

THE WONDER

A Play by Maggie Lou Rader

SYNOPSIS

The Wonder is inspired by the first documented case of spiritual possession in America. Mary Roff's unearthly illness turns her family and the town of Watseka, Illinois, upside down, that is, until Lurancy Vennum follows in her footsteps. The Wonder is a journey of hope, loss, undying familial love, and healing beyond the bounds of this world. Also, it's a ghost story.

CHARACTERS

Ann Roff- Mary's mother. Loves fiercely even if she lives quietly... sometimes.

Mary Roff- A young woman with a stunning heart. Wise, patient, loving, perhaps a bit timid.

Asa Roff- Mary's father in possession of as much hope as goodness. Both are a lot.

Lurancy "Rancy" Vennum- A young woman who is what adults would call "a handful." Smart, impatient, fourteen. *Preferably, the Vennom family is played by BIPOC. They were written with this in mind.

Lurinda Vennum- Lurancy's mother. A good, if not a bit gullible woman and mother, who grows exhausted in mind, heart, and spirit. *Preferably, the Vennom family is played by BIPOC. They were written with this in mind.

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SCENE 2

LURINDA

Rancy, is the table set? Rancy?

(LURINDA enters, looking for her daughter. Sees the plates and silverware still on the table, untouched from when she put it there.)

LURINDA

Rancy? Raaancy?

(LURINDA goes to the outside door.)

LURINDA

LURANCY VENNUM, GET IN HERE RIGHT NOW IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU!

(RANCY, comes inside... eventually.)

LURINDA

Set this table, Rancy. I'm not in the mood.

RANCY

Yes, Mother.

LURINDA

(exhausted to have this conversation again) Doon't call me / that.

RANCY

You are my mother, aren't / you?

LURINDA

Could we not be so formal, / please?

RANCY

Oh I'm sorry, Maaa. Let me set the table, Maaa. Can I do anything else / for you, Maaaaaaa?

LURINDA

Rancy, after the night we had, / I just-

RANCY

The night *we* had?

LURINDA

I just want to have a nice, civil, meal, with you, in peace. Is that so much to ask? Just one meal?

RANCY

Sure. Let's eat. Civilly. Peacefully. *Mother.*

LURINDA

I survived two cross county moves, widowhood, and going back to work, but who, who, who could ever have prepared me to mother this child?

RANCY

I'm not a child; I'm fourteen.

LURINDA

And you're good at it.

(LURINDA and RANCY attempt a truce and work on setting the table together.)

RANCY

... Last night wasn't pleasant for me either, you know.

LURINDA

Alright.

RANCY

I was scared.

LURINDA

So you said.

RANCY

I didn't make it up.

LURINDA

Let's not talk about it, alright?

RANCY

Because you think I'm lying?

LURINDA

(lays down the law) No one was in your room last night.

RANCY

Yes there was!

LURINDA

Rancy, don't be a child. We searched the entire house and didn't find / anybody. Didn't sleep until-

RANCY

I heard them! I did! I heard, "Rancy! Rancy!" *I felt his breath on my face, Mother!* I'm / not making it up!

LURINDA

-until four in the morning and I had to meet Reverend Baker at the church by seven.

RANCY

I had school this morning / too; I'm not lying! I'm NOT LYING! I'm not- There was-

LURINDA

Fine. FINE you're not lying. There's an invisible man who's determined to ruin our lives through sleep deprivation. But since he's here, come on! Come on down! Come on down invisible man, and why don't we just let YOU SET THE TABLE?!

RANCY

..... I'm not lying. It did happen.

LURINDA

Fine. Sure. It happened. Can we- Can we just set the table? In silence? For five minutes? Five minutes of silence, please?

(RANCY grabs the plates and makes a point of setting them, without a word or breaking eye-contact with LURINDA. The battle is over... for now. Stern silence. It's nearly done when something passes over RANCY.)

RANCY

Mother?

LURINDA

I'm sorry; has it been five minutes?

RANCY

No, Mother I- I don't feel well.

LURINDA

You still have to set the table / Rancy; I wouldn't-

RANCY

No, really I- I feel so strange, Mother. I- I feel, so...

(RANCY falls flat on the floor and LURINDA runs to her. RANCY goes through fits of seizing and then stiffness, all while shaking violently.)

LURINDA

Rancy? Rancy? What's wrong? Rancy? Rancy!

SCENE 9

(RANCY sits, in a chair, elbows on her knees, hands under her chin, feet curled up on the chair, eyes staring; a knock is heard on the door.)

RANCY/KATRINA

(savagely in a German dialect) DON'T come any nearer.

ASA

May I sit back here?

RANCY/KATRINA

Sure, you old dick.

LURINDA

(Trying to touch Rancy) Rancy, please don't-

RANCY/KATRINA

SHUT IT GRANNY!

LURINDA

You see? She would never, / say such-

ASA

It's alright Mrs. Vennum. Rancy, I'm here to talk to you.

RANCY/KATRINA

Don't you think I know that, Doctor?

ASA

Is that alright?

RANCY/KATRINA

May rather enjoy it.

ASA

Why is that?

RANCY/KATRINA

You're a Spiritual Doctor, you may understand me.

ASA

That's my hope. What's your name?

RANCY/KATRINA

Raaaaaancy. Right, Witch?

ASA

I asked for *your* name.

RANCY/KATRINA

... Katrina Hogan.

ASA

And how old are you Katrina?

RANCY/KATRINA

Sixty-three.

ASA

Your voice sounds different. Where are you from?

RANCY/KATRINA

Deutschland.

ASA

And when did you die?

RANCY/KATRINA

Three days ago.

LURINDA

Oh my / word.

ASA

How did you come here?

RANCY/KATRINA

Through the rotten air.

ASA

How long will you stay?

RANCY/KATRINA

Three weeks.

ASA

And where will Rancy be, during this time?

RANCY/KATRINA

The other side.

LURINDA

The other side?

ASA

The other side of what?

(RANCY's gaze is fixed, no response.)

ASA

Katrina, did you hear me? The other side of what?

(RANCY bends backward violently. LURINDA and ASA try to keep her safe, during the fit.)

LURINDA

Another fit.

ASA

How often does this happen?

LURINDA

Lately, six or seven times a day, sometimes for hours on end.

ASA

Does Rancy come back after the fits?

LURINDA

Yes, but not entirely, never entirely.

(RANCY gasps and sits up, staring at ASA. Her gaze moves to LURINDA, eyeing her with a crooked simile.)

ASA

Rancy? Are you alright?

RANCY/WILLIE

Rancy ain't here.

ASA

But you're not Katrina, are you?

Naw. RANCY/WILLIE

Who are you? ASA

Willie Canning. RANCY/WILLIE

I knew Willie. LURINDA

Hey there Lucy. RANCY/WILLIE

He was Tom's old boss's boy. Disappeared at nineteen. LURINDA

Why are you here Willie? ASA

Because I wanna be. RANCY/WILLIE

What happened to you? LURINDA

Ran away. Got into trouble. Didn't get out of it. RANCY/WILLIE

How did you die, Willie? ASA

Lotsa questions. RANCY/WILLIE

How did you die, Willie? LURINDA

Did it myself, I did. RANCY/WILLIE

You took your own life? LURINDA

Funny, I think that's what I said. RANCY/WILLIE

Tell me about your father. ASA

Hate the old dick. RANCY/WILLIE

We searched for you. LURINDA

That's enough. RANCY/WILLIE

Why are you here? ASA

It's enough / questions. RANCY/WILLIE

Your poor father- LURINDA

I SAID STOP! (*beat*) Where do you live? RANCY/WILLIE

In the brick house / up the hill. ASA

Are you married? RANCY/WILLIE

/ Yes. ASA

(*continuous*) How many children? RANCY/WILLIE

That's not- ASA

How many boys? RANCY/WILLIE

I'm not- ASA

(*lasciviously*) How many giiiiirls? RANCY/WILLIE

None of your / business. ASA

Have you ever been the South Pole? RANCY/WILLIE

.. No. ASA

The North Pole? RANCY/WILLIE

ASA

/ Why are you, no.

RANCY/WILLIE

(continuous) Australia? Egypt? / Ceylon? Benares?

LURINDA

How / is she doing-

RANCY/WILLIE

Do you lie? Drink? Steal? Swear? Smoke? / Tea? Coffee?

ASA

/ Willie, Willie, I-

RANCY/WILLIE

(continuous) Do you go to church? Do you pray? Do you pray Mrs. Vennum? Do you pray?

LURINDA

I have / to go.

RANCY/WILLIE

Do you PRAY?

ASA

Willie, talk / to me.

RANCY/WILLIE

Do you PRAY Mrs. Vennum?

LURINDA

I can't / do this.

RANCY/WILLIE

DO YOU PRAY? BECAUSE YOU SHOULD!

(LURINDA and ASA both stand to leave, RANCY stands as they do. LURINDA gasps and runs to the door. RANCY screams and falls in a fit. LURINDA runs back to RANCY, followed by ASA.)

RANCY

Mother, they won't stop!

LURINDA

I know dear, / I'm so sorry.

ASA

Rancy? Is it you?

RANCY

I want to come home.

LURINDA

You *are* home; you're right here.

ASA

That may not be entirely true, Mrs. Vennum. Where are you Rancy?

RANCY

I.. don't know, they're all still here. I'm with them.

ASA

Katrina and Willie?

RANCY

They're still here!

ASA

Who are they?

RANCY

Spirits, evil spirits. Mother, they're everywhere.

ASA

Why did you let them in?

LURINDA

I'm sure she didn't-

RANCY

They said they were good. Mother, they're awful!

LURNDA

I know Rancy. But you're home; you're safe.

RANCY

I'm not Mother!

ASA

She's telling the truth.

RANCY

They're pulling me; they want me back!

ASA

Listen to me Rancy. I know it's confusing, but you *are* home. And while your mind is clear, I need you to hear me.

RANCY

I want to come / home!

ASA

Your body IS home, Rancy, and I need you to listen. They will come back,- But, you have a choice. They'll trick you if they can, but you have a choice. You understand?

RANCY

I think so.

ASA

Good. Someone *will* come for control. And if you *must* be controlled, is there a happier, kinder, more intelligent spirit around you?

RANCY

I don't- they lie!

ASA

They will lie. Look deeper.

RANCY

There are a great many spirits who want to come.

LURINDA

Look deeper, Dear, please.

RANCY

There is one, I think.

ASA

Do you know her?

RANCY

No. But I think she's- I can't stay much longer.

ASA

Do you trust her?

LURINDA

Let her come, dear. I love you.

RANCY

I love you too, / Mother.

LURINDA

I love you / so much.

RANCY

She's- *(gasp)* She's here.

ASA

Let her. Let her in.

(RANCY gasps a slow, long gasp while her body contorts, as if her joints shift under her skin. LURINDA and ASA hold her tight during the transformation. Finally, all is still and RANCY's eyes open to look around the room. SHE sees LURINDA and tries to make sense of her face. SHE then looks to ASA and her face lights up with joy.)

RANCY/MARY

Pa? Pa. Oh, I've missed you so.