

NOT A MERMAID
A Ten-Minute Magically Real Play
by Robin Caroline

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Cast of Characters:

MOM: (35-45) enjoys all things sensual—the sun or the water touching her skin, being loved

DAD: (35-45) is a cerebral introvert, very much in love with his wife

DAUGHTER: (teenager or college student) has yet to find herself

Place

A living room

Time

Present

SETTING: The play takes place in the living room of an apartment or house. There should be a table where the daughter sits to do her work. Mom sits on a chair or couch. Dad sits on another comfortable chair.

AT RISE: DAUGHTER sits at the table working on schoolwork looking frustrated.

(Enter MOM who moves—while dialogue ensues—to the couch where a warm spotlight is waiting for her. She sits as if sunning herself in the sun through the window. She basks in its warmth.)

MOM

You look frustrated.

DAUGHTER

I am.

MOM

Why?

DAUGHTER

Group project.

MOM

Oh.

(At this point, MOM should be seated. MOM sits erect with her legs curled under her to the side.)

DAUGHTER

It is so frustrating. I know I'm right, but they won't ever listen. (pause) You are such a cat, warming yourself in the sun.

MOM

Not at all. I'm a mermaid.

DAUGHTER

A mermaid, really? Is that couch your rock?

MOM

Exactly. You have to take advantage of the sun when it's unobstructed.

DAUGHTER

Tomorrow, I'll be able to sunbathe. Not today.

MOM

It may not be sunny tomorrow. It's sunny today. Now.

DAUGHTER

Well, let me look on my phone, and see what it says.

(DAUGHTER looks at phone.)

MOM

Is there an app to help you live in the moment?

DAUGHTER

(still looking at phone) I wish.

MOM

You do make choices, you know.

DAUGHTER

(reading off of phone) Partly cloudy, substantially cooler than today.

MOM

Hmmmm. Choices.

DAUGHTER

(talking to self) Do I have time to be a mermaid today?

MOM

(looks at daughter, indignant) You don't choose to be a mermaid. You either are one or you're not.

DAUGHTER

(defensive) Who made you the expert on mermaids?

MOM

It takes one to know one.

DAUGHTER

(repeats mockingly but jokingly) "It takes one to know one."

MOM

No, I'm serious. It takes a mermaid to know a mermaid, and you are not a mermaid.

DAUGHTER

Who made you the mermaid judge?

MOM

Don't be offended, sweetheart. I would love it if you were a mermaid, but you're not. You're something else. There's nothing wrong with that.

DAUGHTER

If I'm not a mermaid, what am I?

MOM

I don't know. You have to figure it out for yourself.

DAUGHTER

But I'm not a mermaid.

MOM

Definitely not.

DAUGHTER

(thinks about it) Can I be a cat?

MOM

It's not something you choose. It's something you realize. You know it deep in your bones, in your soul.

DAUGHTER

Okay, you're talking crazy. I was playing along, but now you sound like you really believe what you're saying.

MOM

I do believe what I'm saying.

DAUGHTER

You're a mermaid.

MOM

(smiles broadly, with great sensuality) I am a mermaid.

DAUGHTER

Okay, that was creepy. Is Dad a merman?

MOM

Oh, God, no.

DAUGHTER

Does he know you're a mermaid?

MOM

Absolutely.

(DAD walks in with a newspaper under arm. Sees MOM sunning herself, walks over to her, and caresses her arm and gives her a kiss.)

DAD

How is my goddess of the deep?

MOM

Happy to be alive.

DAD

I can see.

DAUGHTER

So you know that Mom thinks she's a mermaid?

DAD

She told you, did she?

DAUGHTER

Yes. And she says you're not a merman.

DAD

Oh, definitely not. You have to watch her around mermen. They sense each other.

DAUGHTER

What? (laughingly) Excuse me?

DAD

Mermaids and mermen sense each other. I stick close when there's a merman in the room.

DAUGHTER

Or what could happen?

DAD

It's a little awkward talking to you about this, but merpeople are very sensual beings.

DAUGHTER

So mermen are men Mom is attracted to?

DAD

No. I'm not a merman, and Mom is attracted to me. We can intermarry. It's more interesting that way. You wouldn't want to marry someone exactly like yourself. That would be boring.

DAUGHTER

(pause) So what are you?

DAD

I am a unicorn.

(DAUGHTER erupts in laughter. MOM jolts upright and gives DAUGHTER a look-to-kill.)

MOM

He just told you his inner essence and you laugh at him? Apologize to your father.

DAUGHTER

(looks from one to the other wondering if this is for real) Sorry, Dad.

DAD

It's okay. Since we've never spoken about this with you before, I imagine it must seem a little surreal.

DAUGHTER

Just a little.

(DAD settles in to read his newspaper. MOM is sunning herself. DAUGHTER is left dumbstruck looking at the two of them.)

DAUGHTER (cont'd)

(to Dad) When did you realize you were a unicorn?

DAD

When I gave up trying to be a Pegasus.

DAUGHTER

(starts to laugh and then stifles it and is serious) You wanted to be a Pegasus?

DAD

To get to fly?! (imagines it in his mind) But once I stopped trying to be something I wasn't, I discovered how remarkable it is to be me.

DAUGHTER
A unicorn.

DAD
A unicorn.

DAUGHTER
Married to a mermaid.

DAD
I am the luckiest man in the world.

DAUGHTER
Because---

DAD
The solitary unicorn is loved by the most sensuous of beings. It is a gift from the gods that I don't deserve.

DAUGHTER
Ewwww--

MOM
Unicorns don't open up to just anyone. They are very selective. And your father shares with me not only his body but his incredible mind. I could swim in the profundity of his thoughts for the rest of my life and never see it all. He is my ocean.

(MOM looks at DAD lovingly who lowers newspaper and blows her a kiss)

DAUGHTER
Ewww--

DAD
(to MOM) Why did you decide to tell her?

MOM
It was time.

DAD
You're really coming to an age when you should be discovering who you are.

DAUGHTER
Seriously?

DAD

Sure. It's different for everybody, but-- Some people never—

MOM

--A lot of people. Most people.

DAD

--never figure it out, and it's a shame. Inhabiting your skin fully is such a blessing.

DAUGHTER

Do you know other people's "inner essences?"

DAD

Yes, but you never tell. There's a code.

MOM

It would be a betrayal of trust.

DAUGHTER

(pause) Okay, so I'm choosing to play along. What are my choices?

MOM AND DAD

It's not a choice.

DAD

It's a reality that you discover.

MOM

It can be an animal, a mythical being, the spirit of a famous person, the sky's the limit.

DAD

(like it's an inside joke) I like how you put that.

DAUGHTER

What?

MOM and DAD

Nothing.

DAUGHTER

There's something you're not saying.

(MOM and DAD exchange looks.)

DAUGHTER (cont'd)

What?

MOM

A hunch.

DAD

(reprimanding his wife) But we're not saying.

DAUGHTER

How do you figure it out?

MOM

It's like an epiphany.

DAD

And you know it, with all your being, that it's true.

DAUGHTER

But you have no control over epiphanies. Can I do research?

DAD

Sure, look inward. Ask yourself, "Who am I? What am I really? Why am I here?"

MOM

You probably knew when you were little, but you've forgotten.

DAUGHTER

You're sure I'm not a mermaid.

MOM

Positive, sweetheart. Mermaids love to be touched. You've wriggled out of our arms since you were little. You hate being confined.

DAUGHTER

I do hate being confined. Is that a clue?

MOM

Could be.

DAD

Maybe.

DAUGHTER

You know, I thought you two were nuts, but I actually like thinking about this.

DAD

And when you've figured it out, you'll be even happier.

DAUGHTER

Why?

DAD

Knowing who you are and who you are not is freeing. Think about it.

DAUGHTER

I guess—

DAD

Chasing other people's dreams won't satisfy you.

DAUGHTER

(pensive) Everybody tells you that you need x, y, or z to be happy, but that might be what satisfies them, not me.

MOM AND DAD

Exactly!

(An alarm goes off on DAUGHTER's phone)

MOM

What's that?

DAUGHTER

An alarm. I have to go.

DAD

Where?

DAUGHTER

I'm meeting Sammy at the museum, and we're racing there.

MOM

You're racing?

(DAUGHTER gets up to leave.)

DAUGHTER

Well, I found a shortcut, but Sam thinks it will take me longer.

DAD

Did you bet?

DAUGHTER

Never with my own money.

DAD

Smart girl.

(DAUGHTER gives kisses to MOM.)

MOM

Bye, Sweetheart.

(DAUGHTER gives kiss to DAD.)

DAD

Be safe!

DAUGHTER

I will.

(DAUGHTER exits. When the door is shut or DAUGHTER has walked off stage. MOM gets up to make sure that she's gone. MOM turns to DAD and they both erupt in laughter. MOM does a happy dance of some kind.)

MOM

I am so right.

DAD

Maybe, but you've got to stop hinting.

MOM

What?! Your parents didn't hint with you?

DAD

They knew I never would have listened.

MOM

Ooh, that's true. She might rebel against the idea because it came from me.

DAD

Exactly.

MOM

My parents did, I think, to keep me safe.

DAD

Did it work?

MOM

No.

(MOM gets up and sits on DAD's lap.)

MOM (cont'd)

You're so smart.

DAD

If you're right, she should be fun to watch.

MOM

She's going to have some great adventures.

DAD

If she figures it out.

MOM

She will.

(Sings the Rovers) *There was green alligators and long-necked geese
Some humpty backed camels and some chimpanzees
Some cats and rats and elephants, but sure as you're born
The loveliest of all was the unicorn*

(Blackout)