him on the cheek, turns to go.

RICHARD

Actually...

He takes her hand, pulls her into him, and kisses her deeply one more time.

ARLENE

Wow.

RICHARD

Just lovely.

ARLENE

Thank you.

RICHARD

Hey, did you want to tell me something?

ARLENE

... You know what? It'll keep. See you tonight.

RICHARD

Yeah you will!

Smiling, she grabs her things and practically dances to the door. The door opens and closes itself for her. Richard doesn't notice. He sighs, happily befuddled. He clears the breakfast things. He gets his bag of magic stuff and pulls out his notebook. Flips through it.

RICHARD

Intro. Ugh, deal with that later. Poker card trick, good. Banter, good. Levitation... ok let's try the new I.T.

He pulls out an Invisible Thread Reel (this is a magician's prop that looks like a small cylinder with a small alligator clip on the end. Does not need to be practical but they're like \$18 on Amazon or something) and examines it, pulling on the end of a thread we probably can't really see.

RICHARD (con't)

Ok Captain Whizzbang, let's see if your stupidly expensive Invisible Thread is worth it.

He clips the reel inside his working sleeve (the sleeve of the actor's dominant hand), and loops the invisible thread around his working wrist.

RICHARD (con't)

Oh that's nice. Good weight. Easy to maneuver. Great.

He puts his magician's notebook in between his hands and separates his hands, making the notebook "levitate".

RICHARD (con't)

Yeah, real good weight. (in his Sean Connery voice) Just like you Money Penny. Ha. Ok let's try the card thing.

He puts the notebook down and grabs his cards, shuffling them, cutting and then one card "levitates" on the thread.

RICHARD (con't)

Is.. this your card? Cool. Is this your card? Yeah! Oh that's good. Is THIS your – shoot.

The card falls. He reaches for it and drops the thread.

RICHARD (con't)

Gah!

He tries to grab the end of the thread with his other hand but it's tricky. Dare we say... invisible? It's like trying to grab a spider's web. Finally, he manages to find the end.

RICHARD (con't)

Come on Venzina. Focus!

He loops it around his wrist again, getting everything reset. Once he's ready, he realizes the card is still on the floor. Very carefully, keeping his hands very still, he squats straight down and slowly picks up the card. He tries to stand back up, but his knees don't like that. Grunting, he grabs the table to help himself up, and loses the thread again.

RICHARD (con't)

Crap!

He tosses the cards down, but the reel goes too and now there is a very long invisible thread tied around his wrist and down to the floor. He grabs the reel, but it has unspooled. He turns in a circle to try and wind up the thread. That was a mistake. This stuff is like cotton candy, and it's really expensive, so the more he tries to carefully save the thread, the more he gets tangled. He bends down, maybe one of the cards levitates for a second, and he tries to grab the thread but it floats away as the card flutters off. He tries to walk around the table but feels the thread suddenly on his face, starts grabbing at it. Flailing at the air. This gets bigger and bigger, like a man stuck in a huge Indiana Jones spider web now, maybe a little bit of panic sets in, he gets more and more tangled until finally, clapping both hands together, he seems like he's got it. Maybe a card levitates again. He claps it too. Now, very slowly, he moves his clasped hands right, but the thread is really wrapped around him and his whole body is stuck. He slides his hands to the left, but he's still stuck. Up maybe? Nope. He still has the card, so using his teeth, he pulls it out of his hands and just at that moment, there's a knock at the door.

RICHARD (con't)

(with mouth full of card) Of course.

He starts to take a step toward the door but that damn thread is around his ankles too and he falls to the ground with a very unmagical thud.

RICHARD (con't)

(with mouth full of card) Fuck.

The door swings open, Leeza enters, sees him

LEEZA

Ta da! Oh.

A beat.

LEEZA (con't)

Invisible thread?

RICHARD

sigh

LEEZA

It can be a bit tricky. Would you like me to...?

RICHARD

If you don't mind.

LEEZA

Not at all.

Leeza takes a look, a nod, a hmm, and, with a flourish, maybe using only one finger, strips the thread off of Richard in a single swoop, winds it invisibly around her hands, and hands it to Richard.

LEEZA (con't)

I see you sprang for the Captain Whizzbang. Excellent choice.

RICHARD

Thanks.

LEEZA

So let's be sure to rehearse the levitation tonight. Along with your introduction, obviously. And I think we will add one final trick.

RICHARD

Great. Is that... did you mention why you were here?

LEEZA

You need something big. For your finale.

RICHARD

Ok. I just... this could have been an email right?

LEEZA

Something flashy.

RICHARD

Or, like a text? You didn't need to come all the way -

LEEZA

I gather you have spoken with your wife this morning?

... of course.

RICHARD

And. How are you feeling?

LEEZA

Great?

RICHARD

About the Magic.

LEEZA

Oh! Well honestly, until I got trapped in the invisible thread, I was feeling pretty good.

RICHARD

Wonderful!

LEEZA

Yeah.

RICHARD

Good for you!

LEEZA

Thanks?

RICHARD

Most men aren't able to, you know, look past it. Historically.

LEEZA

Look past what?

RICHARD

The powers.

LEEZA

Which powers?

RICHARD

Oh I'm not saying she's a witch.

LEEZA

Who's not a witch?

RICHARD

LEEZA
Officially? None of us.

RICHARD
... What?

LEEZA
And yet, all of us I suppose. At least a little.

RICHARD
Uh.

LEEZA
I'm so proud of you Richard! Shocked. But proud.

RICHARD
Thanks.

LEEZA
She can help you.

RICHARD
Who now?

LEEZA
Arlene. Perhaps she'll agree to assist with your audition.

RICHARD
I mean. Why?

LEEZA
She's wonderful. Charming. Plus, well, you know.

RICHARD
She sure is.

LEEZA
And for the finale, you're going to need her. Because Richard? It's time for... the box.

RICHARD
The magic box.

LEEZA
It can be quite a spectacular illusion you know. In the right hands. And I think Arlene has shown she has the exact right hands.

Yeah.

RICHARD

So we are agreed?

LEEZA

Sure I guess. I'll see if she's into it.

RICHARD

I'm sure she will be. For whatever reason, your happiness is her priority.

LEEZA

For whatever reason?

RICHARD

You know what I mean.

LEEZA

... do I?

RICHARD

You'll ask her today then.

LEEZA

Great. It could be cool to have an assistant!

RICHARD

Oh that's funny. She's YOUR assistant. That's delightful! Honestly, I was worried about how you would take all this. I'm so pleasantly surprised. This is going to be a fantastic audition. I promised you the Magic Castle, Richard. And now, with Arlene's help, the Castle is just the beginning.

LEEZA

End Scene Four

Scene Five. That evening. Richard is practicing, shuffling cards, fancy cuts, etc. Richard and Arlene are in mid conversation, happy and comfortable.

ARLENE

They even found stuff from my Student Teacher year! It was so funny.

RICHARD

Were there any pictures of Tyrone?

ARLENE

Richard! Don't tease me about Tyrone!

RICHARD

Your little stalker.

ARLENE

It was a teen aged crush. Poor thing.

RICHARD

Poor thing?! That kid was obsessed with you!

ARLENE

He wrote me one note!

RICHARD

You should put that in the slide show.

ARLENE

Richard!

RICHARD

And wait, oh my god, didn't it rhyme?! "You think that I am just a boy. But I could give you so much joy..."

ARLENE

Ooh are you jealous?

RICHARD

Obviously! How can I compete with a pubescent poet?

ARLENE

I hear he's a lawyer now.

RICHARD

Of course he is.

ARLENE

Stop! It was sweet. He got over me very quickly too, as soon as his acne cleared up.

RICHARD

Well, thank god for Clearasil.

He drops the cards.

RICHARD (con't)

Arg.

ARLENE

I'm going to grab some wine. Do you want a beer or anything? Do you have time before Leeza?

Arlene heads to the kitchen. Richard tosses the cards on the table.

RICHARD

A beer would be great, thank you babe. Yeah, so she was here earlier actually.

ARLENE

Should I be the jealous one now?

RICHARD

Oh please! No, she said she came by to make sure I was "okay with the magic".

A beat

ARLENE

She said that?

The light starts to get brighter, Arlene points at it, shaking her head "no". The light goes back to normal.

RICHARD

Yeah and she said I needed a flashier finale. Maybe the box? Oh and this is funny. She thought maybe you would want to help.

ARLENE

Really? What... what else did she say?

RICHARD

I don't know, something about you having just the right hands?

In the kitchen, the wine bottle floats up. Arlene concentrating hard, gets it to come back down.

ARLENE

Aw hon I'd love to help you!

RICHARD

Yeah?

ARLENE

Yes of course!

RICHARD

Great! You in a spangly little costume, magician's assistant. Might be fun.

ARLENE

Yep. So. Here's something else fun.

As Richard starts to put the deck of cards back together, Arlene points at the deck - a card levitates for a moment, and returns to the deck.

RICHARD

Whoa! Did you see that?

ARLENE

Is that your card?

RICHARD

That was weird. I didn't even -

More cards levitate from the deck

RICHARD

WHOA!

ARLENE

Super fun, right?

More cards levitate

RICHARD

What the hell is happening?

Or maybe something... flashier?
ARLENE

All the cards levitate, maybe form some kind of
show-offy design

Arlene?
RICHARD

Arlene returns from the kitchen with their drinks.
She nods at the cards, which fall back down to the
table. She hands Richard his beer.

Ta da?
ARLENE

Huh?
RICHARD

I really can help you. This is what I was going to say. Something happened.
ARLENE

... Ohhhh. I'm having a nervous breakdown. That makes sense.
RICHARD

Richard -
ARLENE

Are you trying to embarrass me?
RICHARD

Don't be silly!
ARLENE

Silly? SILLY?! It's either a breakdown or my wife has secretly been practicing magic so she
can upstage me at my big audition! Which one's worse?
RICHARD

What?!
ARLENE

When did you learn that card trick??
RICHARD

ARLENE

Hon. This isn't a trick.

RICHARD

You must think I'm an idiot.

ARLENE

I know it's weird. But something is happening to me. As you know, I've been going through some pretty major changes lately.

RICHARD

What are you talking about?!

ARLENE

Come on. You've seen it. The hot flashes. Mood swings. My knees are fat for some reason.

RICHARD

... what?

ARLENE

You live with me, sleep with me, share a bathroom with me, you must have noticed!

RICHARD

Uh.

ARLENE

Do you know how old I am?!

Window opens and shuts. Richard notices.

RICHARD

Did I miss a birthday or -

ARLENE

Do you know what happens to women at my age?!

Picture spins. Richard notices.

RICHARD

I mean.

ARLENE

Richard! You didn't notice anything did you?! I thought you were just trying to be nice!

RICHARD

I'm sorry! Your knees look normal to me!

Thanks.

ARLENE

I'm so confused.

RICHARD

Some women get brittle nails. Thinning hair. So. I guess it could be worse.

ARLENE

Arlene. Are we talking about what I think we're talking about?

RICHARD

What do you think we're talking about?

ARLENE

The, um. The... you know. When you... uh.

RICHARD

You can't even say the word.

ARLENE

I didn't think I was allowed to.

RICHARD

beat

So. Any thoughts?

ARLENE

Yeah!

RICHARD

And?

ARLENE

Well. Change is scary.

RICHARD

It can be.

ARLENE

And I don't want you to be scared.

RICHARD

Aw hon! That's so -

ARLENE

I still find you attractive.

RICHARD

Hmm?

ARLENE

Super attractive!

RICHARD

Um...

ARLENE

I am worried about sex.

RICHARD

Excuse me?

ARLENE

You know, that you won't want to. Like, how is this going to change my -

RICHARD

Something flies in from the kitchen, a wet sponge perhaps, and smacks him in the face.

Ow!

RICHARD (con't)

The thing you're worried about is getting enough sex?

ARLENE

Not just that!

RICHARD

What else.

ARLENE

Cooking.

RICHARD

Cooking and sex.

ARLENE

RICHARD

And no, how you're feeling of course. Physically. And. The other one.

ARLENE

Emotionally?

RICHARD

Uh huh!

ARLENE

Really?

RICHARD

Yes!

ARLENE

You want to know how I feel emotionally? Ok. I don't feel ready. I don't feel old enough. I still feel like the young teacher the boys had crushes on. And the mom that the kids' friends thought was kinda cool. The one the Dads liked to flirt with at the fundraisers.

RICHARD

Wait, who flirted with you at the fundraisers?

ARLENE

I still feel vital! Curious! I want to try things and do things and experience things! And not have people say "oh how darling, that old lady is learning how to surf." I want them to say "That's cool, a normal surfer chick." I just want to be a normal surfer Richard. Not some crone.

RICHARD

I think you're a normal surfer!

ARLENE

You didn't even notice!

RICHARD

Because you ARE vital! That's all I see!

ARLENE

But that's not the whole truth. And we should be able to talk about the truth. And the changes. And... transformation. It shouldn't be taboo. It should be part of our everyday conversation!

RICHARD

Every day?!

ARLENE

Well no not EVERY day. But we shouldn't be afraid of it. We're a team. We're in this together.

RICHARD

Whatever you want Arlene.

ARLENE

Ok good. That's what I want.

RICHARD

Great.

Pause

RICHARD (con't)

Did you want to talk about it more now, or?

She laughs

RICHARD (con't)

I honestly had no idea that levitating cards was one of the side effects.

ARLENE

Me neither!

RICHARD

Is it... usual?

ARLENE

I don't think so?

RICHARD

Can you do other stuff?

ARLENE

I don't really know yet.

RICHARD

Can.. do you think... maybe I'll get it too?

ARLENE

Oh hon. I don't know.

RICHARD

Probably not I bet.

ARLENE

Yeah.

A beat

RICHARD

It's all I've ever wanted you know. To be a Magician. I thought this time I really had a shot.

ARLENE

You've got it in the bag!

RICHARD

Well. You've got it in the bag. I mean, yeah, I'll probably get the gig. If you help. And that's great. It's still... great. But. I'm the idiot who always kind of secretly hoped that it could REALLY be real. And for you, it really is real.

ARLENE

I guess so.

RICHARD

What does it feel like.

ARLENE

... pop rocks.

RICHARD

Seriously??

ARLENE

Like a mouth full of pop rocks. It starts quiet, you can feel it coming, and then Pop! And maybe it's a little overwhelming. Maybe you cut your tongue a tiny bit every once in a while. But it's mostly it's great. And then sometimes it's like, a pop rock got stuck in the back of your jaw or something, and suddenly you get this one random pop. Out of the blue. Surprising. Sweet. But surprising. Those can be a little... jarring. Does that make sense.

RICHARD

Of course it does. You're good with words.

ARLENE

Aw, thanks hon.

Beat

ARLENE

I want to share all of this with you Richard. But I'll understand if you don't want me to. It's okay to feel... ways. All sorts of ways. I don't want you to feel bad about being upset. Or confused. Or worried about sex and cooking. It's all okay.

RICHARD

Yeah?

ARLENE

Yeah.

A beat

RICHARD

Should we tell the kids?

ARLENE

Maybe not yet.

A beat

ARLENE (con't)

So okay. Let's work on your act. Ooh, I can wear my spangly assistant's outfit to Teacher of Year after.

RICHARD

Perfect!

ARLENE

Just what the world needs. A Hag in a spangly assistant's outfit.

RICHARD

With totally normal knees.

ARLENE

You're so sweet, I -

RICHARD

Oh god. Wait.

ARLENE

What.

RICHARD

I'm suddenly a tiny bit worried about Gary.

End Scene Five

Scene Six. The next morning. The Disappearing Box is front and center, and has been cleared of laundry. It is glorious. After a moment, Arlene enters with a thrift store shopping bag.

ARLENE

Richard? I'm back! I'm so glad I subbed out today! You were right, Out of the Closet was a great idea, they have so many sequins! I can't wait to show you what I found!

RICHARD (off)

Great! I'm trying on the tux. It's a little... narrower. Than I remember.

ARLENE

I'm sure it's perfect! I'll go try mine on and we'll have a fashion show!

RICHARD (off)

I don't know about this...

Arlene exits to the bathroom as Richard enters from the bedroom. He's wearing tux pants and ruffle shirt. They are indeed a wee bit narrow.

RICHARD

Where'd you go?

ARLENE (off)

Fashion show!

RICHARD

Oh ok!

He exits as Arlene enters in a sparkly outfit. It's hilarious and perfect. She's fantastic.

ARLENE

Where'd you go!?

RICHARD (off)

I went to find you!

ARLENE

This house is 1600 square feet, how have we lost each other?!

RICHARD (off)

Ok don't move. I'm coming to you!

Richard enters. They look at each other and start to giggle.

Wow. You look like...
RICHARD

A disco ball?
ARLENE

I was going to say Aunt Lois.
RICHARD

That's exactly what I was going for!
ARLENE

I don't suppose you have any magic to fix these pants do you?
RICHARD

Um... yes!
ARLENE

She takes a hair tie out of her bag, makes him a pants extender, and buttons the pants.

Ta da!
ARLENE (con't)

Wow!
RICHARD

I decided to do that one old school.
ARLENE

No school like the old school!
RICHARD

You look so handsome.
ARLENE

You look so... sparkly.
RICHARD

Too much?
ARLENE

RICHARD

You're beautiful. I feel like we're going to the prom or something.

He pulls her in and starts slow dancing with her

ARLENE

I would have loved to go to prom with you.

RICHARD

Oh yeah, you would have had a great time. I was very sophisticated.

ARLENE

I'm sure.

The door flings open.

RICHARD

Was that you?

ARLENE

Nope.

Leeza enters, also in sparkles.

LEEZA

Oh good! You're both here. And you look... perfect.

RICHARD

She's perfect. I'm okay.

LEEZA

True.

ARLENE

You look nice too Leeza, I love your outfit!

LEEZA

I do enjoy a bit of shimmer.

RICHARD

Very Magic Castle!

LEEZA

We haven't much time. I want to make sure we get there early.

ARLENE

The audition isn't until this afternoon!

LEEZA

You know the old saying. Better to live ahead of schedule than to die with your clock in your hand.

RICHARD

Huh?

LEEZA

Maybe it doesn't translate correctly. Richard, can you excuse us for a moment? I need a spot of... girl talk.

RICHARD

Sure.

LEEZA

Perhaps you can deal with your tie.

RICHARD

I forgot about the tie!

He leaves

ARLENE

What's wrong hon. You seem... keyed up.

LEEZA

You are so intuitive Arlene. Able to sense how people are feeling. You always been like this, yes?

ARLENE

I think so.

LEEZA

I believe that's part of it. Those inherent gifts lead to greater ones as we progress.

ARLENE

That's nice.

LEEZA

Every time, I learn something new.

ARLENE

How many... like me? Lots probably?

LEEZA

Not as many as you might think. My mother was the first I ever knew. Such a chaotic woman. So fragile. I was disappointed, that she would be rewarded in this way. I assumed I would get the powers as well, when it was my time. I was going to do it right. I waited patiently. Remained single.

ARLENE

Single.

LEEZA

Yes, it is far more common that single women manifest the gift when it is their time to transform. Maybe because they aren't constantly focused on another's needs.

ARLENE

Ah.

LEEZA

I learned parlor magic, better to blend in. But my path was to be different. So I searched for others. The Gift can be tricky. Cruel. It can make some women... unhinged. Dangerous. Others live happy, quiet lives, but never reach their full potential for power. They have a misplaced desire to help, knowing they won't get credit for it, yet doing it anyway. Weak. And then there are the ones who refuse to see it. They are the most common and the most pathetic.

ARLENE

What do you mean?

LEEZA

Because she has been told her whole life that what she knows to be true, is impossible, she pretends it's not happening. She is convinced she could never be special enough to have power. This beautiful force shrivels up and dies. The light winks out.

ARLENE

That's so sad.

LEEZA

It is criminal. Yet it happens all the time. You have to watch out for those who would drain you.

ARLENE

Drain me?!

LEEZA

Drain you of your very essence. The people who recognize your power and want it for themselves.

ARLENE

Like who?

LEEZA

Like Gary. Like men. (beat) Like Richard.

ARLENE

No, Richard is... Richard is...

LEEZA

You are so much stronger than him. You always have been of course, but now it's palpable. How long will he be able to go on like this? Knowing you have all the power and he can't even make it as a street magician without your help.

ARLENE

Richard isn't like that.

LEEZA

They're all like that. He's just a man. And you have outgrown him. Tonight, when you perform the disappearing box trick, you can actually disappear. Vanish. Then together, we can wander the world and use your power to its fullest.

ARLENE

What?!

LEEZA

You are on the verge of unlimited power and I only need an occasional sip. Think of the things we can do Arlene, unfettered by societal rules. A society that doesn't want us anyway. We have been devalued long enough don't you think?

Beat

ARLENE

Where is Richard?

LEEZA

He's no threat to you now.

ARLENE

(calling to him) Richard?

LEEZA

He doesn't see you. Doesn't KNOW you. Don't you want to be known?

ARLENE

I am known! (calling to him) Richard?

LEEZA
He's busy.

ARLENE
What did you do to him?

LEEZA
Nothing. He's fine. Probably.

ARLENE
Richard!

LEEZA
Why do you want him? Is he value added? Does he enhance you in any fundamental way?

ARLENE
Of course he does!

LEEZA
Let me touch your knee.

ARLENE
What?

LEEZA
Your knee. That's how I can share your power.

ARLENE
Through my knee? That's ridiculous.

LEEZA
Why do you think they're so fat?

ARLENE
Richard said my knees were normal!

LEEZA
Richard will say anything to keep you!

ARLENE
Stay away from my knees!

Arlene makes a flicking motion and Leeza flings backward. Enraged, Leeza picks herself up and rushes toward Arlene. Arlene fends her off.

Through this next they fight magically. No actual contact. Lots of flinging.

LEEZA

Just one taste! I'm running low! Don't be selfish!

ARLENE

Stay away! Richard?? Can you hear me hon?

LEEZA

He's no good for you. Listen to me, I know!

Gary bursts in.

GARY

STOP!

LEEZA

You!

Gary makes a magical gesture and the two women are stuck. Can't move.

GARY

Stop this immediately! There is rarely a winner in a magical fight.

LEEZA

Get out Gary! She's mine!

ARLENE

I'm not yours! But yes Gary, get out.

GARY

Richard! Can you join us please?

Richard enters, he seems a little stoned.

RICHARD

Gary! How've you been.

ARLENE

Richard! You're ok!

RICHARD

Hey babe! Did you miss me? I missed you so much.

LEEZA

Richard. Gary is here to harm Arlene. You must get rid of him at once!

RICHARD

Bro you touch her and I will mess you up!

GARY

Richard. Do not be sucked in by this... succubus.

ARLENE

Is he talking about me?

LEEZA

I think he means me.

ARLENE

That makes more sense.

GARY

She will disarm you with her sparkle and confuse you with her misdirection!

RICHARD

You look so pretty and shiny...

Richard dips Arlene a little. Flirty. She's still frozen though, so isn't as bendy.

RICHARD (con't)

You used to be more bendy...

LEEZA

Stop dipping her!

RICHARD

Ooh you know what sounds good? Dip.

ARLENE

Richard honey, focus please. We're in real trouble here.

GARY

I sensed it. The danger. I tried to warn you, remember? Beware the Hag in a Sparkly Dress.

ARLENE

Me?

LEEZA

Me again I think.

GARY

Richard! You clearly ignored me!

RICHARD

Because I think you're a little loony.

ARLENE

I told you, he was an odd one.

RICHARD

A loony little turd.

GARY

That's so rude, I'm trying to - forget it. They're always so stoned after that spell. Arlene, listen to me. I released Richard. I will release you too. I'm here to help.

LEEZA

Liar! He wants every ounce of what makes you special! Don't let him win!

GARY

Don't listen to her. She needs what you have. Centuries of hunting for power have made her petty and jealous. I'm going to release you, and the choice will be yours. You've got great instincts. Go with your gut.

Gary flicks at Arlene and she is free. She throws her arms around Richard.

RICHARD

Was someone making dip?

ARLENE

Ok shh honey. Let me think.

RICHARD

Sure babe. Shh. I'm all kinds of shhh.

LEEZA

Sun or moon Arlene. Feminine or masculine. Pick a side!

ARLENE

See, I don't think I do have to choose. Can't it be about balance? The unique beauty of the moments when Darkness and Light exist together? Dusk. Dawn. There's a reason they call it Magic Hour, right? Leeza hon, I'm sorry you didn't get the power you thought was coming to you. But maybe Mick and Keith are right. You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you get what you need. (beat) I want you both to take some of my power. Enough so that you don't have to hunt anymore. But you have to promise to stick together for a while, work on that balance. And the four of us can go about our lives. How does that sound.

LEEZA

Stuck with him? For eternity?

GARY

You know you love it.

LEEZA

Don't tell me what I love.

GARY

Fine. I'm in. She is too.

Gary flicks at Leeza and she is released.
Arlene goes to them, they each touch her knee for a moment.

ARLENE

All set?

GARY

I feel great.

LEEZA

I feel... better.

GARY

Arlene?

ARLENE

Still have the pop rocks!

RICHARD

Ooh you know what sounds good? Pop rocks.

ARLENE

How much longer is he going to be like this?

LEEZA

It should wear off before the audition. If not, at least he'll be loose. Make sure he runs through his intro one more time please. I do have a reputation to uphold.

GARY

Thank you Arlene. We'll meet again I'm sure.

LEEZA

Yes, we'll absolutely meet again. As for you. What now?

GARY

Something exotic perhaps? Bora Bora is lovely this time of year.

LEEZA

I was thinking more like Vegas. See if we can get a gig at one of the casino clubs.

GARY

That sounds interesting. It's been a while since I've trod the boards.

LEEZA

We can open with that Forger and Master trick. I'll be the master.

GARY

Stop stealing my bits!

LEEZA

Don't talk about your bits!

Gary throws a flash and this time,
they both disappear

ARLENE

Wow.

RICHARD

They seemed nice.

ARLENE

Richard, I -

RICHARD

Can I say something. I feel super talky right now and I want to talk something to you. Here's the thing. I've been... greedy. I take up so much room. Men are taught to take up space. Man-spread. Work out. Get bigger. Gains. More money, more strength, more air. We're taught to use more air. You know on a plane when they say "secure your own mask before you help someone with theirs"? We do that automatically. Take care of our own mask first. I don't think women do that. I think women have to learn that. Or I guess, unlearn not to? What I'm trying to say is, I want you to take care of your own mask. I want to give you all the air. You deserve all the air Arlene. We can skip the audition and just focus on Teacher of the Year. Whatever you want.

ARLENE

We have room for all of it. The Castle and Teacher of the Year and magic and air. Besides, we don't want to waste these fabulous outfits on just one party, do we? Now then, I believe before we were so rudely interrupted, you were showing me a little prom move.

They start to dance again. As the light fade

RICHARD

And then we can have dip?

ARLENE

And then we can have dip.

He dips her. Lights out.

End Play