

The Misfortune Teller

A One-Act Play

by
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SCENE ONE.

Lights up on a small bedroom in an apartment. The sun shines through the one window in the room. Nathan, 26, folds clothes from a laundry basket, packing some of them into a suitcase on the bed as Martha, 24, puts on makeup in front of a mirror hanging on the wall. Amateur abstract paintings hang on the walls, slightly invigorating an otherwise drab, plain, eggshell-white room.

Nathan takes out a Grateful Dead T-shirt and holds it up.

NATHAN

Will your mom think I'm being presumptuous if I wear a Grateful Dead shirt? Or does she fit the hippie stereotype and she's actually a Deadhead?

MARTHA

Nathan, I've already told you - my mom's not a hippie, she's an *anarchist*. It's different.

NATHAN

Aren't we kinda splitting hairs here?

MARTHA

Just bring the Dead shirt; you only wear it to sleep anyway.

NATHAN

True.

Nathan folds the Dead shirt up and packs it in the suitcase. He takes a Beatles shirt out of the laundry basket and holds it up.

NATHAN

Aw, I forgot I still even had this shirt. I kinda wanna bring it, but it'd be kind of obnoxious to bring two band shirts, right?

MARTHA

I don't know why you always overthink your shirt game when we go anywhere. We're only gonna be there for a day.

Martha squints, looking at the shirt in the mirror.

MARTHA

Ooh, don't bring that one though.

NATHAN

Why not?

MARTHA

My mom hates the Beatles.

NATHAN

That's preposterous.

MARTHA

(shrugging)

People are allowed to not like the Beatles.

NATHAN

But *hate* them?

MARTHA

She doesn't like what they stand for. She says they're posers, and that they preach a rebellious message but ultimately sold out to the almighty dollar. In her words.

NATHAN

Does your mom not believe in record labels or something?

MARTHA

It's more an anti-capitalist thing. Anyone who says they're not about it but doesn't stay independent is a hypocrite to her.

NATHAN

I mean, I guess. Pretty sure the Dead had a record label too.

MARTHA

Yeah, but they're the Dead, they get a pass.

NATHAN

I will give you that. I won't bring the Beatles shirt.

MARTHA

Did I tell you that my mom predicted John Lennon getting shot?

NATHAN

Well, you told me she predicted he would die, which is not the same thing.

MARTHA

She got more than that right. She got some of the specifics - that it would be in New York City, that Yoko would be by his side, that it would be by gunshot...

NATHAN

Who could've possibly predicted that someone would get shot in New York City in the 80s?

Martha chuckles.

MARTHA

I'm serious! My mom's the real deal, Nathan.

NATHAN

I know, I know.

MARTHA

How is this?

Martha shows her made-up face to Nathan.

NATHAN

You look great, honey.

MARTHA

Aw, thanks.

NATHAN

So, do hippies generally stay unemployed for that reason or do they all start homegrown businesses like your mom?

Martha begins putting away her makeup things.

MARTHA

Anarchist. And I don't know. She's just my mom. That doesn't make me an expert in hippie culture.

NATHAN

Speaking of employment, have you told her about our plan yet?

MARTHA

Atlanta? No, not yet.

NATHAN

Well, I hope she takes it well. I don't need job insecurity, crippling debt, *and* your mom to be mad at me.

MARTHA

She's honestly pretty laid-back, Nathan. I don't think you have anything to worry about.

Martha walks over to Nathan, who is still standing next to the bed folding clothes, now piling them on the bed to be put away. Martha stands behind him, wrapping her arms around his waist as he folds.

NATHAN

I know. But this is a good opportunity for me, I think. And it would just be really nice if it worked out. And, you know, her approval is kind of the last big hurdle toward making the decision for real, which I've been wanting to do for a while. So... I dunno, I want it to go well. I mean, it's meeting your mom. I don't want to come off like some asshole who's trying to steal her daughter away.

Martha kisses Nathan's shoulder blade and smiles.

MARTHA

Mmm, I do like that you care enough about making a good impression for my mom. It's sweet.

NATHAN

It's not even so much that really. I'd just like to avoid as many tirades as possible, you know?

Nathan chuckles. Martha doesn't.

MARTHA

Right.

A quick knock at the bedroom door. In pokes the head of Ben, 29, a plump, bearded man wearing thick black-rimmed glasses, dark jeans, flip flops, and a brown and gray sweater over a mustard yellow T-shirt.

NATHAN

Hello, Ben.

MARTHA

Hi, Ben!

BEN

I am the glue keeping this household together.

NATHAN

Why's that?

Ben opens the door more and rolls in a small vacuum cleaner.

BEN

Guess who finally bought us... a mothafuckin' vacuum.

Nathan and Martha clap.

NATHAN

Thank you so much, Ben.

MARTHA

Where would we be without you?

BEN

That's what's up. You guys packing? Oh, is the mom trip today?

NATHAN

Yeah, we're heading out pretty soon actually.

BEN

Is it the big one? You guys tellin' her about the move?

NATHAN

That's the plan.

BEN

(to Martha)

You cised?

MARTHA

(with reservation)

Yeah!

BEN

Nice. I'm excited, guys! We're doin' it! Ready to go bananas in Atlanta, baby.

Ben shimmies as he walks out of the room, pulling the vacuum behind him.

Nathan chuckles as he folds the last article of clothing and puts it on the bed. He then looks into the packed suitcase.

NATHAN

Okay, so all the laundry is folded. I have our toiletries packed, and then Tylenol, animal crackers, phone charger--

MARTHA

Oh, wait!

Martha runs over to the other side of the room and grabs a magenta pump bottle of a lotion-like substance off an end table next to the bed.

MARTHA

Here, put this in the toiletry bag.

NATHAN

What is it?

MARTHA

It's the best elbow lotion ever. Claire recommended it to me because I had such ashy elbows. It's got all these natural ingredients and works, like, ten times better than a regular lotion, I'd say. I've just been bringing it everywhere lately.

Nathan looks at the information written on the back of the bottle.

NATHAN

This has literally all the same shit that's in a regular lotion, it looks like. My lotion has pretty much all this same stuff. Most of the extra stuff does nothing.

MARTHA

Well, yeah, it's the same general *stuff* as normal lotion, but like, scientifically, specifically designed for the elbows.

NATHAN

(chuckling)

Martha, I'm pretty sure there's no such thing as "elbow lotion". Full-body lotions work the same everywhere. Because, you know... they're full-body lotions. I mean, it's the companies who make them that make it seem like you need a different one for every appendage.

Nathan notices Martha looking slightly embarrassed.

NATHAN

I-I'm not trying to be mean. I just don't want you getting scammed, that's all.

MARTHA

Well... fine. The point is I had ashy elbows before, I put that shit on my elbows, and now they aren't ashy anymore.

NATHAN

Okay, fair enough.

MARTHA

And it was only 17 dollars.

NATHAN

Okay, that's fucking robbery--

MARTHA

Put it in the bag, Nathan.

NATHAN

Fine, fine.

Nathan puts the lotion in the toiletry bag. Lights down.

SCENE TWO.

Lights up on a small, quaint porch. Nathan and Martha sit on white wicker chairs with cups of tea. Donna, 56, sits on a chair across from them, wearing flowing earth-toned clothes and holding her own cup of tea.

DONNA

So, Bradley suggested this tea shop on Cherrywood. He said that they had the best, most professionally brewed tea in the area. But when we walked in -- all of the energies in that room were just *not* what they needed to be. I could barely keep myself still. He was asking the man behind the counter all these detailed questions about all the different flavors, and I was just left standing there, shifting and fidgeting around, completely unable to stay comfortable. And I told Bradley, how are we supposed to make a decision we can be at peace with when I can barely stand in this shop without feeling like I'm being assaulted? It was all just very strange, very strange, and so we had to get out. And good thing we did, too -- I'm sure you'll both agree this tea is excellent. From the old man on Fulton. Trustworthy, tranquil, and positively balanced. That's where you want to buy your drinks.

Donna and Martha both nod as they sip their tea in unison.

NATHAN

So, um... was that one of your predictions?

DONNA

What's that?

NATHAN

Knowing that the tea would be bad there. Was that one of your predictions?

Donna looks confused at Nathan, then at Martha, who's smiling.

NATHAN

It's a joke. I was joking. You know, you're a psychic, so--

Donna begins laughing.

DONNA

Oh! Ha ha! Yes, I guess I am, aren't I? Oh, you're very funny, Nathan. But yes, I suppose we could count that among my successful predictions. To be fair, I never actually *drank* the tea from Cherrywood. Maybe it's good. Who knows? But the feeling was there, and that's something.

NATHAN

Right...

MARTHA

I told Nathan about John Lennon, Mom.

DONNA

Well, at least someone knows the truth. You know, that man was not all he pretended to be--

MARTHA

No, Mom, about the prediction. Of his death.

DONNA

Oh, yes, yes! Yes, wow, what a thing to see, right? Devastating. Didn't support his music, but sensing a human life soon to be lost?

Donna shudders slightly.

NATHAN

That sounds pretty crazy.

DONNA

Oh, yes, unimaginable.

Martha nudges Nathan and gives him a look, pointing her head toward Donna. He shrugs and nods.

MARTHA

So, uh, Mom... we were going to let you know about something going on with us.

DONNA

Oh, Martha, as soon as you said you were coming to visit, I knew you had news. I had a vision of it, in fact.

MARTHA

Really? That's amazing! Then you know that I'm--?

Martha and Donna speak at the same time.

DONNA

Pregnant!

MARTHA

Thinking of moving-- wait, what?

DONNA

What?

NATHAN

What?

MARTHA

What?

DONNA

Nothing.

MARTHA

Oh. Well, Nathan is thinking of moving to Atlanta pretty soon. Ben - you know, the roommate I told you about - he has a contact at a local news station there and, you know, it's a really good opportunity. And I asked if he wanted me to go with him and he said yes, so... what do you think?

DONNA

Atlanta! Well, that's a nice city, isn't it? Is your field big in Atlanta right now, Nathan?

NATHAN

Um, I guess so.

DONNA

Well, how do *you* feel about it, Martha?

MARTHA

I dunno. Fine, I guess. Just a little nervous. Moving to a new state is... a big thing, you know? Have you, uh... you know, gotten anything about it?

DONNA

What do you mean, hon?

MARTHA

You know, any... visions?

DONNA

About Atlanta? Hmm... I can't say I have. I don't think so. Big city visions, let's see... I saw that murder-suicide at that bar in Pittsburgh the other week. That's the most recent one. But nothing about Atlanta I can remember.

NATHAN

The one last week with the guy from around here?

DONNA

Yes.

NATHAN

Wow. You knew that was gonna happen?

DONNA

Yes! Well, I didn't see a murder-suicide specifically. But I felt something very strange about Pittsburgh - I couldn't quite explain it, and then that happens the next day. Shame.

NATHAN

Yeah. Donna, could I ask you a question?

DONNA

Sure!

NATHAN

I just want to understand about the Pittsburgh thing - you didn't see a murder-suicide specifically? What *did* you see?

DONNA

You mean, did I see an event in Pittsburgh in my vision?

NATHAN

Well, yeah, but what did you see, you know? If not a murder-suicide. An armed robbery? Aggravated assault?

MARTHA

Nathan--

Donna laughs lightly.

DONNA

No, it's fine, Martha, I don't mind explaining. It's a bit different than you might be thinking, Nathan. I don't "see" things in that sense, in terms of events or images or specific actions or what have you. Those are human constructs, right? The things I see, I feel aren't manifestations of normal linear events in time, but rather energies. Feelings, emotions, souls, spirits, things of that nature. And visions aren't me seeing those things or witnessing them literally. They *inform* me.

NATHAN

Hm. That's really interesting.

DONNA

Oh, yes, the supernatural is fascinating - and *vast*! It's a wonderful world to be in tune with. The revelations never end.

Nathan turns to Martha and smiles.

NATHAN

That's pretty rad.

MARTHA

Yeah, see, I told you she's good. Nathan's not really about the whole supernatural thing, Mom, so he's still learning about it.

DONNA

Oh, well, if you'd like a full-fledged education on the subject, you've come to the right place. And you're dating the right girl.

NATHAN

Well, we can talk about it as much as you want. It's interesting and you make good tea.

MARTHA

Wait, Mom, why don't you give Nathan a reading? He's never had one before.

DONNA

Oh, yes! That's a great idea! I'd love to see what's going on with that soul of yours.

NATHAN

(chuckling nervously)

No, uh, my soul is fine for now, thanks.

DONNA

Oh, come on, honey. It only takes a few minutes.

MARTHA

It's fine, babe. Just do it and see if it does anything for you.

NATHAN

All right, all right.

MARTHA

Great!

DONNA

Ooh! I'll go get my hat!

Donna leads Martha and Nathan through the front door on her porch. Lights down on the porch.

Lights up on the second half of the house set, this half making up the dimly lit fortune telling room inside. In the center is a circular table draped with a tie-dye tablecloth. Surrounding the table are various mystic artifacts, model skulls, lava lamps, and colorful psychedelic tapestries, drapes, and rugs. Shelves stocked with tiny glass vials of herbs and scents line the back wall.

Martha leads Nathan by the hand through the beaded doorway into the telling room.

MARTHA

So, you ready?

NATHAN

I guess so. I'm not weird for thinking this room is kinda bonkers, right?

MARTHA

Well, yeah, it's cheesed up for the mystique. You know, people will leave if you don't have the look.

NATHAN

Does the average person gravitate toward skulls?

MARTHA

Don't act like you don't think skeletons are awesome.

NATHAN

They objectively are, but that's not the point. Does she need all this stuff to see the future? Doesn't she just use the crystal ball?

MARTHA

Ugh, you generalize so much. It's not a *ball*...

NATHAN

Why can't we just drink tea?

MARTHA

Why can't you just try something new? Why do you hate fun?

NATHAN

I just am seeing and hearing so many things I don't understand so fast, I can't even think about them all.

MARTHA

I dunno, some of this stuff can be hard to explain to someone who isn't in touch with the supernatural.

NATHAN

How convenient.

Donna suddenly emerges wearing a comically large, colorful hat with an all-seeing eye on the front.

DONNA

All righty! Let's do some soul searching, shall we?

NATHAN

So, uh, how far do your predicting powers go? I'd like to leave some of my life for a surprise if possible.

DONNA

Ha ha, Nathan, you slay me. What fortune of yours is revealed to me is completely outside of my control. Not my decision. The procession of fate as transcribed by the cosmos will dictate what happens.

NATHAN

Okay.

DONNA

Just have a seat right there, dear.

Donna and Nathan sit across from each other at the center table while Martha sits on a chair off to the side to watch.

DONNA

Now, we don't have to get too intense. We can start with just a basic fortune reading.

NATHAN

Whatever works for you.

DONNA

Lovely. Hands, please.

Nathan gingerly stretches his hands out on the table, with his palms upward. Donna puts the palms of her hands on top of Nathan's.

DONNA

Okay...

Donna closes her eyes and breathes in deeply, then exhales.

DONNA

I see... I see a male figure in your family ... A father perhaps... With blackness in his chest. Pain. ...But who is it?

MARTHA

Oh! Didn't your uncle have a lung disease, babe?

NATHAN

Uh... yeah--

DONNA

Shh, shh, okay, okay, let me see... I can see... that there was great insecurity in your early life... as you were growing up... in your adolescence...

NATHAN

I guess I'd say that's true.

DONNA

Yes, yes, a deep insecurity in your adolescence... about your... height.

Nathan says nothing. Donna opens one eye to look at him.

NATHAN

Um, no, not really. I was five-foot-ten by the end of my sophomore year. Pretty average. I never really had a height thing in school.

DONNA

Oh, well, then never mind.

Donna immediately closes her eyes again.

DONNA

Now... I... I'm not seeing anything, but I am... feeling something. It's hard to identify... but it's powerful... It doesn't... it doesn't feel very good.

Martha leans forward in her chair.

MARTHA

What is it? Is it bad?

NATHAN

Oh, boy.

DONNA

I-I don't know, it's... it has to do with... the two of you. I'm feeling that... something in your lives will... *significantly* change the course of your relationship... And-- I'm sorry, it... it doesn't seem good...

Nathan pulls his hands away quickly.

NATHAN

Okay, I think that's enough reading for now--

Martha stands up and puts her hand to her forehead.

MARTHA

Shit...

Donna leans back in her chair, letting out a sigh.

DONNA

Well, what'd you think, Nathan? Did I convince you? First tango with the supernatural - how'd it go for you? Although, in my defense, we didn't perform a *full* reading. We didn't even peer into my crystal.

Nathan stands up from the chair and puts his hand on Martha's back.

NATHAN

I-I don't think we need to peer into anything. We tried it, and you know, maybe it's just not for me.

DONNA

Oh, of course, that's all right. But what about it? Any of it feel different? You think there's any validity you may not have thought of before? Ah! I'm sorry for asking so many questions. I just get excited when someone's new to it.

NATHAN

I mean... I can say honestly that... there's a non-zero chance that you're right, at least.

MARTHA

What do you mean?

NATHAN

I mean, sure. *Could* something in our lives significantly change the course of the relationship soon? Sure. I mean, it's definitely *possible*.

DONNA

(excitedly)

Ooh! So I have convinced you?

NATHAN

Well, I didn't say that exactly. I said there's a chance you're right. That doesn't necessarily --

MARTHA

Okay, I think we're both missing a crucial point here.

NATHAN

What's that?

MARTHA

I mean... this all seems pretty obvious to me.

NATHAN

What do you mean?

MARTHA

I mean, it makes sense she'd be feeling that way. What's a thing coming up in our lives that has the potential to change the course of the relationship?

NATHAN

What, Atlanta?

MARTHA

Yes!

NATHAN

I mean, sure, like I said, it's possible, I guess.

Martha grows a bit quieter.

MARTHA

Well, don't you think that... complicates our decision a little?

NATHAN

What do you mean?

MARTHA

I mean, should we... re-think this?

NATHAN

Do you not want to go with me?

MARTHA

It's not you, but... I dunno. This makes me feel kinda... weird. About it. Uneasy.

Nathan looks at Donna, who has been sitting in her chair with her head titled downward, then at Martha. He sighs.

NATHAN

Well, then... I don't really know what to do.

An uncomfortable pause.

Donna stands up from her chair and walks lightly over to Martha, placing a hand gently on her shoulder.

DONNA

(softly)

Sweetie... I think you two will need to sort this out on your own. Think these things through again, and see how you both feel. That's probably the best course of action at this point.

Martha nods. Nathan sighs again.

NATHAN

I guess it is.

Blackout.

SCENE THREE.

Lights up on Nathan and Martha's bedroom. Nathan sits on the bed eating a cup of noodles. Ben sits next to him in pajamas, tapping away on his laptop. The sound of the shower running off stage can be faintly heard.

NATHAN

Oh, we also met the guy who grows her produce and also her weed.

BEN

Are you serious?

NATHAN

Yeah, he came in right before dinner with a bunch of cabbage.

BEN

You mean broccoli?

NATHAN

What?

BEN

Wait, so has Martha ever smoked weed with her mom? Because if so, no offense, but I never pegged her as such a badass.

NATHAN

I don't know, maybe.

BEN

That shit about Atlanta is wack though. Is her mom *trying* to fuck it up?

NATHAN

I don't think she'd do that. I mean, I don't think any of the shit's real, but I think her mom genuinely believes she can predict the future... or something like that. Not a lot of what she said made much sense.

BEN

That's a big fuckin' shock. I just hope Martha doesn't take it so seriously for much longer. It's gonna be a pain in the ass to find another person to split the rent with in Atlanta, and if we lose the place, neither of us are getting jobs there.

NATHAN

Hey, you know, I feel you. But I wouldn't count on her calming down on it. Ever since the reading, she's been weird about it. I kinda got the impression she was anxious before, but now...

BEN

That's weird to me.

NATHAN

What is?

BEN

That Martha would even believe in that shit.

NATHAN

Oh. I mean, she's always asked me for my friends' signs when I introduce them to her. And she talks about positive and negative energies from time to time, especially when she's painting. But I dunno, it never really bothered me or mattered.

BEN

Yeah, but Martha's smart. Like, how does she not see it's bullshit?

NATHAN

I don't know.

BEN

You think I should talk to her about it? Spread some knowledge? Recommend some literature?

NATHAN

Why?

BEN

Fuck you mean why? I *am* a scholar of psychology.

NATHAN

You *minored* in psychology. You took, like, fifteen credits.

BEN

Hey, you don't need a doctorate to know that psychics and mediums and shit are mostly scam artists.

The shower turns off.

NATHAN

Like I said, I dunno if it's a scam. Or at least, maybe not an intentional one. I think her mom genuinely believes she has connections with spirits or whatever. I mean, isn't that a thing in psychology? Being able to delude yourself into thinking certain things are meaningful and then you start actually seeing shit?

BEN

Sure. But I hope you realize you're saying that your girlfriend's mother is either a liar or insane. So you know, it's kind of a sticky wicket.

Nathan tosses his empty cup of noodles into a trash can, then sighs.

NATHAN

It is a sticky wicket. For both of us.

BEN

I hate when my wickets are sticky.

Martha enters from the bathroom door with a towel around her head, wearing short shorts and a white T-shirt.

MARTHA

How's the resume going, Ben?

BEN

Pretty bitchin'. I found this nice clip-art of an elephant, so I feel like that could be some bonus points.

MARTHA

Very nice.

BEN

But now I gotta find some references, and the recommended number is three, but I only have two former bosses, so I've been e-mailing every authority figure who has ever liked me.

MARTHA

Damn, I hope it goes well.

Ben closes his laptop and gets off the bed.

BEN

Welp, we will see how it goes tomorrow because I am tired as fuck. So I'm gonna go watch *The Golden Girls* till I pass out.

MARTHA

Right on.

BEN

Night, Ben.

Ben exits.

Martha takes the towel off her head. Nathan is now sitting upright in bed, looking at his phone. Martha sits next to him in bed and sighs as she settles in.

MARTHA

Finally alone. I feel like I haven't gotten to just talk to you alone in, like, 40 hours.

NATHAN

Yeah.

MARTHA

I hope my mom wasn't too much. Was she?

NATHAN

No, no, she was fine.

Pause. Martha looks at Nathan.

Nathan looks over briefly, then turns off his phone.

MARTHA

Well, what'd you think of her? We haven't really talked about it, and I'm interested.

NATHAN

She seems like a nice lady.

MARTHA

I know she can be a little intense sometimes. I hope it wasn't too overwhelming.

NATHAN

Yeah, but all moms get like that, you know? There are some times where it might be better to just take some things with a grain of salt.

MARTHA

Yeah, maybe.

Pause.

MARTHA

Well... I know it's not exactly your thing, but I just wanted to say again that... my mom *is* legit. You know, a lot of people - a lot of assholes just completely fake having any sort of connection to the paranormal. Just gyp people out of their money. But my mom has always wanted to help people. And she's always been able to do what she does.

Nathan sighs.

MARTHA

What?

NATHAN

What?

MARTHA

You sighed.

NATHAN

Yeah.

MARTHA

What is it?

NATHAN

I... I don't know how to put it, babe. It doesn't even matter.

MARTHA

Do you like my mom?

NATHAN

Yeah, I said she's a nice lady.

MARTHA

Do you think she's not legit?

NATHAN

What?

MARTHA

You sighed like you didn't believe me when I said she's legit.

NATHAN

I wasn't--

MARTHA

Do you think she's bullshit?

NATHAN

I don't-- I-- what do you want me to say to this?

MARTHA

I want you to just tell me the answer.

NATHAN

The answer? ...Okay. All right, if you want. Yes. The short answer is yes. Okay?

MARTHA

What's the long answer?

NATHAN

Martha, we don't have to do this now, it's late.

MARTHA

No, we started it, so let's just do it. What's the long answer?

NATHAN

The long answer is... that... I don't think she's *particularly* bullshit.

MARTHA

What?

NATHAN

She's no more or less bullshit than anyone else who does what she does. Okay? There.

Nathan stands up out of the bed. Martha follows.

MARTHA

Nathan, my mom is *not* bullshit. You can't tell me what she can and can't see.

NATHAN

But *she* can?

MARTHA

Yes! She's my mom, Nathan, I trust her. And I *know* she's not bullshitting.

NATHAN

I'm not saying it's bullshit that your mom sees or feels thing and interprets them. I'm sure she really does. But I'm personally not even really convinced that the "paranormal" exists in the first place, so it's all sort of a tough sell--

MARTHA

Ugh, you do this all the time. You're so closed-minded. You never consider any other point of view.

NATHAN

Martha, you know me better than that. I didn't just decide one day that I think psychics and astrology are horseshit. I came to that conclusion after thinking about how little sense they make, and how little they're backed up by actual science.

MARTHA

Ohh, okay. Which scholarly articles did you carefully read to bring yourself to this fully formed opinion? I want an annotated bibliography in MLA format.

NATHAN

Martha, you're being ridiculous.

MARTHA

You're the one calling my mom a bullshitter! Any close family members of *yours* you'd like me to insult?

NATHAN

Oh, yeah, sure. As soon as one of *my* family members throws all our plans off the rails because she can supposedly tell exactly what's gonna happen in your life by looking at a fucking plastic rock, then you'll have my permission to insult whoever--

MARTHA

Oh my God, you're still doing it! This is all you do. Just because it throws off *your* fucking plans--

NATHAN

What do you mean "my" plans? I thought we were doing this *with* each other. I thought we made this decision together.

MARTHA

And we can change it together just as well.

NATHAN

Martha, I'm sorry that I'm not willing to upend something I've wanted to do for months because your mom had some feelings while touching my hands.

MARTHA

And what are you gonna do if the stuff she said turns out to be true? You still gonna be singing this song if it turns out she's right?

NATHAN

Oh, like she was about my height problem? What makes you think she'll be right?

MARTHA

Because I'm scared! Okay? I was already scared. I've been scared. I mean, I have no idea what I'm doing. And at first, that's what made me excited about moving. I mean, all I do here is work random jobs, pay off bills and debt, and take a painting class on Wednesdays. So I just barely meet the criteria for being a living person. And I was ready to throw that up in the air because it's all just shit I do. It's not *for* anything or *because* of anything. I just do it because I have to. And because - well, what else am I gonna do here? But moving also means a lot changing and you meeting new people and me meeting new people, and... I don't know. It's just scary to not know what's going to happen. I was still ready to go with you, *for* you, but I like our life here. I always know where it's going, and it always ends somewhere nice because you're there. The idea of risking that... I was already on the fence. And then, this thing with my mom just clinched it for me.

Nathan places a gentle hand on Martha's shoulder.

NATHAN

Martha, we don't know for sure what's gonna happen. That's true. But it's okay. I mean, what your mom said was pretty vague. It could mean anything.

Martha moves Nathan's hand.

MARTHA

I believe her, Nathan. I've seen her be right. I've seen her help people. And you can't tell me I haven't. And she's my mom; I trust her advice on this stuff. And that much has nothing to do with her being psychic.

NATHAN

So... what then? Stay here? Continue living this comfy life that you apparently hate?

MARTHA

Well, I was hoping--

NATHAN

Martha, you're very important to me, and I love you, and being with you is great. But this is an opportunity for me. I don't know when I'll get another one. I mean, you should know, I'm not exactly livin' large here either. Even if it's just a job writing the ticker tape no one reads, it'll at least feel like I'm working toward something instead of just being here, you know?

MARTHA

I understand but... I'd rather be here with you doing nothing than take this big risk.

Nathan sighs.

NATHAN

I don't know what to tell you, Martha. Ben's already looking for jobs. The deposit on the apartment is due in a few weeks if we want it. I have to go. And whether or not you want to go is up to you.

Pause.

MARTHA

I guess I'm staying here then.

NATHAN

Well, what does that mean in terms of... us?

Martha looks at the ground.

MARTHA

I don't know.

Blackout.

SCENE FOUR.

Lights up on Donna's front porch. Martha is sitting on a white wicker chair, one empty one next to her, wistfully stirring the sugar in her cup of tea. Donna comes out to the porch with a plate of organic cheese and crackers. She sets them down on the table and sits across from Martha.

DONNA

Here we go. A little light snacking should help lighten your spirits.

MARTHA

Thanks, Mom.

Pause.

DONNA

How have you been getting along, sweetie? I know the last few weeks have been hard.

MARTHA

Pretty good, actually. I've started doing guided meditations while I paint, and it's really clearing my head and improving my work, I think. And then, the new job is nice. Just waitressing, but the people are nice. Accepting.

DONNA

Well that's good. A clear mind is important.

Pause.

MARTHA

Hey, Mom... can I ask you a kind of weird question?

DONNA

My favorite kind of question, lovey.

MARTHA

What do you actually *do* when you're reading someone? Like, how do you know things about them? Is it actual pictures in your head? Like, what actually *happens*?

DONNA

Ha ha, this seems like much more than one question, but... I suppose I never have actually explained it in full.

MARTHA

Yeah, I'm curious.

DONNA

Well, it's actually fairly simple. When you touch someone, and you focus all your mind on them, and on what they feel like - not just on a tactile level, but *who* they feel like to you from their presence - things start to come into your mind about that person. At first they might be faint, but with clarification from the participant, you can figure them out. Usually, they can fill in the dots and everything falls into place. Some symbols also repeat themselves, carry recurring meanings, and so on and so forth.

Donna eats a cracker. Martha sighs.

DONNA

What, dear?

MARTHA

What?

DONNA

You sighed.

MARTHA

Oh. I just-- it's weird. I believe you, and that makes sense to me. But I don't know why.

DONNA

It's not all that complicated, honey. It's simple. It works because it feels like it works, which is all something really needs to do.

MARTHA

But what if you get it wrong?

DONNA

What about it? We're all only human, and I'm certainly no exception. It's not up to me to make sense of the things I see for people, just to tell them exactly what I felt, what I saw. My guess is just as good as anyone else's. See, the best thing about the paranormal is that the interpretation is completely up to the individual. It's obviously not bound by the typical notions of logic and nature. So if you want an explanation and can't get one from the physical world, the paranormal offers some.

MARTHA

But because of that, we can never know if we're right for sure. And it's all just guesses. I dunno, that sounds... not satisfying.

DONNA

We live our whole lives on guesses, sweetie. And besides, what's really more satisfying - inventing an explanation or convincing yourself there isn't one?

MARTHA

I'm not sure.

Pause.

MARTHA

Mom? I have one more question.

DONNA

Sure, dear.

MARTHA

Do you think... do you think the things psychics feel unconsciously can affect what they see in their visions?

DONNA

What a good question! I don't see why not. It works that way for dreams.

MARTHA

Do you... think that's a bad thing?

DONNA

Why would it be? It's my unconscious. Not like I choose to feel these things. Sometimes you can feel when something isn't right, and at that point the rest is up to you. And I'm a mom. Protecting you has always been a part of me.

Donna sips some tea in silence. Martha stares off.

MARTHA

I hope Nathan is doing okay.

DONNA

How do you think he's doing, Martha?

MARTHA

Probably well, actually. He's a hard worker, and he's got references. He's probably happy. Sometimes I get these things - I wouldn't call them visions - but I have these things in my head of Nathan in Atlanta, working the camera in a newsroom. I'm never there with him, but... I can feel that he's happy and proud of what he's doing. I don't know if it's real or if it means anything, but... it makes me feel better.

Donna smiles and holds up a cracker.

DONNA

Mmm. Cracker?

Martha smiles back and eats the cracker. Lights fade down.

SCENE FIVE.

Lights up on an even smaller bedroom in a different apartment. The walls here are a different shade of white, and are completely bare. Boxes in various stages of unpacking litter the room, making for little space. Nathan is emptying out a box of various household items onto the bed.

Ben enters.

BEN

Hey, I'm home. I see you're still living amongst the cubes.

NATHAN

That is the case, yes.

BEN

Do you still wanna go to lunch with me and those guys from work? We're about to hit that pizza place we saw.

Nathan begins unloading a toiletry bag.

NATHAN

Uh... nah, I got a lot of stuff to unpack right now, man. Maybe later this week. I haven't had a lot of time because of the interviews.

BEN

Oh yeah, how have they been going?

NATHAN

Okay, I think. Some told me they'd call me back, some didn't, you know. Only one place offered me a job on the spot.

BEN

Doing what?

NATHAN

My choice - gopher or ticker tape.

BEN

Woof. Tough break, scamp.

NATHAN

(dryly)

Thank you, Ben.

BEN

No, really, man, I get it. These are the trials we endure living in this late-stage capitalist society of ours.

NATHAN

Please don't start this now.

BEN

Word. Oh, hey, by the way, I showed that girl Monica your Instagram and - don't be alarmed - she said she thinks you're cute. So, at first, I was pumped because it could be a potential thing, but--

NATHAN

I'm, uh... I'm good for now, Ben.

BEN

That's the thing. Guess what she does for a living.

NATHAN

I swear to God, if it's another stripper--

BEN

Nope - a psychic! Isn't that hilarious?

NATHAN

I would've preferred stripper.

BEN

So yeah, definite no. Which sucks because she's great. Apart from being nuts.

NATHAN

Well, I dunno about *that*...

BEN

Or a scam artist.

NATHAN

Hey, man, you know me, but that old lady didn't get everything entirely wrong.

BEN

Ha, yeah okay. Just her luck, I'm sure.

Ben looks at his watch.

BEN

Oop, pizza time. Peace.

Ben exits.

Nathan goes back to unpacking the toiletry bag.

NATHAN

Just her luck.

Nathan reaches into the toiletry bag and pulls out the magenta pump bottle. He pumps a little into his hand and rubs it in on his elbows. He then continues to unpack his boxes. The lights fade out.

THE END.