

Daphne

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## CHARACTERS

**Daughter**

**Guard**

**Mother**

At a museum, Daughter sneaks up to a statue on a platform. The statue holds a vinyl record in its outstretched hand.

Daughter carefully takes the record from the statue. Guard enters.

GUARD

Hey! Don't touch the art.

DAUGHTER

Who are you?

GUARD

Who are you? You're not supposed to be here right now. The museum is closed.

DAUGHTER

No, there's been a mistake.

GUARD

You need to step away from the statue.

DAUGHTER

Where's Rob?

GUARD

Rob retired three months ago. How do you know Rob?

DAUGHTER

He didn't tell you? About us? We had an arrangement with him. With this whole museum, actually.

GUARD

I really don't know what you're talking about, but it's time for you to leave. You can sort out whatever "arrangement" you have here with the staff in the morning.

DAUGHTER

No, I can't leave now. This has to happen tonight. My mother will be back any second now.

GUARD

Your mother is here too? Where is she?

Daughter points to the statue.

DAUGHTER

She's there.

GUARD

That's a statue.

DAUGHTER

No, that's my mom. To you, this is a sculpture called *Daphne*, but...it's actually my mom.

GUARD

I think I need to call someone.

DAUGHTER

Wait. Just...wait. You'll see.

GUARD

You need to tell me right now what's going on.

DAUGHTER

Okay. Listen, I know I'm going to sound crazy, but try to keep an open mind. There's a custom in our family - a duty really - that goes back for decades. Every year, one woman from my family steps onto this platform and becomes *Daphne*. She becomes the art, staying here for an entire year. Then, when her time is up, the next woman steps in to take her place. My mom has been here for the past year, but tonight she finally steps down. Now, it's my turn. It'll be my first time as *Daphne*...

Guard stares at Daughter for a moment. Guard then approaches the statue and looks closely.

DAUGHTER

What are you doing?

GUARD

This is just a statue. It's marble. Cold

DAUGHTER

Yes.

GUARD

But you said this is your mother?

DAUGHTER

She is my mother. It's complicated. We train for this in my family. We learn how to *become* the statue.

GUARD

You're telling me that this thing isn't what it actually appears to be. Yet, thousands of people have come here to see it, and all of them have agreed that this is just a statue.

DAUGHTER

No one ever looks closely enough. If you looked, really looked, you would see.

Guard squints at *Daphne*. Guard starts pressing on the statue. The statue rocks slightly.

DAUGHTER

No!

Daughter pushes Guard away from the statue and holds the statue so it stays steady on the platform.

DAUGHTER

Don't touch her!

GUARD

Back away.

DAUGHTER

You could have killed her. That platform keeps her frozen there until her time is up. It's also the only thing keeping her alive right now. It was crafted long ago by my great-great-grandfather for this specific purpose.

GUARD

You're insane. I'm calling the police.

MOTHER

No!

Daughter and Guard turn to the statue, which is now moving. This is Mother.

Mother rolls her neck, moves her limbs, then steps off the platform.

GUARD

Oh my God.

DAUGHTER

Mom!

MOTHER

My darling.

Daughter and Mother embrace.

GUARD

Wh-wha...

MOTHER

You almost killed me, you idiot! Has no one really told you about us? I'll have to speak to the museum director tomorrow.

GUARD

You're really...you heard-

MOTHER

Yes, I heard all of it. I could see and hear everything up there. Statues can listen too. Now, please let us do this. *(to Daughter)* Are you ready?

DAUGHTER

I...

MOTHER

Don't be nervous. I've done this several times, and once you're up there, the year goes by just like that.

DAUGHTER

But, I don't want to miss an entire year of my life. I don't want to be left behind.

MOTHER

Darling, you have to. It's your time. My sisters and I can't keep carrying on like this. We need the next generation to step in. You're doing a noble thing. You're keeping our family alive and safe.

GUARD

Safe?

MOTHER

Do you have your song?

Daughter reveals a vinyl record.

DAUGHTER

Yes. It's my favorite.

MOTHER

Good. If you're going to listen to this for a year, then you should like it. Now, quickly. Step on. It's best to dive right in.

Mother ushers Daughter toward the platform.  
Guard steps in front of them.

GUARD

Whoa! Whoa. Hold on. I...This doesn't make any sense.

MOTHER

It doesn't have to make sense to you. This is a vital tradition for us. Please move out of the way. You and I can talk afterward.

GUARD

You expect her to stand here for an entire year? Like she's some kind of...toy on a shelf?

MOTHER

That is how it goes, yes.

GUARD

I can't let you do that. It's inhumane!

MOTHER

You don't understand. Our livelihood depends on this. We aren't just a family of artists, we *are* the art. The women of my family have created installations at galleries around the world. We need that income to survive. And this piece is a very important part of our wealth. It pays for our food, our clothes.

DAUGHTER

We're trapped.

MOTHER

Don't say that.

GUARD

Why...why just the women? Why not the men?

MOTHER

The men have other labors to perform.

GUARD

Well, why not quit this and get another job?

MOTHER

You can't simply quit something that's a vital part of you. Quitting this would be like removing our lungs. We couldn't breathe without it.

Daughter steps away from Mother.

DAUGHTER

I never wanted to do this with my life. I'd be happy to quit and be a teacher or, or...a falconer or something.

MOTHER

A falcon...No! Why would you be a falconer when you could be a statue? You can't quit. You have to do this. For your family. We need you. Step on. Go.

Guard steps toward Mother, backing her away from Daughter.

GUARD

If you try to force her into this, I'll have to intervene. I'll tell whoever I need to tell to make this stop. This is horrible.

MOTHER

Everyone who works here knows except you, apparently. The donors who endowed this gallery made an agreement with my family fifty years ago. They knew that what we wanted to do here would be special, magical, transcend the boring boundaries of modern art. They agreed to include *Daphne* in the permanent collection here and pay us a handsome sum each year to do so. But they've also forced us to remain silent. The cowards. They were afraid to offend the public and didn't trust people enough to appreciate our art for what it is. But...

(beat)

It's worth it, to live my life dedicated solely to my craft. This has been our purpose for years, and if you tell anyone, if you shatter the illusion, we'll have nothing.

Guard backs away from Mother, flabbergasted.  
Mother turns to Daughter.

MOTHER

Please. It's time.

DAUGHTER

We should tell the world. That could be our way out of this.

MOTHER

We don't need to get out of this.

DAUGHTER

Yes, we do! *Daphne* doesn't liberate us as artists. It's a prison! We've been shackled to this piece for years for...what? To make the wealthy names plastered to this hall sound good and beautiful? Our stipend hasn't risen in years. The sum the museum pays us isn't like it was decades ago. It's worth almost nothing now. If the public knew, they would take our side. They would revolt! Put pressure on the donors to release us.

MOTHER

No one will ever take your side when the only value you have is in being a pretty thing. The people who come to see *Daphne* don't want to face the ugly truth of it. They want beauty. Silent beauty. That's it. Now go.

DAUGHTER

I can't, Mom. Don't make me do this. There is so much more life for me to live. I can't waste half of my days standing here, waiting to be looked at.

MOTHER

Either you step on that platform, or I make you step up there. Do you understand?

DAUGHTER

No, please!

Mother grabs Daughter's arm and starts dragging her to the platform. Guard steps in between them and the platform.

GUARD

Let her go!

Guard struggles with Mother, who struggles with Daughter. Daughter manages to push her Mother away, but bumps into Guard behind her. Guard stumbles backward and onto the platform.

GUARD

Wait-



Guard freezes, arms outstretched. Mother and Daughter look at the new *Daphne*, shocked.

MOTHER

No...no!

Mother reaches for the statue, but Daughter pushes her back.

DAUGHTER

What are you doing? Do you want to be a murderer? Don't touch the art!

MOTHER

You've ruined us!

DAUGHTER

I've freed us!

MOTHER

They're going to sue us into our graves.

DAUGHTER

No, they won't. We can win against them if they do. I know it.

MOTHER

They have enough money and resources to silence us in a heartbeat, no matter what we try to do. That's how they've kept us in this situation for so long. They could put us in real danger.

Daughter thinks for a moment.

DAUGHTER

They'll never have to know. They'll never look close enough to see it isn't us. We're free to live our lives now, without this burden.

Daughter and Mother share a deep look. Mother nods and backs away.

Light starts to fill the room.

DAUGHTER

We should go. The museum is opening soon.

Daughter takes her vinyl record and places it on the outstretched hand of *Daphne*.

The opening lines of The Beatles' *I Saw Her Standing There* plays. As they do, Mother and Daughter stare at *Daphne*.

THE BEATLES

*One, two, three, four!*

*Well, she was just seventeen, and you know what I mean.*

*And the way she looked was way beyond compare.*

*So, how could I dance with another?*

*When I saw her standing there?*

Blackout.

**END**