

THE great MOLLY

a magical play
by
Colby Day

[WORKING DRAFT]

Colby Day
646 673 4733
Colby@colbyday.com

CHARACTERS

MOLLY mackenzie

An Irish girl in her late teens. Precocious, hardworking, emotional. Wants to be the world's greatest magician.

BURT sullivan

A young man, the house manager of the Evanston Theater. Rational, blunt, honest. Wants to own a theater.

tony dante

An older man, tired from managing magicians his whole life. Caring, wishes he wasn't.

THE great ALGIER

A magician beaten down by his years on the road.

JAMES Teak

Owner of the Evanston Theater. Imperious, protective. Doubles as stagehand.

emily Teak

Works as a concessions girl. Compassionate, understanding.

roger matinsky

A technically skilled magician who works as Raj Matan, a maharaja.

LOLa

Molly's assistant. Wants to be like her. Doubles as a volunteer.

THE carnival barker

A showman. Doubles as priest, stagehand, and Sheldon Little.

setting

THEaters throughout the United States, in the early 1900's. Some are small and rundown, others big and luxurious.

sets may be spare or suggested, as may be the curtain.

MAGIC should be performed as convincingly as possible.

FIREs may be simulated with lighting and/or fog, or done practically if there's the budget for it.

ACT ONE: BIRTH OF A MAGICIAN

1 SCENE ONE: THE EVANSTON THEATER

1

LIGHTS UP on a bare stage, with just a ghost light, a bright, bare bulb at the top of a standing lamp, off right.

MOLLY MACKENZIE, an Irish girl in her late teens, peeks her head out from behind the curtain, looking sneakily about.

She then runs across the stage to hide behind the opposite curtain, again poking her head out, completely perpendicular to the curtain.

She pantomimes taking a top hat off of her head and waving it to the audience.

MOLLY

Hello.

She looks a little displeased. Popping her head back behind the curtain. She CLEARS her throat loudly, then returns, once more doffing her fake hat.

MOLLY

(deeper, louder)

Hello!

She reacts as though the audience erupted in applause, grinning broadly. She puts her hat back on and heads out from behind the curtain, walking towards center stage with great poise. She looks around the audience, then plants herself, removing her hat and bowing nobly.

MOLLY

Ladies, and gentlemen. Muh-dams and mess-your. Good evening. I stand before you after years of training by Tibetan monks in how to be invisble. In the Sudan I learned to create something from nothing. And after years of research, have myself discovered the key to never-ending life. Prepare to be amazed.

She puts her top hat back on her head.

MOLLY

I am Molly Mackenzie, the world's greatest magician. For my first feat, my most death-defying feat, I will need a volunteer. Yes, you sir.

She points to nobody at all, an imagined volunteer.

MOLLY

Step right up. Yes, take my assistant Lola's hand. No don't be afraid. She won't bite. Hard.

She waits as her imaginary volunteer approaches and interacts with her imaginary assistant.

BURT SULLIVAN, a young stagehand, enters from the wings carrying a tall stool and a broom. He stops, letting Molly continue without noticing him. He leans against the broom, studying her intently.

MOLLY

Now, step right over here, and examine this coffin. It seems ordinary yes. Inspect it carefully. Your life may depend on it. Are you superstitious, sir? Fantastic. Step right up this stair, and lay down inside. Now, Lola, close the coffin.

She turns around sharply to see Burt, and jumps back with a SHRIEK.

BURT

Hello, Molly.

MOLLY

Oh my! Burt! You can't sneak up on people like that!

She's flushed and embarrassed. And when she's embarrassed her mother's accent comes out, which she hates.

BURT

Sorry, but I didn't want to interrupt. I wanted to see the rest of that trick.

MOLLY

Well you'll never see it, anyhow. Not for playing a mean trick like that on a body.

BURT

When I say something, I mean it, Mackenzie. I said I was sorry. Now how's the rest of that trick go?

MOLLY

It isn't no trick, boy. It's the real deal.

BURT

Alright.

He sets the stool down center stage, and heads back off. She doesn't want to tell him, but it's too good not to.

MOLLY

I cut him in half!

Burt reenters, carrying a podium, draped in cloth, and a side table. He begins pulling things out from behind it and arranging them on the table: a glass bottle, a flower, playing cards.

BURT

Well that's nothing special, every magician's ever been on stage cuts someone in half.

MOLLY

But I do it length-wise, see?

She gestures towards the imaginary coffin, demonstrating the body-length cut she makes.

BURT

Well that sure would be one for the books. Too bad there's no such thing as magic.

He goes back to work, sweeping the stage now.

MOLLY

Burt Sullivan, don't you dare say no such thing! How can you want to work in a theater and say there's no such thing as magic?

BURT

I reckon it's working in a theater that I can say it.

Molly darts in front of him.

MOLLY

What about the witches with their bubbling cauldron?

BURT

That was just a special ice, and green lights.

He sweeps past her, but she darts in front of him again.

MOLLY

Or when The Great Algiers makes his assistant fly.

BURT

That's wires, Mol. I rig em sometimes when the guys are too drunk.

Molly grabs his broom, and points it at her breast.

MOLLY

Or, when Juliet stabs herself because her one true love is dead and gone? And their blood mixes and they're finally together?

She "stabs" and "dies."

BURT

That's just plain pretending, and you know it.

MOLLY

If there's no magic in it, at all, then why'd you even want to run one?

BURT

Would you let me get to it? Your one true love's none too nice if the stage ain't swept properly.

He grabs the broom from her. She looks at him, disappointed.

MOLLY

I am not in love with the Great Algiers. He's my idol.

BURT

Right.

He goes back to preparing the theater. Molly tries to get his attention.

MOLLY

I mean it!

BURT

If you say so.

MOLLY

I love somebody else.

BURT

Okay.

He works.

MOLLY

Don't you want to know who?

BURT

I want to know when you're leaving.

MOLLY

Burt Sullivan, you are rotten, and mean, and I wish I'd never met you!

Molly starts to tear up, and heads off in a huff. As she does, THE GREAT ALGIERS enters, wearing a rumpled suit and carrying a top hat. He's a great showman, but tired and rundown, and it's starting to show. Maybe a little more than starting.

She runs right into him.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

God damn it! What in the hell is this?

MOLLY

The Great Algiers!

BURT

Oh, sir, I'm so sorry. That's Molly, one of the concessions girls --

THE GREAT ALGIERS

I don't care if she's one of the chorus girls. Dressing room looks like an Indian Sideshow's just been through, and I don't have any of the... medicine... I require before show time.

He gestures taking a drink, in no way subtle.

BURT

Yes sir. Molly?

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Well hop to it, boy! I can handle my fans.

He hands him a nickel.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Rye.

Burt leaves Molly alone with The Great Algiers. She is incredibly nervous.

He sets his top hat down on the podium and begins checking his props. She takes a bit to build up her courage, as he works.

MOLLY

Mr. Algiers, sir?

Maybe he didn't hear.

MOLLY

Mist--

THE GREAT ALGIERS

What is it you want girl?

MOLLY

I'm your biggest fan.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Mm-hm.

MOLLY

I've seen all your shows here.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Mm-hm.

MOLLY

I think you're the greatest magician who ever lived.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

(matter of fact)

It's all fake you know, illusions.

Molly looks a little crushed but tries not to show it.

MOLLY

Oh, sure. I know. But I --

THE GREAT ALGIERS

If I could make something from nothing, you think I'd be broke?

He pulls a playing card out of thin air.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

There's no there there.

He makes the card disappear once more, then turns his hand over to reveal he's holding the card behind his hand. Nothing magical to it at all.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Empty promises.

He exits, dropping the card. Molly finds herself alone, on stage, with the magician's hat and props. She picks up the card, returning it to the table, next to his hat.

She might step away, but it is too tempting. She approaches and takes the hat in her hand, waving it forward. She doesn't really believe it's magical anymore, but there's no harm in pretending.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen...

As she swings her hand forward, an orange flies out and rolls across the stage. She is shocked. Checks in the hat, but sees nothing.

She laughs.

MOLLY

Burt! Burt!

She looks around, sees nobody is watching her, and grabs the hat, running from center stage towards the stage door.

MOLLY

Burt, look at --

As she comes offstage she runs into the large, imposing form of TONY DANTE.

MOLLY

Oh, Mr. Dante. I was just dusting this off.

She waves the hat slightly. An orange pops out, which she catches and stuffs back into the hat.

DANTE

You're the concessions girl?

She nods. Then goes and returns the hat to its podium as he watches her.

MOLLY

But not for long I won't be.

DANTE

Getting married?

MOLLY

No, no. I'm going to be the world's greatest magician. Like The Great Algiers.

Burt returns, holding a bottle of rye in a paper bag.

BURT

Mr. Algiers! I've got your medicine here!

He sees Dante and lowers the bottle

DANTE

(to Molly)

I'd aim a little higher, kid.

(to Burt)

Hand it here, hand it here.

Burt considers for a moment.

DANTE

He'll still get his medicine. Thank you. And keep your staff off the stage, or should I speak with Mr. Teak about his house manager?

BURT

No need for that, sir.

DANTE

That's a lad.

Dante exits.

DANTE (O.S.)

Al, you sot!

BURT

I've told you time and again to stay off the stage, Mol!

MOLLY

Burt, I've seen the most amazing thing!

BURT

Would you listen to me, please? You know Teak's got it in for me as it is.

Look it...
MOLLY

She grabs the hat once more.

MOLLY
(motioning again)
Ladies and --

Burt grabs her arm.

BURT
And you can't touch the props!

MOLLY
But you'll never believe it!

BURT
Quit the childishness and get off of the stage! Enough's
enough.

Molly sets the hat back down.

BURT
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be cross.

Molly walks off without another word.

BURT
Oh, come on, Mol!

But she's gone. Burt picks up the ghost
light, lugging it offstage into the
wings. The theater goes DARK.

2 SCENE TWO: THE EVANSTON THEATER

2

LIGHTS UP in a spotlight center stage.
Algiers is in the middle of his act,
clearly drunk.

He holds up a handkerchief.

THE GREAT ALGIERS
This woman's kerchief, just like the rest of us, must one
day, sooner than you expect, turn to ashes.

The handkerchief erupts in a puff of
LIGHT and SMOKE, gone.

THE GREAT ALGIERS
Sorry, madam. Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust as they say.
Unless...

He pulls his hat off, scratching his head.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

No. It couldn't be. No. Well, why not?

He places the hat on the podium, peering inside.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

This hat, blessed, or some may say, cursed, by a shaman, many years ago. Blessed with the gift of renewed life. From nothingness comes the eternal beauty.

He reaches inside and prepares to pull his hand out with a flourish. He looks down into the hat, inspecting it a bit less presentationally, with more urgency. He rummages around in there.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

The eternal isn't always the most cooperative.

He steps back, covering as things go badly. He speaks out to someone unseen in the house, the WOMAN who volunteered the handkerchief.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Madam, you said the kerchief was a gift, from your husband? Do you think he might be interested perhaps in purchasing you another gift, out of the goodness of his heart? If perhaps the ether were to produce for me a coin in place of a kerchief?

Someone in the house YELLS.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

He's died!

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Well. Hm.

(hoping)

All the more reason for a new one. No?

He struggles to think, his brain's muddled. Things aren't going well. He rubs his hands together as he turns and walks away, his back to the audience.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Ah yes.

He comes up with a plan. Not a very convincing one. Half-hearted and unconvincing, he very clearly pulls a handkerchief out from his sleeve with a flourish that fails to conceal the sleight of hand.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

Voila! Ma'am would you please come inspect your kerchief?

The WOMAN enters, walking up to Algiers, who holds the handkerchief close to his chest. As she looks at it, her hands go to her mouth, dismayed.

THE GREAT ALGIERS

(stage whisper)

Let them applaud, let them applaud. Nod your head, good. Madam there's been an egregious mistake, which I take responsibility for. I will retribute to the best of my ability the value of the handkerchief and your emotional distress at losing it. I'm sure you understand. Now, curtsy with me to their applause. Thank you.

(loudly to audience)

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

He helps her offstage and the curtain falls abruptly. From behind the curtain we hear Algiers furiously smash something.

THE GREAT ALGIERS (O.S.)

Damn it!

Dante enters from the wings. There's a bit of a hullabaloo as the curtain rises again.

DANTE (O.S.)

What the hell was that?

(re: curtain)

Keep that down, there!

After a confused second, the curtain goes back down and JAMES TEAK enters the house. He's a broad shouldered, no-nonsense business man. He speaks to the audience.

JAMES TEAK

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming, we do apologize but that will be the end of our performance for the evening. Thank you.

He looks to Burt, standing in the wings, and gestures to him. He then makes his way backstage. Burt moves to a switch, flicking it. The house lights RISE and as they do, the curtain becomes sheer. We can see through what is nothing more than a scrim now.

Teak makes his way towards Dante and Algiers, who throws his jacket off across the stage in a fury.

ALGIERS

I told you, nobody else touches it! It works by touch!

JAMES TEAK

Enlighten me, gentlemen.

DANTE

Someone's been messing with the props, sir.

ALGIERS

Nobody touches the props! It's a simple enough agreement you big --

JAMES TEAK

Mr. Dante, I believe we also agreed that the performer would be fit to perform.

ALGIERS

Ruined.

Algiers falls as he tries to sit on a footstool.

DANTE

Shut up, Al.

ALGIERS

Who do you work for?

DANTE

I'm as disappointed as you are, Mr. Teak.

ALGIERS

It was the concessions girl!

JAMES TEAK

If you are insinuating anything about my daughter, sir, I suggest you tread lightly.

DANTE

Molly?

JAMES TEAK

You're certain?

ALGIERS

He has eyes, doesn't he?

Burt has throughout this swept the stage in front of them. At the mention of the concessions girl he stops, listening intently.

James Teak returns front of house crossing through the curtain.

JAMES TEAK

Burt, would you grab both the girls? Thank you.

Burt nods, heading out the house doors.

BURT (O.S.)

Molly! Emily!

Molly enters, followed by EMILY TEAK. She's blond, fair, compassionate.

EMILY

What is it, Burt? Show ended twenty minutes early.

BURT

There's some kind of problem backstage with Algiers.

MOLLY

He wasn't hurt in the Water Torture?

EMILY

Is he drunk again?

MOLLY

It isn't nice to gossip, Em.

BURT

I don't think it has anything to do with it. But yes.

The three pass backstage, where Algiers is just regaining balance on the stool.

Emily turns to Burt, smiling. And to Molly, "I told you so."

ALGIERS

Her! She was on stage!

He points to Molly.

DANTE

Would you lower your voice please?

JAMES TEAK

Did you touch Mr. Algiers' props?

MOLLY

I...

JAMES TEAK

Which props were meddled with, gentlemen?

Dante looks to Algiers, who won't say.

DANTE

Let's just see whether she touched anything.

JAMES TEAK

Well?

She looks to Dante & then Burt, neither says anything.

JAMES TEAK

Burt did you happen to --

MOLLY

Only the hat, sir.

ALGIERS

Only the hat! My hat! A valuable... The prize of...

JAMES TEAK

You remember what I told you? After the Merchant of Venice?

MOLLY

Yes sir. But --

ALGIERS

You could never comprehend. The damage this girl has... To touch my props. My --

JAMES TEAK

I have to ask you to leave, Molly.

MOLLY

But Mr. Teak -- !

ALGIERS

(bursting, frightening)

You've ruined me! You understand? Ruined!

Molly recoils somewhat. Emily grabs Burt's hand.

JAMES TEAK

Sir, I hardly believe that one failed trick --

ALGIERS

It's sabotage is what it is, plain and simple! Who's paid you, girl? Who's in charge?

MOLLY

I just wanted to see what it would be like... to... hold a magician's hat. I know it was --

ALGIERS

You don't know anything you stupid little bitch.

JAMES TEAK

(booming, overpowering)

That is enough!

(back to normal)

I will not tolerate your profanity sir, particularly in the company of a lady. Do not forget that you are here because I allow you to be.

Algiers falls silent as everyone remains frozen.

MOLLY

Sir, please?

Teak shakes his head.

MOLLY

I meant nothing by it. I apologize. Mr. Dante? Burt?

She looks to Burt, but he won't even meet her eyes.

JAMES TEAK

I am sorry to have to do this Molly, you understand.

Molly nods, and wipes her eyes, as Algiers downs the rest of a flask of rye with a bitter laugh.

JAMES TEAK

And I suggest you brew Mr. Algiers a pot of coffee. He has tomorrow to redeem himself, or we may need to reexamine our booking.

He turns to see Emily holding Burt's hand.

JAMES TEAK

(curtly)

Emily. Grab your things, time for home.

Emily starts, and heads off.

JAMES TEAK

(to Burt)

Don't forget to clean under the seats. There was garbage this morning.

BURT

(apologetic)

Yes sir.

Teak follows Emily off. Dante helps hoist Algiers up, he is now unconscious. Burt moves to grab a broom.

MOLLY

Please, I didn't mean to make him cross. He isn't really... ?

DANTE

He was ruined long before Evanston.

He exits with Algiers. Molly stands still.

MOLLY

Burt. I made a mistake.

BURT

What do you want, Mol? You know the rules. Couldn't have done nothing.

MOLLY

Could have stood up for me.

BURT

You know that ain't true.

MOLLY

Because you care more about what Mr. Teak thinks of you than your friend?

Molly waits for Burt to say that it isn't true. But he doesn't say anything. Molly leaves. Burt sweeps the stage.

The scrim again becomes opaque as
LIGHTS FADE.

Molly enters the theater through the house doors, LIGHT POOLING IN with her.

The GHOST LIGHT GLOWS dimly on stage.

MOLLY

Hello? Mr. Teak?

She moves forward, seeing a dim shadow hanging down from the rigging. She moves towards it.

MOLLY

Burt? Don't you go scaring a body again. Not today, boy. I am in no mood!

She continues to move closer to it, but it's dark this far upstage.

MOLLY

I know I oughtn't have come...

She grabs the ghost light, bringing it closer to the shadowy figure. Thirty feet. Twenty five feet. Twenty. The figure slowly comes into view: The Great Algiers, hanged, hat on his head.

Molly drops the ghost light. With a SHRIEK and a CRASH, the theater is thrown into complete darkness.

After a few frightening moments, the HOUSE DOOR reopens, and a figure appears WHISTLING a slow, sad song.

As LIGHT POOLS in from the door, Molly stands in the same position. The magic hat now sits at her feet. The Great Algiers still hangs from the neck, dead, unmoving.

The doors close once more and the figure moves about the house, still whistling. With the sound of a flipped breaker, HOUSE LIGHTS RISE.

Dante enters.

MOLLY

Mr. Dante!

Dante looks to see Algiers, stiffly hanging.

MOLLY

Help!

He rushes to Algiers' side as he throws off his jacket. He deftly picks up the fallen stool near his feet and stands on it, hoisting Algiers' body up to relieve the pressure on his neck. He's much faster than you'd expect.

MOLLY

Oh my! Mr. Algiers!

Molly watches, frozen.

Dante checks Algiers' pulse. His face goes cold. There's no need to rush anymore.

DANTE

It's too late.

MOLLY

Is he?

Dante gently lowers Algiers to the ground, stepping off the stool carefully.

They stand in silence a few moments. He looks to Molly.

MOLLY

I wanted to apologize.

DANTE

Too late now.

MOLLY

I would never want to harm your show.

She picks up the hat and hands it to Dante.

MOLLY

Here.

Dante doesn't even seem to notice he has it in his hands, he's still thinking.

DANTE

Do you know where the nearest police station is?

MOLLY

Around the corner, on South 4th.

He nods.

MOLLY

What will happen you think?

He puts the hat on her head.

DANTE

I'll speak with the police, Mr. Teak. Settle up tonight.
Can't complain about breach of contract I suppose. Then it's
the 11:15 to Chicago.

They both turn to Algiers.

DANTE

(to Molly)

You go home now.

She doesn't move. He notices her
reluctance.

DANTE

Don't live here, do you?

MOLLY

No. But...

She approaches Algiers with the hat.

MOLLY

I'm sorry.

DANTE

That's enough of that. Don't want your boss finding you here.

MOLLY

Do you think I could take the hat?

Dante considers for a second.

DANTE

If you really want it.

Molly nods.

DANTE

You hold onto it, then.

She picks the hat up.

DANTE

Now, go home.

Molly starts to leave. She looks back, trying to think what to say.

DANTE

Don't. Nothing to say.

She nods, exits.

Dante bends down, grabbing his jacket and putting it back on.

He reaches into Algiers' pocket and pulls out a few bills, which he pockets, and a flask.

He sits a few moments, inspecting the flask.

DANTE

You stupid drunk ass.

He takes a sip. LIGHTS FADE, leaving only ALGIERS illuminated for a moment. LIGHTS OUT.

4 SCENE FOUR: THE EVANSTON THEATER

4

The stage, dark, has a new backdrop, resembling a starry sky. Backstage there is a loud KZHING as a large switch is engaged, and twinkling electrical lights begin to sparkle in the backdrop: the stars shining through the night.

Burt enters, wiping his brow and looking at his handiwork. He stops, back to the audience, to look up at the electrical night sky, amazed.

Molly enters quietly through the house doors. She holds Algiers' hat, carefully, in her hand. She stops, on the threshold of the stage, seeing Burt.

MOLLY

Hello.

He turns sharply. He sees Molly and laughs.

BURT

Scared me half to death.

MOLLY

Thought a spirit was sneaking up on you?

BURT

Any surprise? All anyone's talked about all week.

MOLLY

Father O'Toole did a whole sermon on the evils of theater this morning.

BURT

Think Pastor Roberts covered that last Sunday.

There's a long pause.

MOLLY

I didn't know where to go.

BURT

Don't just stand there then. Come in.

He gestures for her to come in. She's uncertain.

BURT

Everyone's gone.

She walks slowly up to the lights, touching one gingerly.

BURT

Pretty, aren't they?

MOLLY

(surprised)

They're hot.

BURT

Mr. Teak reckons they're safer than the old gas lamps.

Molly turns away, playing distractedly with one of the curtains. Burt cleans up a few work supplies. Molly crosses down to center stage, staring out at the house.

Burt starts to gather a few of his things from around the theater.

Molly sits on a nearby crate and watches as he works.

BURT

Is that Algiers' hat?

MOLLY
Mr. Dante said I could have it.

BURT
When'd he say that?

MOLLY
I was here. I came. The day... We found him. You don't think he really?

BURT
His manager? Gossip's all.

MOLLY
You don't think I?

BURT
(laughs)
Course not.

Molly plays with the hat, unsure.

BURT
How do you like it? We're loading in Arabian Nights.

MOLLY
The show must go on.

BURT
I'm sorry, Mol.

She nods.

BURT
You give him another week without his favorite concessions girl and he may change his mind.

MOLLY
Emily's his favorite.

BURT
I don't believe Teak goes in for sentiment much.

MOLLY
Maybe not.

MOLLY
Do you love it here?

BURT
S'pose so.

I do.

MOLLY

They lock eyes.

Burt, what do you think of me?

MOLLY

She looks down at her hat.

Mackenzie, you could outsell her with one hand tied behind your back.

BURT

You think so?

MOLLY

I know so.

BURT

He stands, putting on his cap and jacket. He's embarrassed. It's as emotional as we've seen him.

Be sure to turn everything off on your way out.

BURT

Don't go.

MOLLY

I've been rigging all day, Mol. I'm asleep on my feet.

BURT

Just a minute more.

MOLLY

Stay as late as you want. Turn everything off, except the ghost light.

BURT

He heads to the house door.

Burt!

MOLLY

He stops, looking back at her.

I wanted to say goodbye.

MOLLY

You'll be back here before you know it.

BURT

He fiddles with a light.

I'll see you soon.

BURT

He leaves.

She stands, hat in hand. She examines it.

No.

MOLLY

She goes to place it on her head.

You won't.

MOLLY

She places it firmly on.

Ladies and gentlemen, the disappearing girl.

MOLLY

BLACKOUT. Maybe there's a flash of light, maybe she disappears. Maybe the disconcerting LAUGH of a disembodied Algiers fills the theater.

ACT TWO: LIFE OF A MAGICIAN

5 SCENE FIVE: CHICAGO WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION

5

The Midway is a bustling street of exotic, exciting stalls, caravans, and wagons. Various booths are open, a CARNIVAL BARKER shouting nearby.

CARNIVAL BARKER

Step right up, step right up folks! We present to you a swami so supernaturally gifted that the Maharaja himself exiled him for fear he'd enchant the nation of India. This man, almost 300 years old can see as far into the future as he has seen of the past, and even ascend directly into the heavens! Five cents gets you in! Five cents for the amazing, the stunning, the regal Raj Matan!

Molly has entered by this point, and stands near the barker.

CARNIVAL BARKER

You there girl! The secrets of the Orient await you! Raj Matan: The Maharaja of Mysteries! Only a nickle.

MOLLY

What if I only want to talk to Raj Matan?

CARNIVAL BARKER

One nickle gets you in. What happens then, no one can say.

Molly pulls out a nickle and pays the man. He pulls back two long flaps to an oriental looking tent.

Inside sits RAJ MATAN, an elderly, withered Indian man. He has long white hair, which he's tied around his narrow waist, and wears a cloth wrapped in a diaper around himself. He sits cross legged in front of a woven basket.

MOLLY

Mr. Matan?

He indicates for Molly to sit as well. She places the hat in front of her.

MOLLY

I wanted to ask --

He gestures for her to be quiet.

MOLLY
(quietly)
Would you be able to --

He opens the wicker basket, and waves his hands over it, to indicate that there are no wires.

Molly stops trying to speak, watching intently.

RAJ MATAN'S ROPE TO HEAVEN¹.

(For more on the precise details of each trick, see Appendix One at the end of the script)

He then slowly, diligently, coaxes something out of the box.

A rope peeks out, straight up into the air. He goes to put the lid back on the box, but the rope holds the lid aloft as well.

He removes the lid once more, coaxing further. The rope moves higher into the air, over his head. He tugs down on it but it won't budge.

He then snaps his fingers and the rope falls back into the wicker basket which he closes. He SNAPS again and the Carnival Barker leans in.

CARNIVAL BARKER
Alright, that's enough girl. Get lost.

MOLLY
That's it?

CARNIVAL BARKER
You get what you pay for.

MOLLY
I paid for a magic show.

CARNIVAL BARKER
Did you or did you not see some magic?

MOLLY
I don't know. Let me see it again.

Raj Matan shakes his head, closing his eyes, and begins to meditate, palms outstretched.

CARNIVAL BARKER

The Mystical Raj must meditate now. He is exhausted from his efforts.

Raj peeks one eye open.

CARNIVAL BARKER

Unless you have another nickle.

Raj nods, exactly.

MOLLY

No, I -- Mr. Matan, please.

CARNIVAL BARKER

That's enough.

MOLLY

This hat. It's magical.

The Carnival Barker grabs her and starts dragging her out.

CARNIVAL BARKER

Alright, kid. Alright.

MOLLY

Let go, let! Honest! I need your help! I... The Great Algiers, he gave me this hat!

Raj motions for the Carnival Barker to stop. He does, reluctantly.

RAJ

(to the Carnival Barker)

You may go.

CARNIVAL BARKER

(more to Raj)

I'll give ya five minutes.

The barker exits.

RAJ

The Great Algiers, you say?

MOLLY

Yes.

RAJ
Gave you this hat?

MOLLY
Yes.

RAJ
Then he is alive, after all?

MOLLY
No, he... No. But it is truly magical!

RAJ
May I see it?

He holds out his hand.

MOLLY
No.

Raj smiles, laughs.

RAJ
Then may I see its magic?

MOLLY
I've been practicing with it...

RAJ
Very well.

MOLLY
Algiers, he gave me this hat. He told me to carry on, to keep magic alive. That it could produce something from nothing, but only for someone it chose. He chose. Whatever they think of, they can... you understand?

Raj nods.

Molly takes a second, shaking herself off, nervous. She focuses, then takes the hat, holding it out to show that it is empty. She's unsteady.

She holds the hat out in one hand, lifting her other hand over it.

Raj COUGHS, pointing to her sleeve. She pulls it back.

MOLLY
There's nothing there.

RAJ
Now I see this is true.

MOLLY
Can I do it, or --?

RAJ
Proceed.

ROSE RISEN.

Molly concentrates, hard. A single rose begins to rise out of the hat. She plucks it up with her hand, holding the rose out to Raj.

He doesn't take it.

MOLLY
I haven't entirely figured it out yet. Exactly how it works.

Raj looks at her a moment.

RAJ
How long have you had this magical hat?

MOLLY
A little under a week, sir.

The Carnival Barker re-enters.

CARNIVAL BARKER
Raj, that's enough of that! We gotta get back to work.

Raj glares.

MOLLY
What do I do? I know a manager who --

RAJ
Please. My tent will be open tonight. Return and you may speak of magic with my more polite assistant.

MOLLY
I'd rather speak with you if you don't --

RAJ
I do not speak of my magic. Tonight. He is a handsome young American. And you are?

MOLLY
Molly Mackenzie. Thank you Mr. Matan.

RAJ

Please, Raj.

She stands, exiting the tent.

LIGHTS FADE.

6 SCENE SIX: THE EVANSTON THEATER

6

RAIN FALLS softly. LIGHTS SLOWLY RISE on Burt, painting a scenic element back in the Evanston theater. Emily enters.

EMILY

Burt, are you walking home soon?

BURT

Soon's I finish this.

EMILY

You didn't bring an umbrella today?

BURT

Didn't realize I'd need one.

EMILY

Father always knows when it's going to rain. I'll walk you home. If you like.

BURT

Thank you.

EMILY

Sorry if he's been sore lately, with the low attendance.

BURT

(laughs)

Sure has.

A beat.

EMILY

Did you hear, Molly's been missing?

BURT

What do you mean, missing?

EMILY

A policeman came around the other day. She hasn't been home for some time.

BURT

Hm.

EMILY

I said she's probably run off to join the circus.

BURT

You mean off somewhere doing magic.

LIGHTS RISE on Molly, on the other half of the stage. She's bundled up, huddled against the back of a caravan, hoping to be shielded from the rain. Her hat rests on the ground in front of her.

EMILY

A lady magician. I never.

BURT

Nothing wrong with a lady magician.

EMILY

I thought you didn't go in for all that.

BURT

It's what she wanted. Not hurting anybody.

Something begins peeking out from the hat, slowly. Growing. In the shadows, we may not even notice yet.

EMILY

And what do you want?

BURT

Finish this set.

EMILY

Is that all?

BURT

Be nice if attendance picked up.

Emily moves closer to him. A flower slowly begins to blossom from Molly's hat.

EMILY

You're awfully peculiar, Mister Sullivan.

BURT

Why what do you mean by --?

Emily moves right next to Burt, they're very close. She leans in, and kisses him. It's a peck really, unsure. A rose blossoms from Molly's hat.

BURT

Why, Emily!

EMILY

Oh, be quiet. Do you want a hand with that?

Another rose blossoms. And another.

BURT

You don't think your father'll be bothered, do you? You get some paint on those fingers?

EMILY

I'll be extra careful.

Emily approaches and he hands her a brush. The two paint together, Emily occasionally peeking over at Burt.

6A SCENE SIX A: OFF THE MIDWAY

6A

The stars twinkle in the backdrop behind Molly.

She pulls her coat tighter around herself.

ROGER enters, gaunt, pale, clean-shaven, young. He speaks quickly, brusquely.

ROGER

That's pretty. Wouldn't an umbrella make a bit more sense in this weather?

MOLLY

What do you want?

ROGER

To talk with you.

MOLLY

I can't, I'm waiting for Raj Matan.

ROGER

I see.

He goes to enter the caravan.

MOLLY

What are you doing?

He produces a key from thin air, and opens the door.

Molly stands, shocked, unsure what to do.

Roger re-enters, looking down at Molly.

ROGER
(in the voice of Raj Matan)
Little girl, little girl. Welcome.

MOLLY
You're...

ROGER
Raj Matan, at your service.

It is in fact Raj Matan. Out of his costume, and makeup, he's barely recognizable. A young white man plays the lanky, ancient Indian maharaja.

MOLLY
You're American.

ROGER
And you're Irish.

MOLLY
Am not!

ROGER
You'll have to work on your brogue a bit you want to tell that lie.

MOLLY
So you weren't trained by swamis?

ROGER
Never even seen one. A real one that is.

MOLLY
Have you been to India?

ROGER
Indiana. A few times.

MOLLY
Oh.

ROGER
Listen, you asked to meet me, so --

MOLLY
I want to be partners. We can do a show together.

Pass.

ROGER

He turns to re-enter the caravan.

Wait!

MOLLY

He pauses, looks at her.

Well?

ROGER

Molly picks her hat up off of the ground, careful not to prick herself with the roses. She reaches through the plant, carefully, and slips her hand into the hat. She pulls out a full-length, black umbrella, much too large to fit in the hat. She opens it with a twirl.

Roger keeps a neutral expression. Molly bows, eager for him to show his hand either way.

Be my assistant.

ROGER

MOLLY

Why in Heaven would I want to be your assistant, when I'm a magician?

Roger laughs.

Alright magician. Were those sleights or self-working?

MOLLY

I won't say.

ROGER

What's your routine like? You have a solid backpalm?

MOLLY

I'm still working on it.

ROGER

You want to be an assistant because you'll get to learn. From the best. That's me there, in that example. I've played all over the country, and now the World's Fair as Raj Matan. I'm gaining momentum, and you're welcome to ride on my coattails, or diapertails, for a while. Until you gain your feet.

Or at least learn not to sleep out in the rain. You can think that over if you want.

Roger exits.

Molly curls up beneath the umbrella.

LIGHTS begin to FADE and the rose bush does as well. The Carnival Barker enters, heading into the caravan.

CARNIVAL BARKER (O.S.)

What do you think you're doing? Out! Out!

Roger is thrown unceremoniously out of the caravan, landing next to Molly.

MOLLY

I thought he worked for you?

ROGER

That's why I need a new assistant. Bad attitude. Mind if I sneak under here with you?

He sneaks under the umbrella with her.

ROGER

Listen, fair's closing tomorrow night. Plenty of shows are staying, I reckon we'll have to make our way elsewhere. As I hadn't planned on employing an assistant, you'll have to cover your own train fare. I can get myself as far as Tulsa, got a friend there who books this local bar. But that's all I got. Cards on the table.

MOLLY

I want to stay in Chicago.

ROGER

Everybody already went to the fair, saw the magic shows, mine included. Nobody's hungry for it, here. Tulsa, though, they're hungry for anything you could call culture.

MOLLY

But I know a manager here.

ROGER

Well, why didn't you say so? Who's this manager? Does he like Indians?

MOLLY

Tony Dante. He's The Great Algiers's manager.

ROGER

The Great Algiers? I thought that was part of your repertoire. Didn't he die, five, ten years ago?

MOLLY

No, I saw his last performance.

ROGER

What a mess, huh?

MOLLY

Not at all.

ROGER

Was when I saw it.

MOLLY

When was that?

ROGER

I was just a kid. My grandfather worked with him for a bit, back when he was really something.

MOLLY

What Algiers was doing, when I saw him, was amazing.

ROGER

Budge over a bit more, huh?

MOLLY

Are you going to help me find his manager, or not?

ROGER

Slow it down, kid. Slow it right down. We don't have an act as yet. One step at a time.

MOLLY

What's the first step? If I do agree. To be your assistant?

ROGER

For now, a good night's sleep.

He pushes under the umbrella a bit more, trying to remain dry. She slides over a bit, they're both mostly covered.

ROGER

Say... One magician to another. How do you do that? With the rose bush and the umbrella?

Molly moves the hat closer, cautiously.

ROGER

I haven't seen anything like that. No apparatus, not on a podium or table. You can move the hat around?

MOLLY

Magic.

ROGER

Alright, alright. Play it close to the chest if you want. I'll figure out your trick eventually.

MOLLY

Maybe there is no trick.

Roger LAUGHS.

ROGER

Al taught you one thing, huh?

They rest there. Roger curls up to go to sleep.

Roger laughs softly to himself.

ROGER

Maybe there is no trick.

LIGHTS FADE slowly. The RAIN continues to fall, growing LOUDER. There's a FLASH of LIGHTNING, illuminating the SILHOUETTE of The Great Algiers, swaying in the rain.

Molly GASPS.

With the CRACK of THUNDER, he disappears.

LIGHTS OUT.

7 SCENE SEVEN: A RUNDOWN THEATER

7

Pre-show. Molly stands, now dressed as a romanticized Indian girl: MAL MATAN.

MAL

(bad Indian accent)

Ladies and gentlemen...

She looks around, displeased.

MAL

(worse Indian accent)

Ladies and gentlemen... Oh, stuff it.

(she drops the accent)

Ladies and gentlemen... I have traveled many miles to bring you the wonders of my native land. Exiled, by the maharaja, my father and I must wander the world, making a meagre living. Believe in the impossible, my friends. For you are about to see it accomplished.

She has by now emerged from the curtain, standing down center. She drops her character and poise, relaxing into herself once more.

Roger enters.

ROGER

What are you doing out there?

MOLLY

Rehearsing.

ROGER

And I told you to lose the hat.

He holds his hand out.

MOLLY

No.

ROGER

You're the daughter of a fakir.

MOLLY

And a fakir's daughter wouldn't wear a hat?

ROGER

He wouldn't allow it.

MOLLY

Maybe that's exactly why she does wear it. She's rebellious.

ROGER

It isn't a question of character. It's a question of aesthetic. Unless you're going to be using it, and you won't be, there's no need for it. It's distracting.

MOLLY

I could! I've been thinking about a neat vanishing bit with rope that might lead into your cobra.

ROGER

You miss my point. Your job is to not be a distraction. You doing tricks, would be... distracting. Hit your marks, the ones we went over, and that's that. Leave the rehearsing to me.

Molly sulks.

MOLLY

Yes.

ROGER

(in Raj's voice)

Yes, what?

MOLLY

(in Mal's)

Father.

She smiles. Roger (as Raj) goes to sit on a cushion, cross legged, center.

Molly (as Mal) stands behind the curtain. She peeks out at the house. She looks across the audience carefully, scanning for someone, who she doesn't find. She's disappointed.

He waves her away from the curtain.

ROGER

Cut that out.

Molly returns back behind the curtain, all business now.

MOLLY

Juggle on the second cup?

ROGER

The fourth!

MOLLY

Kidding. Alright, here we go.

Molly steps back, setting up behind a little podium or cart with Raj's woven basket atop it.

The curtain parts. Raj sits, meditating.

After a moment, he flutters his eyes open. He acknowledges the crowd with a short, stiff bow, and stands.

He waves to the wing, and Molly rolls the cart on in front of him. She hits his toes, and he gives her a glare.

He shakes his finger at her, and repositions the cart forcefully.

From the basket, he pulls out a set of three cups, and three balls. He hands the basket to Mal.

She steps to his side with it, placing it on the edge of the surface.

He demonstrates the three cups are solid, tapping them, dropping the balls in. He then demonstrates the balls, throwing them high into the air, letting them bounce.

RAJ MATAN'S CUPS & BALLS TRICK.

Raj manipulates the cups and balls, making one ball after another disappear, then reappear under another cup. Throughout this, Mal tries to pour herself a cup of water, contributing to the confusion.

When all three balls have magically disappeared, and reappeared under the center cup, Raj hands them to Mal, who juggles them before setting them aside.

Raj then magically produces under each cup one large ball that fills the cup. By the end, Mal, fed up, takes a large gulp directly from the water pitcher.

The CURTAIN, sheer, FALLS. The magicians reconfigure their props, setting for the next act.

STAGEHAND (O.S.)

Alright, five minutes! We're back in five.

ROGER

Thank you five.

(to Molly)

Watch the toes next time, hm?

MOLLY

Sorry.

ROGER

And be a little less...

MOLLY

What?

ROGER

Just less. Give me a hand?

He gestures to his turban. Molly helps him readjust it.

MOLLY

How long have you been on the road?

ROGER

Five years. Six in March.

MOLLY

Do you ever think about home?

ROGER

That who you're looking for out there?

Molly doesn't answer. Roger fusses over his turban.

ROGER

No.

8 SCENE EIGHT: THE EVANSTON THEATER

8

As Roger and Molly continue their preparations, in front of the curtain, James Teak steps out, speaking with Emily & Burt.

JAMES TEAK

It'll only be for a short time. Until I can raise the funds to re-open her.

EMILY

How long will that be?

JAMES TEAK

I have a meeting with Harry Hooper at First Union tomorrow.
(to Burt)
I'm sure you understand.

BURT

Of course, sir. I can't imagine the rumors help at all.

JAMES TEAK

Darn magician left us with one nasty last trick. A disappearing audience.

He LAUGHS bitterly.

JAMES TEAK
But, she won't be gone long.

BURT
I hope not.

EMILY
What about Burt?

BURT
Em.

JAMES TEAK
An enterprising young man like him, I have no fear he'll --

BURT
I'll be looking for work tomorrow.

EMILY
You said yourself: everybody's tightening their belts.

JAMES TEAK
Well, that's true.

BURT
Emily, please.

EMILY
Couldn't he have a job at your office? Just until the theater re-opens, of course?

JAMES TEAK
Would you want that?

BURT
I would, sir. If I could come back here when it reopens, of course.

JAMES TEAK
It won't be anything like this. There's nothing like this. Nothing like it in the world.

BURT
I'd just be happy to have some work to call my own. You know I'm diligent.

EMILY
And clever.

Teak begins to think it over.

BURT
I think I've proven myself a hard worker.

JAMES TEAK

Well, well, if you think that would please you.

EMILY

It would!

JAMES TEAK

You, Burt.

BURT

It would, sir.

JAMES TEAK

Then I don't see why not. Now, if you don't mind, there are a few formalities I need to take care of here...

EMILY

Oh thank you, daddy! Let's go, Burt.

Emily starts to head out.

BURT

Thank you, sir. I, you've always been fair with me, and, well, I know I may not be good enough for --

JAMES TEAK

You will be.

BURT

Yes sir. I will.

EMILY

Come on! Let's celebrate.

She grabs him by the hand. Burt & Emily exit. Teak stands alone.

From off, somewhere, the sound of a stool falling over. Silence, followed by a slow, quiet, menacing LAUGH. The laugh of a victor.

Teak cocks his head to listen. But the theater is silent once more. He didn't have anything to take care of besides breathing in the theater a few more times.

LIGHTS OUT.

STAGEHAND (O.S.)

Places!

LIGHTS UP on the bare stage, curtain down. Molly peeks her head out through it, surveying the house. She looks across the audience, carefully, eagerly.

ROGER (O.S.)

Damn it, Mol. Enough with that!

Molly's head disappears back behind the curtain once more.

After a moment, CURTAIN UP to reveal Raj Matan sitting cross legged, meditating. He appears much more serene than he sounded moments ago.

Mal enters. She approaches Raj as quietly as possible. He opens his eyes, smiling up at her.

RAJ

Mal, what is the matter? Why do you disturb my meditations? You should be asleep.

MAL

I had a bad dream father.

RAJ

Sit, tell me of this bad dream.

MAL

Some sneak took your magic basket, and placed a cobra inside.

RAJ

Ah.

MAL

And when you pulled the rope out and ascended to the heavens, it was on a cobra. Which turned, and struck you. Dead.

RAJ

Little Mal, you need not worry. I am never away from my magic basket.

MAL

But what if --

RAJ

And I alone control what is inside.

MAL

But --

RAJ

Quiet! Please.

He leans forward, listening to the basket. It HISSES. He looks to Mal.

MAL

Father, please.

RAJ

It seems you may have been blessed with the third eye, as your mother was.

He opens the basket, and a cobra emerges, swaying slightly, HISSING.

TAMING THE COBRA.

MAL

The cobra!

RAJ

Do not fear, little one. Do you forget that I was raised with the cobra, as a brother? We can speak the same tongue.

He WHISPERS to the cobra, which emerges further and further from the basket. With a sudden speed, Raj darts his hands forward, grabbing the cobra and pulling it all the way from the basket.

It is now totally stiff, a long walking stick and nothing more. Raj Matan leans on it to stand tall.

RAJ

And the cobra will always give me a hand should I need it.

He pats Mal on the head.

RAJ

Now, little Mal. While your third eye is active, let us attempt to open it wider.

He CLAPS his hands and a STAGEHAND wheels on a table, with a few props on it: a deck of cards, a pocket watch, a copy of a Hindi religious book.

Raj hands the cane to the Stage Hand, and it immediately collapses back into a writhing cobra.

RAJ

Oh, very sorry. He does not like Americans.

He takes the snake back from the assistant, and carefully places it back into the basket.

RAJ

Now, my daughter, born with the sacred third eye, shall see into my very thoughts. May we have an assistant please?

A volunteer is produced from the audience (this should be an actual volunteer, with no affiliation to the production).

RAJ

Thank you. And you are?

He gets the volunteer's name.

RAJ

Now, VOLUNTEER, we will perform a series of sacred feats. My daughter and I share a holy bond, that of blood. We are very much alike, but, many men are such with their children. What we will do for you now, however, is only possible for those who have studied the sacred texts, and meditated long hours on the art of feeling with another. A bond, almost like what Western doctors call "Mind Reading." Though, it is more complicated. The mind is not like this book here, merely to browse through and select portions. It is a collection of complex passions and visions, some real, some imagined. We shall now challenge Mal's third eye, to decipher from my mind three pieces of information. First, we must be sure she can not see, so we will obscure her vision.

Mal produces a bag, which she hands to the volunteer.

RAJ

Try this on, if you would be so kind. Check to be sure there is no way to see through it.

Once the volunteer has done this:

RAJ

Now, please place that over Mal's head, so she may not see.

The volunteer places the bag over Mal's head.

THREE SACRED FEATS OF MIND READING

RAJ

Would you please examine this deck of cards, sir/madam?

The volunteer is handed the cards,
which he/she can inspect.

RAJ

Would you please select one card from the deck. Be sure to show the audience here your card, or this may not be particularly impressive. Excellent. Now, if you would show me the card too, as Mal will read the information from my mind.

The volunteer does so. Raj looks at the card intently for a moment, then returns it to the volunteer.

RAJ

Wonderful. Now return the card to the deck, and close the box. Thank you.

Raj takes the box back from the volunteer and casually sets it down on the table.

RAJ

But, is this truly proof of her third eye? With only 52 possible choices, it is possible that she could guess, at least once in 52 shows we have to be correct, and we do 7 shows a day, ladies and gentlemen. So, we will need something slightly more impressive to convince you non-believers, no?

He picks up the watch from the table, holding it aloft.

RAJ

There are 12 hours on the clock, 60 minutes per hour. Leaving over 8000 different possible combinations. Would you please set the time on this watch to whatever hour and minute you'd like?

He hands the watch to the volunteer, who sets a time.

RAJ

And show this to the audience. Some of you may need your spectacles.

Once the volunteer has tried to show the audience:

RAJ

Now, if you please...

He holds out his hand, studying the watch a moment, focusing intently. He then closes the watch and sets it back down on the table.

RAJ

Now that the watch is firmly closed, there is no way my daughter can see the time you've selected, except for through our thoughts, correct?

The volunteer confirms.

RAJ

Still, perhaps you will require further proof.

He picks the book up off of the table.

RAJ

The Rig Veda, a holy Hindi scripture, which speaks of many of the divine experiences of our people, and contains over 35,000 words. Would you please open the book, and find a page you feel drawn to, and then a word that speaks to you? Point the word out to me?

The volunteer shows Raj the word.

RAJ

Now, this is very difficult. Very difficult. We both know these texts, but in our native tongue. English is to myself a second language. I will need to create a strong impression here.

He focuses on the book, closing his eyes and holding the book in front of him.

RAJ

Very well.

He places the book also on the table.

RAJ

Mal, if you please?

Mal walks over, bumping into the table slightly.

MAL

Oh!

Mal removes the covering from her head. Raj glares at her, but quickly regains his composure.

She moves towards a chalkboard that has been wheeled on.

It is positioned so that she may write on the opposite side, without the audience seeing.

MAL

I thought I saw.

RAJ

Please, we require total silence. The third eye is easily distracted by the other senses. Remember, remember. I've shown you in my mind...

Mal picks up a piece of chalk, puzzling a moment before she writes out the volunteer's card on the board. She turns it over to reveal the volunteer's card correctly.

RAJ

And now, the watch.

Mal concentrates on this, then writes the time of the watch on the chalkboard. She again turns the board over, again with the correct answer.

RAJ

And are we correct to assume this was the time you set?

After confirmation, Raj continues.

RAJ

And the word.

Mal concentrates again.

MAL

I can't father.

RAJ

Look into my mind.

MAL

It's all in Hindi. Maybe, if I could feel the book. I may be able to read its aura.

Mal picks up the book, riffling through it. She places it back down again.

MAL

May I look into VOLUNTEER'S mind?

Raj waves his approval.

MAL
(to Volunteer)
You do not mind?

Mal looks into the Volunteer's mind.

MAL
I see. Of course. A western book calls for Western magic.

Raj tries to mask his confusion, this
isn't how the end of the trick goes.

RAJ
What do you mean my little one?

She pulls her hat out from underneath
the table.

MAL
The conjurer, pulling a rabbit out of his, or her, hat.

Raj glares at her before giving a wave
of his hand, magnanimously.

RAJ
If you must my daughter.

She reaches into the hat and pulls out
a small slate, which has the word
written on it already.

She reads the word to the volunteer,
who confirms that it is his/her word.

RAJ
Ladies and gentlemen: The Third Eye.

They take bows, and return the
Volunteer to his/her seat.

The CURTAIN FALLS.

They begin to dismantle their set
pieces. Roger rips his beard off.

ROGER
Mind telling me what in the name of all things holy you were
doing there?

MOLLY
I was trying to make it interesting!

ROGER
They eat up the third eye stuff!

MOLLY

You mean third rate mentalism.

ROGER

You do not change my show! You do not surprise me, in my show.

MOLLY

Our show. Ours.

ROGER

We can not, if you won't tell me what you're going to do --

MOLLY

On the train from Cincinnati, eighteen months ago, you said, you said it would be our show from now on.

ROGER

Whose name is on the bill? Huh? What are you trying to do? To ruin me?

MOLLY

I'm trying to do something bigger. I'm trying to get our show recognized you idiot.

ROGER

Oh, I'm the idiot? Who bumped into the table?

MOLLY

I'm wearing a blindfold!

ROGER

You knock even one of those props, I swear!

MOLLY

I can't right now. I can't.

Molly puts her hat in a little hatbox, slams the lid shut. She marches off, leaving Roger alone to stew.

ROGER

If we're changing the script on each other, how about I just cut all your lines?

Roger slams some props away as well. He looks at the hat box. Tempted. He opens the lid, looking inside.

Molly returns. Behind her, enters Tony Dante.

MOLLY

Raj Matan, meet Tony Dante. He's a manager I invited to see our show.

Surprised, Roger doesn't know what to say.

MOLLY

I wasn't sure you'd ever come!

DANTE

I was in Sacramento anyway, thought I'd save the postman another trip.

ROGER

Pleased to meet you, sir.

DANTE

Dante's fine.

MOLLY

Dante and I met back when he used to manage The Great Algiers.

ROGER

Oh, do you manage any other living acts?

DANTE

I've been on hiatus.

MOLLY

How'd you like our show?

DANTE

Well, it's pretty.

ROGER

Thank you very much, and thank you for coming. Would you --

DANTE

Not bad for mentalism.

Molly gives Roger an "I told you" look.

DANTE

You dressed it up nice. I like that reveal at the end, from the hat. A little twist at least.

MOLLY

That was mine, Rog hates that. We were just discussing it, actually.

ROGER

It's not maharaja, Mol.

MOLLY

You want the show to be great? Then we have to give them something they haven't seen before.

ROGER

I know what you want to give them. I don't do Algiers.

MOLLY

Nothing like Algiers! Like nothing else in the world.

ROGER

Mr. Dante, what would you say to booking us a few --

DANTE

Just Dante's fine.

(to Molly)

What did you say kid?

MOLLY

We need to do a show nobody else is doing. I don't see why you don't --

DANTE

No, hold on. The exact words, dear.

MOLLY

Like nothing else in the world.

DANTE

Who told you that? Where'd it come from? The tagline?

MOLLY

(maybe lying)

Nobody. It just came to me.

DANTE

First tagline I wrote for Al. When I first picked him up.

ROGER

Listen, guys, you want to do Algiers' show, he's dead. You want to go dig him up, be my guest. We got something new here, Mr. Dante.

DANTE

Stop it with the Mistfers. Makes me feel old.

ROGER

We have an interesting, and dare I say, crowd-pleasing, show. You've clearly taken an interest in Molly, and why not? Now how about our routine?

DANTE

I'm not interested in Indians. Too much makeup. Too many costumes.

ROGER

But if you watch our act --

DANTE

You ever get any exclusive contracts?

MOLLY

No.

DANTE

Ever headline?

MOLLY

No.

DANTE

What's your ordinary billing?

ROGER

Sometimes we'll be fifth or sixth.

MOLLY

Generally second or third.

DANTE

Indians only open these days.

ROGER

No offense then, but why would you come at all if you aren't even interested in us?

DANTE

There is something I'm interested in. Something I think we could sell.

MOLLY

What?

Dante steps back, appraising Molly.

DANTE

The Daughter of Algiers.

A SPOTLIGHT hits Molly. The rest of the LIGHTS FADE.

DANTE

(loudly)

Ladies and gentlemen, The Daughter of Algiers!

He presents her with a wave, backing off stage. She smiles, frightened. She waves, frightened. She bows. She smiles.

CURTAIN.

10 SCENE TEN: A THEATER

10

The Curtain begins to become sheer, as we see preparations being made backstage. Molly stands near center as Dante & Roger scuttle about.

DANTE (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, this is places. Places everyone.

MOLLY (O.S.)

Thank you.

She walks to the opposite wing, peeking out from behind the curtain at the house.

ROGER

What do you think she's looking for?

DANTE

Probably checking the size of the house.

ROGER

We were just out there.

DANTE

Finish getting into costume.

Molly, disappointed, closes the curtain once more, and walks to center stage.

She puts on a serene face. Dante looks to her expectantly. She nods. He nods to a STAGEHAND who opens the curtain.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen, may I have a volunteer?

(beat)

Preferably an unmarried volunteer. Don't worry, we won't besmirch your reputation. Not greatly, anyway. An intellectual, perhaps.

A VOLUNTEER stands, an audience plant.

MOLLY

Do you consider yourself a cerebral man?

The Volunteer nods.

VOLUNTEER

I work in the library.

MOLLY

Wonderful, a scholar. And are you weak of heart?

VOLUNTEER

No.

MOLLY

Think carefully. Are you not just fit, but also courageous?
Meaning full of heart?

VOLUNTEER

It's actually closer to "innermost feelings."

MOLLY

Wonderful. Are you a man of inner feelings?

VOLUNTEER

I suppose.

MOLLY

Of course. Let us proceed. Please, sir, make your way up to
the stage. That's right. Watch your step. If you'd take a
seat.

She gestures towards a seat that
doesn't exist.

MOLLY

Hm. Now where is that assistant of mine?

Dante shoves Roger out with a chair in
hand, which he places.

MOLLY

Thank you. A little more downstage.

Begrudgingly he obliges.

MOLLY

Thank you.

He begins to exit.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen, my assistant. If you would, sir.

She gestures towards the chair, and he
sits.

MOLLY

Now, would you agree that the heart and the mind are often of
different opinions as to what might be most prudent?

VOLUNTEER

I would agree.

MOLLY

And in those instances, what do you listen to you? Your heart, pumping and yearning uncontrollably, or your brain, rational, dependable?

VOLUNTEER

The brain, of course.

MOLLY

Of course. And when you speak, do you try to use your intellect, to get your point across, or do you speak from the heart?

VOLUNTEER

A little of both, I suppose.

MOLLY

If you had to pick one.

VOLUNTEER

Intellect.

MOLLY

As I suspected.

(to crowd)

Ladies and gentlemen, we have here, a man, like many of you. Bright, well-read, and unmarried, correct?

VOLUNTEER

Correct.

MOLLY

Do you have a special someone?

VOLUNTEER

Not exactly.

MOLLY

(to crowd)

A man, full of passions, yearning to be released, but tyrannically opposed by the ruling force: intellect. A man, repressed by his own smarts.

VOLUNTEER

I wouldn't go that far.

MOLLY

I am prone to statements of grandeur. Being a wordsmith, as you are, I'm sure you will understand. Does it not hold a certain truth, sir?

VOLUNTEER

A certain truth, it does.

MOLLY

This brings us to today's experiment: Uncaging the Heart.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

MOLLY

You say you have no special someone, is that correct?

VOLUNTEER

Yes.

MOLLY

Would you like to?

He LAUGHS, uncomfortable.

MOLLY

Not me.

VOLUNTEER

I...

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen, the heart shackled by the mind. The brain working a series of lightning fast calculations "What is prudent to say?" "What do I want?" "How can I get the one I yearn for?" We will instead, this evening, cage the mind, letting the heart free, if only for a few moments.

As she speaks she demonstrates a large heart in a cage. After placing it under a small handkerchief, and waving her hand over it, she pulls the handkerchief away to reveal the heart has been replaced by a brain.

She turns to her Volunteer.

MOLLY

Now, I shall sit here opposite you.

DANTE

For god's sake, Rog.

Roger enters once more with another chair, apologetically.

MOLLY

Over one thousand shows, and still, he fails to understand the difference between one and two. Ladies and gentlemen, my soon to be former assistant.

He places it for Molly to sit. He exits. She sits across from her Volunteer. She stares deeply into his eyes. He looks somewhat uncomfortable.

MOLLY

How silly of me to try to stare into your heart without even a proper introduction. I'm Molly Mackenzie.

She proffers her hand.

VOLUNTEER

Sheldon Little.

MOLLY

(they shake)

A pleasure, Sheldon.

(to crowd)

A round of applause for Mr. Little.

After the applause.

MOLLY

Now, if you would look into my eyes please.

She leans forward somewhat, looking into his eyes. He stares back into hers. The following is very slow, dreamy. They connect deeply, breathing together.

MOLLY

I want you to look deep into them. Look deeper, deeper. Do you see your own reflection? Do you see yourself in me? Look deeper, into your own eyes. Right here, in mine, yours. And even deeper, look down, into my heart, beating, beating with yours. Do you feel my heart, Sheldon?

He nods.

MOLLY

I feel your heart, Sheldon. Our hearts are beating together. And there is nothing else, just you, and me, two humans, connected, by our eyes, and our hearts.

They sit there connected for a few breaths.

MOLLY

Do you see into your heart? Do you see?

He nods.

MOLLY

Do you see a person?

He nods.

MOLLY

Someone your heart longs for?

He nods.

MOLLY

Who do you see?

VOLUNTEER

Esther.

MOLLY

(lightly joking)

It's Molly, you old dog.

(to Sheldon again)

Can you see into her eyes, Sheldon? Look into mine, deep into mine, as you would hers. Do you see?

VOLUNTEER

Yes.

MOLLY

What color are her eyes?

VOLUNTEER

The ocean.

MOLLY

That's not a color, Sheldon. Blue, grey, green?

VOLUNTEER

Yes.

MOLLY

You've really got the bug, huh, Sheldon?

VOLUNTEER

Yes.

MOLLY

You work in the library, Sheldon?

VOLUNTEER

Yes.

MOLLY

Can you picture it? What does it look like? Rows of books? A few ink-stained tables? High windows? Are we there now?

He nods.

MOLLY

And here comes Esther. Oh, I see what you mean, Sheldon. I really do. She's stunning. There she is, standing just back there.

He turns looking back where indicated.

MOLLY

Speak with her.

Sheldon stands. He makes his way towards Esther, still in a fog.

SHELDON

Esther, I don't make much money. And I know you want a large family. But I'll become head librarian soon. Mr. Fairview is very old, and his vision is going. You don't need to worry about that. You needn't worry about anything. Let me worry for you. I will. Whether you want me to or not. Esther, I... Do you remember the fair that came to town, that summer of the drought? I saw you there, do you remember? At the fair, you were there with your elder sister, and everyone always said she was the beauty of the family, she won the pageant, remember? And I saw the two of you there, and I only saw you. I just saw you, and nothing else, not the whirligigs, or the lights, or the fat man, you. I only ever saw you, Esther. I don't know why I didn't say anything.

Molly SNAPS her fingers, or CLAPS loudly. Something jarring that should signal the end of the hypnosis.

MOLLY

Thank you, Sheldon, you can return to your seat.

Sheldon is startled, but not out of his hypnosis. He turns sharply on Molly, believing she's Esther. He might even go down on his knees at her feet.

SHELDON

(pleading, desperate)

I should've said something then. I should've said something instead of running away.

Molly is very uncomfortable at this point.

MOLLY

(softly)

Sheldon?

He looks up at her expectantly. She snaps directly in front of his eyes.

MOLLY

That's quite enough.

It doesn't take. He remains hypnotized, emotional.

SHELDON

I was afraid. You have so much of my heart, so much, and what if you don't want it?

Molly is stricken by this, and something comes over her. She seems to grow taller, more ominous, gaining power over Sheldon. Her temper snaps.

MOLLY

(violently, with authority)

That is enough, Sheldon.

He returns from his fog with a slight start, perhaps crumpling somewhat. Molly, equally startled with herself, takes a calming breath.

MOLLY

Sheldon?

SHELDON

Yes?

MOLLY

Are you with me?

SHELDON

Yes.

Molly turns to the audience trying to hide that she's shaken. She mostly succeeds.

MOLLY

How about a round of applause for our courageous volunteer?

Sheldon looks puzzled. He has no memory of anything that's taken place.

MOLLY

Thank you Sheldon, you've been a sport. And I suggest you speak with Esther after the show.

SHELDON

She's here.

MOLLY

Then I imagine she'll want to speak with you. You may return to your seat.

She walks him to the edge of the stage.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen: The Uncaged Heart.

She bows. CURTAIN.

Behind the curtain, Roger and Dante approach Molly. She wipes her brow, setting her hat on her chair.

ROGER

What in the world was that? Some schlub spills his heart? Great way to start a magic career.

MOLLY

It needs two chairs! That's it. It's very straightforward. I need one chair for the volunteer, one for myself.

ROGER

What a snore.

MOLLY

They didn't think so.

Roger begins clearing set pieces. Molly fiddles with her hat. She produces a rose from it, disappears it. She repeats this process absentmindedly.

DANTE

You want to end it before it gets sad like that.

MOLLY

I know.

DANTE

You don't need to push so far with everything.

MOLLY

Yes I do.

DANTE

It could use a little dressing up. Crowd gets bored with you sitting there.

ROGER

No kidding.

MOLLY

At least it's an original trick!

DANTE

Enough. Enough you two. Christ, it's like having children. It's a fine set piece, but dress it up. Not bad for a first show.

Molly stops running tricks with the hat for a second to look up to Dante.

MOLLY

You think so?

DANTE

Kid, for a first show, I think you know that wasn't bad. Might want to introduce yourself at the beginning.

She LAUGHS.

MOLLY

I got nervous.

DANTE

(to Roger)

If two chairs is too much to ask, this may be the end of the road for you.

Roger sulks. Molly goes back to fiddling with her hat.

DANTE

Well?

ROGER

Two chairs.

DANTE

Maybe more once we get this piece right.

(checks watch)

We're on the 12:25.

Dante looks to Molly.

DANTE

Take a break.

Molly looks up.

DANTE

Celebrate for a second.

Dante exits. Molly sets the hat down for a moment, surveying the set.

MOLLY

Did go pretty well, huh? All things considered.

ROGER

Say, when you look out before the show, who are you looking for? If it isn't Dante...

MOLLY

Nobody.

Roger starts clearing chairs as Dante re-enters with a trunk. He moves towards Molly's hat.

MOLLY

Oh, I'll take that.

Dante reaches to grab for it.

MOLLY

(a little too forceful)

No!

She grabs his hand, stopping him as she picks the hat up with her other.

MOLLY

I can get it.

Dante and Roger study her as she firmly fixes the hat on her head.

DANTE

Sure. You've got it.

Molly exits. Dante and Roger share a look. Dante exits, leaving Roger to collect his things as LIGHTS FADE.

11 SCENE ELEVEN: A THEATER

11

A GHOST LIGHT shines. Molly enters with her trunk and a smaller case, which is locked, through the house doors onto an empty stage.

MOLLY

Hello?

She walks towards center stage, setting her trunk down.

MOLLY

Hello? Mr. Danbury? The Daughter of Algiers is here.

The GHOST LIGHT FLICKERS. She studies it, frightened.

But nobody's there. The theater is empty.

She sits on her trunk, lockbox sitting on her lap. Roger enters carrying another.

She waves.

ROGER

You're early.

She shrugs.

MOLLY

What time is it?

ROGER

Quarter past three. The trunks were stuck at the station, [that's why I'm late]. I also picked up some mail.

MOLLY

Okay.

He holds up some letters.

ROGER

Aren't you from Evanston?

MOLLY

Why?

ROGER

I think you got a letter from your nobody.

He hands her an envelope. She looks at it, trying to conceal her eagerness. She pockets it, then looks back to Roger, businesslike once more.

MOLLY

Thank you.

Roger wheels a large chalkboard out to center, in a wide loop, revealing both sides to be blank. He covers it with a sheet.

ROGER

Aren't you going to read it?

MOLLY

What's the difference? You read every piece of junk that comes from Tulsa?

She begins to pull her trunk apart, bringing out several props.

ROGER

What's in the lock box?

MOLLY

Nothing.

ROGER

Lot of secrets, that's all I'm saying.

MOLLY

Nothing strange about that.

ROGER

You always knew how all my tricks were done.

MOLLY

And look where that got you.

Roger nods, angry.

MOLLY

I'm sorry, Rog. I didn't mean that.

ROGER

No, you're right. Say, I met a fellow from Evanston the other day.

MOLLY

Who?

ROGER

I don't recall his name. Nice enough guy. Said some curious things about Algiers. How he died.

MOLLY

What about it?

ROGER

Suspicious stuff's all.

MOLLY

Like what?

ROGER
All sorts of rumors, I suppose.

MOLLY
What rumors?

ROGER
I'm just kidding around. Giving you a hard time.

MOLLY
Well cut it out.

Molly pulls a key on a chain from
around her neck, unlocking the box. She
opens it and pulls out her hat.

Roger LAUGHS.

ROGER
You take everything so personal.

He exits. Molly walks to the
chalkboard, pulling the sheet back to
reveal in large letters: "THIEF."

The GHOST LIGHT FLICKERS again as Dante
enters.

Molly turns, startled.

DANTE
(re: chalkboard)
What's this?

MOLLY
Roger's idea of a practical joke.

DANTE
Thief?

Molly begins to erase the board.

MOLLY
He's right.

DANTE
Can't be so hard on yourself. He had his shows. Yours are
better.

MOLLY
Maybe.

DANTE
I'll talk with him.

MOLLY

No, don't.

DANTE

It'd be my pleasure. Kid's been screwing up ever since we switched the billing. Can't be a coincidence.

MOLLY

I suppose not.

(beat)

They are better, aren't they?

DANTE

Of course. When you've got real magic...

He winks at her before he exits.

Molly smiles. She turns the board over to reveal writing on the other side as well: "IMPOSTOR."

She erases this, turning the board over again. This side now has writing on it as well: "MURDERER."

She erases this furiously. Slowly, cautiously, she flips the board over again to reveal: "YOU WILL PAY."

She drops her hat to the ground, frightened.

The GHOST LIGHT FLICKERS again. Then, abruptly, LIGHTS OUT.

INTERMISSION?

12 SCENE TWELVE: A THEATER

12

LIGHTS UP. The curtain is down. Molly sits on a stool backstage.

She pulls the letter out of her jacket pocket, looking at it expectantly, reverentially.

She opens it, scanning quickly. Surprised, she reads through once more from the beginning, more slowly, proving the contents of the letter to herself.

She is visibly shaken, upset.

Roger enters from the house.

Molly, hearing Roger, stands, frozen,
clutching the letter center stage.

ROGER

Hello, Mol.

She doesn't respond.

ROGER

Bad news?

MOLLY

You're late, Roger.

ROGER

I was actually talking to the house manager about --

MOLLY

I don't need an excuse. Get to work.

ROGER

You're unbearable lately, you know?

He exits. Molly slams her lock box down
on the floor as Dante enters.

DANTE

You scratch the floor it's coming out of your advance.

Molly turns to him.

MOLLY

Sorry.

DANTE

Care to tell me why you're abusing the trunks?

MOLLY

Roger's prying, needling.

DANTE

Trying to discover your secrets? You must be doing something
right then.

MOLLY

I thought eventually it'd be a good fit.

DANTE

Still could be.

MOLLY

I don't think so.

Dante picks up the last remaining trunks on stage.

MOLLY

Do you mind if we try a new number in rehearsal?

DANTE

Never mind everybody working.

He goes to pick up the lock box as well. It falls away from him with a THUD.

MOLLY

Don't touch that. I've told you.

DANTE

Yes ma'am.

He exits. Curtains come down on both wings, Molly fussing over them.

DANTE (O.S.)

Alright, alright. We'll worry about the curtains later.

She moves to center stage.

MOLLY

(rehearsing)

Ladies and gentlemen, I am The Daughter of Algiers, and I intend not to offend, I speak as a scholar... The theater is very old, older than Greece. And then I have a bit about how everyone in the audience has been an actor, since they've done what we're about to see, which I think is pretty good... Uh, then we move to... I just introduce it. Honored guests: The Wedding!

She claps her hands and the curtains fall on each wing.

MOLLY

That's when the cross enters.

A cross is flown in center.

MOLLY

Enter bridal party.

A line of gowns is flown in as well.

MOLLY

Enter groomsmen.

A line of tuxedos is flown in. It snags.

MOLLY

Hold. What's that caught on? Must be the rigging for Eager Assistant. We'll fix that.

(to Dante)

Anyway, there's groomsmen.

Burt enters, along the line of the tuxedos, moving to center. Alone, nervous, not in this scene.

MOLLY

(indicates)

Solemn, dutiful, et cetera. And then I have an introduction until POOF! A cloud of smoke. The Priest. Maybe he looks like the devil?

Clearly visible from a trapdoor, a PRIEST enters center stage. He opens his bible.

MOLLY

Yes, yes, very officious.

Molly walks down the staircase, down the center row of the house, towards the house door.

MOLLY

But where is... something, something... the bubbling, beautiful, bountiful bride?

Silence.

MOLLY

(to back)

That's your cue. The beautiful, bountiful bride.

THE WEDDING MARCH begins to PLAY.

MOLLY

So ebullient with the thought of her happily ever after? Why she's being done up, prim and proper, ready to be wed, binded and bound, til death do us part.

The rear curtains part. Beautifully backlit is EMILY, fair in her wedding gown.

Dante, who has been sitting in the house, calls out.

DANTE

Alright, hold it! Let's hold! Where's the bride?

MOLLY

You're looking at her.

DANTE

(sighs)

Proceed.

Molly steps back to the same line as Emily, holding her hands out in front of her.

MOLLY

Roger enters with the rope.

Roger enters, holding a long length of rope, a chain, and a set of locks.

MOLLY

Dearly beloved, might we have three volunteers to help us tie the knot, so to speak?

THREE VOLUNTEERS are produced from the audience. (Real)

MOLLY

And what is your name? Are you with the bride or the groom?

Introductions are made with the other two volunteers as well.

Volunteer's response.

MOLLY

Thank you all for coming. Oh if they're with the bridal party, that question doesn't work... Now

(to volunteer one)

If you _____ would take this rope, and tie my hands and feet however you'd like.

Roger hands the volunteer the rope.

MOLLY

(to second volunteer)

And you _____ will take this chain, also binding me however you see fit.

(to third volunteer)

And you _____ can place these locks however might be most secure.

Roger dispenses the other items.

MOLLY

Don't fear, no bond is too tight when it comes to matrimony.
(as they begin to bind her)
I think this will take them a while, I'm assuming.

Molly continues to VAMP as the
Volunteers bind her.

MOLLY

Excellent. And you're certain these are secure?

Volunteer's responses.

MOLLY

I suppose we'll have to see. Thank you. Now if you would be
so kind as to stand here with the rest of the bridal party,
we can begin the ceremony.

(to Roger)

So you will take them to that line there.

Roger takes the volunteers over to join
the bridal party.

A STAGEHAND/JAMES TEAK emerges,
grabbing the now struggling Molly.

MOLLY

(marking through it)

No, I won't marry this man. You can't make me. It's a sham! A
marriage of convenience! Something along these lines. No,
please, and so on, as he drags me down the aisle.

The Stagehand begins dragging her down
the aisle.

MOLLY

Oh! A burlap, do we have any burlap? A burlap sack, over the
head. Maybe with the veil over it like some sick joke. We'll
work that later.

As the stagehand lugs Molly up the
aisle, on his other side, Emily walks
beautifully, expectantly, full of
excitement, her eyes fixed demurely on
her feet.

The two stand opposite Burt.

MOLLY

(off)

Do we have any burlap? From the blind? I'd like to see if...

As a stagehand brings this on for her,
Burt & Emily's scene continues.

The Stagehand/James Teak says a few soft words to Burt, then steps over to "the groomsmen."

The stagehand places the sack over her head.

The Priest begins to speak.

PRIEST

What a joyous and propitious occasion, the beginning of a marriage. The bonds of love forged through years of steady conversation between the two of you, a shared smile, a longing look, are stronger than steel. And in the eyes of man, you already belong together. In the eyes of god, we make it official. Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, 'til death do you part?

Burt hesitates. He nods.

PRIEST

(turns to the bride)

And do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?

Emily nods.

PRIEST

You may now kiss the bride.

Burt lifts Emily's veil.

PRIEST

Perhaps we should...

(breaking character)

I'm not off book yet, what's the line. You two should have privacy...

(looks in Bible)

Ah! Yes. We should give you two some privacy, for this most intimate of firsts. A couple's first kiss as man and wife.

Roger wheels out a large partition, which blocks Emily, Molly, and Burt from view.

The wedding party looks on anxiously. A few moments pass.

PRIEST

Alright, alright. That's quite enough time.

Roger removes the partition to reveal Molly standing alone, the chains and ropes at her feet, she's escaped!

She takes a little bow as the LIGHTS FADE. The rest of the wedding party begins to recede to the wings, as Dante approaches.

DANTE
That's five everyone. Thank you.
(clears volunteers off stage)
Thank you, you can go back now.

MOLLY
A beat earlier on that removal, Roger.

ROGER
You said you wanted --

MOLLY
I don't care what I said. That's what it needs.

ROGER
I can't.

He leaves, angry.

MOLLY
Oh for god's sake.

Molly and Dante stand alone on stage.
He paces around a bit.

MOLLY
Well?

DANTE
Okay.

MOLLY
Okay?

DANTE
You don't need my permission to put anything new in.

MOLLY
I'm asking for your opinion.

DANTE
It'll work nicely between The Eager Assistant and Torn in Two.

MOLLY

Same set ups. Is it... But, what do you think?

DANTE

It's different for you.

MOLLY

I don't think so.

DANTE

What happens to the groom?

MOLLY

That's not important. It's an escape.

DANTE

Not very satisfying to have him disappear.

MOLLY

We're tracking her. She's free.

DANTE

A lot of people, a lot of women, especially, they want the wedding to happen. So I'm just not sure what story you're telling.

MOLLY

It's staying in.

DANTE

It's your show.

He has one more thing to say. Should he?

DANTE

I think what's disappointing is there's not really any magic to it.

MOLLY

I'm escaping from chains, from ropes, from locks. Two people disappear. In fifteen seconds. Ten seconds if Roger doesn't goof it up. Don't tell me that isn't impressive.

DANTE

You know what I mean.

MOLLY

Book our shows, tell me if it works, but keep your nose out of it, alright?

DANTE

It's too late for that, kid!

MOLLY

If I want your opinion on what "magic" is, I'll ask you.

DANTE

You don't want to talk to me, fine. But you might want to talk to somebody about whatever the hell is going on with you!

MOLLY

Leave me alone. I'm tired.

DANTE

From all the work I've gotten you!

MOLLY

Scrabbling for shows when I'm doing something that doesn't exist anywhere else? Have you gotten me even one solo engagement? Have you gotten me anything I couldn't have gotten for myself?

DANTE

Don't you dare say I haven't done anything for you. Because I have done things I wouldn't do for anyone else. You know my secrets, and I know yours.

She fiddles with her hat. Produces a rose. It disappears in a FLASH.

MOLLY

I'm done talking.

She continues to practice.

DANTE

Why don't you cut that out for a minute?

She stops, looking at him.

DANTE

You me and Rog, we go out for dinner, drinks?

MOLLY

I don't want to deal with Roger trying to pull everything apart anymore.

DANTE

We decided that. That's a choice you made.

MOLLY

Maybe it was wrong!

DANTE

It's too late for right or wrong.

MOLLY

Leave me alone! I'm tired of both of you and I just want a moment to myself. Alright?

DANTE

Fine.

He heads off.

MOLLY

I'm sorry. Ton'!

Molly fidgets, eventually pulling the letter out from her coat, rereading it. As she does, Burt carries Emily out from behind the partition, across the threshold into their home.

BURT

Here we are.

EMILY

I wouldn't rather be any place else.

They kiss. LIGHTS OUT.

13 SCENE THIRTEEN: A THEATER

13

LIGHTS SLOWLY RISE, Molly still seated, letter in hand. Stagehands and Roger move props and set pieces around her.

DANTE

Places everyone.

Molly doesn't acknowledge him.

DANTE

One minute, Mol.

She nods.

MOLLY

Tony?

DANTE

What is it?

MOLLY

You aren't sore with me, are you?

DANTE

Course not. No more than usual.

Okay.

You're on.

The curtains part once more. Molly remains frozen center. After an uncomfortable beat she holds the letter aloft.

We travel fifty two weeks a year, to hundreds of cities across the United States, and abroad. The only interaction a magician has is with her trusted assistant...

Roger enters with a pitcher of water and an empty fishbowl, which he places on the podium.

Thank you, Roger.

Gladly, Mol.

(sarcastic)

She glares at him just a moment as he heads off but quickly gains her composure.

And of course, the mail.

She holds the letter aloft.

But words can't compete with companionship, with physical presence, so many magicians bring animals, pets, into their acts: rabbits, doves, lions.

Perhaps she makes little stuffed animals, or carved wooden figurines, appear as she lists each animal.

These are all enormously expensive, and take a significant amount of space. Which is why, I prefer to travel with a magic fish. You can feed him words, and nothing more...

She tears the letter up, then sprinkles the paper bits into the fishbowl.

And just add water... MOLLY

She pours the water into the fishbowl.

Give it a quick stir. MOLLY

She produces a magic wand, which she uses to stir the bowl, and as she does so: a goldfish appears in the bowl. It swims around.

A friend. A companion. Who will never leave your side. MOLLY

She takes her hat, placing it over the fishbowl.

Until you tell it to. MOLLY

She lifts the hat back up. The fish now floats at the surface, dead.

Surprised, she doesn't know what to do. She looks to the wings, gesturing for them to do something.

CURTAIN.

What in the hell happened? MOLLY

Alright, Rog, could you check the other fish? DANTE

What happened? ROGER

I don't know. What did happen? MOLLY

I didn't do anything. ROGER

Of course you didn't. The fish just happened to die at exactly the right moment. MOLLY

I seriously doubt -- DANTE

ROGER
Maybe you bored it to death.

MOLLY
And did I tell you to speak on stage?

ROGER
I was doing a bit. They eat up that angry assistant schtick.

MOLLY
I don't think it's schtick.

ROGER
It's a bit.

MOLLY
You do what I tell you. That's it. You don't do anything else, you understand me?

ROGER
What's eating at you? God! It's not like I ran out and did my old act.

MOLLY
You are sabotaging my show!

ROGER
Do you really believe that, Molly? That I've been plotting for years? That I would kill a fish, to get back at you?

MOLLY
Would you?

DANTE
That is enough!

MOLLY
I don't know how you did it, but I know it was you. Always fiddling with the props.

ROGER
That is my job! My only job at this point.

MOLLY
Not anymore. You're fired.

ROGER
Thank you.

Roger exits.

MOLLY

And if I hear you're performing a single... so help me!
(to Dante)

What?

DANTE

Nothing. I'll go place an ad. You know you have to do that.
Something's in your way.

MOLLY

Where do you think he'll go?

DANTE

What does it matter?

Dante studies Molly for a moment.

DANTE

Look on the bright side, finally got yourself an honest to
god solo show.

The GHOST LIGHT FLICKERS. Somewhere,
maybe in Molly's mind, The Ghost of
Algiers LAUGHS.

LIGHTS OUT.

14 SCENE FOURTEEN: A THEATER

14

Molly enters from the house doors,
wearing her tuxedo and top hat. She
walks to center stage, placing a trunk
down. She takes the hat off, letting
her hair down, wiping her brow. She
then exits upstage left.

Just a moment after she exits, sooner
than is possible, she enters again
through the house doors. In the same
clothes, she does the same thing,
exiting again.

Molly enters a third time through the
house doors, depositing a third trunk.
This time she begins to unpack the
trunk.

MOLLY

What day is it again?

Dante enters, lugging his own trunk.

DANTE

Thursday. Syracuse was Monday, Buffalo was Wednesday.

MOLLY

What time is the show tonight?

DANTE

Tonight? No show. You have a day off. Well deserved, too.

She stops unpacking the trunk, unsure
of what to do.

MOLLY

Oh. But we're in the space already?

DANTE

They had an opening. Thought it might be nice to load in
early for a change.

MOLLY

Okay.

She unlocks a small trunk, pulling out
her hat.

DANTE

Say, you still lock that up, huh? Even just the two of us?

MOLLY

Guess I got in the habit.

DANTE

Guess so.

She sits on one of the trunks.

DANTE

Let's head down to the Green Pony. I've got an old booking
friend works there now.

MOLLY

No, no. You have your day off. I'll be alright by myself.

DANTE

Look, there's a lotta hurt feelings in show business. Come
have a drink with me.

MOLLY

Can I just miss my friend now, please?

DANTE

Don't forget about Tony Dante. He's your friend too.

MOLLY

Only one.

THE GHOST LIGHT FLICKERS. A cable falls from the piping of the theater, in the same place where Algiers once hung himself.

DANTE

Come with me, Molly. You shouldn't be by yourself.

THE GHOST LIGHT FLICKERS.

DANTE

Really, it's for the best.

She shrugs.

DANTE

You ask me, you didn't ever need him. Wouldn't be here today if you did.

He leaves her with her trunks of tricks.

She begins to cry.

She climbs into one of the trunks, letting the lid slam shut. She is trapped inside.

SILENCE.

An ASSISTANT, a young girl, enters, sliding the trunk forward and center away from the others.

She spins the trunk around so the audience can see each side. Then she opens a slot on one side: Molly's arm sticks out. She does the same on the other side: Molly's other arm.

She then opens a slot on the bottom: Molly's left leg. Another slot: Molly's right.

Another ASSISTANT enters with a large saw, which they place lengthwise along the trunk. They begin to SAW the trunk in half. The arms and legs twist and shudder violently amidst MUFFLED SCREAMS.

They place two long metal plates in the newly sawed line along the trunk, separating the trunk a few feet.

They spin each section, demonstrating that the hands and feet are real.

They then place the segments together again, removing the metal plates. They open the clasps, popping the lid up and open.

A YOUNG GIRL steps up out of the trunk striking a pose with a smile.

From the back of the house, APPLAUSE. Molly appears in a spotlight, her clothes torn.

MOLLY

Alright, well done.

She walks down the aisle towards the stage, all business, but a bit distracted. She inspects the trunk, the metal plates, the assistants.

YOUNG GIRL

Oh, thank you Ms. Algiers.

MOLLY

Molly's fine.

YOUNG GIRL

It's really a beautiful trick.

MOLLY

Tell that to the critics.

YOUNG GIRL

You're the reason I wanted to get into show business you know.

MOLLY

Mm-hm.

YOUNG GIRL

I grew up hearing stories about you. That you could do things no other magician could. Truly magical things.

MOLLY

Mm-hm.

(to the other assistants)

Maybe some blood? A pool?

YOUNG GIRL

Every bit you do is so... wonderful. Almost made me believe... I know it's all fake, but, still.

MOLLY

I can't have you saying that, if you work for me.

YOUNG GIRL

Of course not.

MOLLY

Everything you say, everything you do, on stage, or off, everything will be magic. Your life is this show. You understand?

YOUNG GIRL

Of course.

MOLLY

The moments between performances, our travel arrangements, our sets, they are all under scrutiny. Someone is always watching. I have enemies. I need someone who understands that.

YOUNG GIRL

I understand.

MOLLY

I will ask you to do frightening things. Dangerous things. I will ask you to leave everything and everyone behind, every night.

YOUNG GIRL

If that's what it takes.

MOLLY

That's what it takes.

Molly takes her hat off, and pulls some paperwork out of it, which she hands to the girl.

YOUNG GIRL

You mean it? I got the job?

Molly smiles. She's enjoying this now.

MOLLY

Will you work harder than anybody else?

The girl nods.

MOLLY

Will you deny the impossible? Challenge gravity? Defy god himself if I tell you to?

YOUNG GIRL

Of course I will.

MOLLY

And will you keep your mouth shut?

YOUNG GIRL

Yes, ma'am.

MOLLY

Good.

(also produced from her hat)

Your non-disclosure agreement. Have Tony explain these to you before you sign.

YOUNG GIRL

Is it true, I read that, you're the daughter of an Indian princess and The Great Algiers?

MOLLY

True as anything else.

The Young Girl doesn't entirely know what to make of that answer, even if it is exciting.

Dante enters.

MOLLY

Tony, would you take care of this young lady here?

DANTE

My pleasure.

Molly starts to leave without so much as a second glance.

DANTE

(to Young Girl)

Why don't we head back to the manager's office?

YOUNG GIRL

Ms. Algiers, Molly?

Molly stops.

YOUNG GIRL

You said you had enemies. Who are they?

MOLLY

The competition. Other magicians. The five or six assistants I've fired.

A SANDBAG falls on stage. Molly and Dante share a look.

MOLLY

(smiles)

Ghosts.

(beat)

Before you sign anything, consider the rewards, consider the costs.

YOUNG GIRL

I have.

Molly exits. LIGHTS OUT.

15 SCENE FIFTEEN: THE IROQUOIS THEATER

15

Pre-show. The curtain is down, and we can see through it.

Dante paces the stage as Molly stands still. Her ASSISTANT, the Young Girl from the previous scene, moves around adjusting set pieces and props diligently, frightened of making a mistake. A side table, an opaque partition like the ones used to change behind, and a pistol are placed onstage.

DANTE

I don't like it.

MOLLY

You're superstitious.

DANTE

You constantly need to push the envelope.

MOLLY

I do.

DANTE

Chung Ling Soo died doing this.

MOLLY

This isn't a bullet catch and you know it.

DANTE

No! People will think it's more dangerous.

MOLLY

It is not.

DANTE

And how do you propose we explain that to your audience?

MOLLY
(to Assistant)
Be sure to keep the "Live Rounds" logo towards the house.

Her Assistant adjusts a box of bullets.

DANTE
Well?

MOLLY
(to Assistant)
What did I tell you?

ASSISTANT
Don't tell Tony how it's done.

DANTE
I know how everything's done.

MOLLY
(smiles)
I don't know if I believe you.

DANTE
I've been around a long time, kid. You can't keep anything secret from Tony Dante. Neither could Al.

A STAGEHAND enters.

STAGEHAND
That's places, Mr. Dante.

DANTE
Thank you.

MOLLY
(to Dante)
You want to go on with me?

DANTE
For Christ's sake.

He moves, frustrated, to the wings.

CURTAIN RISES. A SPOTLIGHT hits Molly.

MOLLY
Ladies and gentlemen, I am The Daughter of Algiers. Many of my colleagues will come before you and claim to have defied death. One mystic, whom I shall not name, even claims to have lived some 300 years after exile by the maharaja. But, few of them will ever defy death before your very eyes. That's because, many of them may have, shall we say, embellished, their abilities. I will not do that.

I will simply show them to you today. I do not mean to say that what they do may not be dangerous. Anything performed with a live gun and live ammunition is indeed, very dangerous. And I know many who have died attempting similar spectacles.

Her assistant holds the pistol aloft, as well as a bullet. She loads the pistol, as Molly retrieves the partition.

MOLLY

Which is why, for your own dignity. I shall stand behind this partition. Only in case something terrible should happen, to shield you from the possible horrors that could unfold. First, a simple test of accuracy.

(to Assistant)

If you would.

Her Assistant hands her an orange.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen, an ordinary orange.

She retreats behind the partition, which blocks her from the audience's view. Her silhouette however, is clearly visible as she is backlit.

Her assistant raises the gun, aiming steadily at the orange on Molly's head. She FIRES.

The gun recoils with smoke as the orange falls to the ground, rolling out from behind the partition.

Molly walks out after it, picking it up. She shows it to the audience, displaying that a hole has been shot through the orange.

MOLLY

We are using a very real pistol, and very real bullets. Which have beautifully pierced this very real orange. There is nothing terribly magical about a bullet passing through an orange.

Molly tosses this into the audience.

She produces another orange from the hat.

MOLLY

Now, for something a little more... death-defying. Certain magic, certain charms, ancient and powerful, have been placed on objects for centuries. A lucky amulet, a talisman. Many of those objects will improve the wearer's luck, or watch over them. But there is a more powerful charm, a more remarkable magic, known only by a few, which, when placed upon an object: a charm, or even, a hat, would protect the wearer from death himself.

She places the hat on her head.

She places the orange in her teeth, biting down on it. She walks back behind the curtain, her shadow again clearly visible.

She takes a few moments to get ready, adjusting her stance. She leans forward slightly, leading with the orange so that it is closest to her assistant.

The Assistant again loads the pistol. She raises it to aim at Molly.

Molly nods. Her assistant takes a deep breath and FIRES.

Something SPLATTERS across the dressing screen. The orange falls out of Molly's mouth. She crumples to the ground as well.

A beat.

Her shadow stands, placing the hat back on her head, holding the orange in her hand.

She moves out from behind the partition, holding the orange aloft.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen, The Bulletproof Orange.

She pulls a knife out, cutting the orange in half carefully, to reveal a bullet lodged in the center.

She takes a bow.

CURTAIN. Lights shift so that it becomes transparent. Dante approaches Molly, as she packs her belongings.

MOLLY

It's not enough of a spectacle.

DANTE

Are you deaf? Did you hear that scream? The applause?

Molly moves about, business-like,
efficient.

MOLLY

(to Assistant)

On the second shot, I need you to really take your time
aiming. Reluctant, scared...

ASSISTANT

Scared I'll kill you?

MOLLY

And you'll be out of a job.

(yells off)

I want blue backlight! Not red!

She places her hat in a lock box, which
she places into a trunk she locks as
well.

DANTE

Take a breath, kid. Take a breath.

He stops Molly.

DANTE

We're here all week. Remember?

MOLLY

All week?

DANTE

You keep the houses full, we'll stay all year.

Molly, suddenly exhausted, heavy, sits
on a trunk.

DANTE

(to assistant)

You run along now, no need to put anything away tonight.
We'll clean the stage tomorrow. Call's an hour early though.

ASSISTANT

Thank you.

DANTE

Apartments are upstairs. You're the third door.

ASSISTANT
Good night.

Molly nods.

DANTE
Good night, dear.

She exits.

DANTE
You hear what I said, Mol? Management wants to sign you to an exclusive contract. For a year.

MOLLY
I heard you.

DANTE
No more trains.

MOLLY
I like our train.

DANTE
Best news a magician could get in his career.

MOLLY
Her career.

DANTE
You should be jumping for joy, here, kid. I figured you'd run down Broadway singing at the top of your lungs.

MOLLY
I'm tired is all.

DANTE
You can really be a brat you know? Don't know why I give my life when you don't even give a rat's ass one way or the other.

Molly turns, staring back at the partition, as though she sees something behind it.

DANTE
Only four or five wands have been exclusive at The Iroquois, and you're one of 'em. Algiers himself never even got this offer.

MOLLY
He's here.

Who? Roger? DANTE

Algiers. MOLLY

Al never played here. DANTE

He's everywhere. MOLLY

Molly nearly swoons, she doesn't look well.

Mol? You okay? DANTE

I just need to rest. To sleep. MOLLY

Let's not talk about Al. Get to bed. DANTE

Thank you, Ton. I... don't know what's come over me. MOLLY

Forget it. Will you be alright? DANTE

I just need to sleep. You go out. I'm fine. MOLLY

Go lie down. DANTE

Dante leaves.

Molly pulls a ghost light from the wings, dragging it out behind the screen partition, turning it on. She looks cautiously behind the screen.

It FLICKERS, casting an eerie shadow from behind the screen.

Molly moves to the other side of the stage, where a props table sits. On the table is a safe. She opens it, placing her hat & its lockbox inside.

She then moves back across the stage. As she passes the ghost light, it again FLICKERS. She studies it for a moment.

Then, as though drawn to it, captivated by it, she moves slightly closer, studying it intently. She stares, hypnotized.

LIGHTS FADE - except for the GHOST LIGHT, which continues to FLICKER, more and more pronounced. It's short circuiting. Molly collapses.

16 SCENE SIXTEEN: UPSTAIRS AT THE IROQUOIS

16

LIGHTS UP stage left, where Dante enters drunk. Molly's Assistant lies asleep in a cot, next to an empty one. Smoke billows, filling the stage.

DANTE

She's ungrateful. An ungrateful, un-Great-full...

He waves his hand, trying to get the smoke out of his face.

DANTE

That's enough smoke. Al always wanted more smoke. So much people'd think there was a fire. Fire? Fire! Girls! Fire! Molly!

The Assistant wakes up.

ASSISTANT

What?

DANTE

Theater's on fire, where's Mol?

LOLA

I don't know... with you?

DANTE

Like hell she is!

ASSISTANT

(still groggy)

Probably in the theater.

(suddenly fully awake)

What can I do?

Dante looks across the stage into the flames and smoke.

DANTE

Run. Back of the hall there's an exit to the alley. Run. Run!

Assistant exits out the back of the theater.

DANTE

Molly! Mol!

Dante runs to center, where he sees Mol, passed out on the ground, in the smoke.

DANTE

Wake up! Molly! Wake up!

She won't budge.

DANTE

Come on, kid! Come on.

He picks her up, slinging her over his shoulder, without any grace.

DANTE

Where's your hat, Mol? Your hat? Damn it, Molly!

She doesn't respond. Dante lugs her out of the theater. Once empty, the GHOST LIGHT begins SHINING behind the partition once more, BRIGHTER and BRIGHTER.

A SILHOUETTE appears: THE GHOST OF ALGIERS. It trails a long rope from its neck as it moves across the stage. It picks up a hat, placing it on its head.

Dante reenters the theater, SMOKE fills the air.

He COUGHS violently.

As he turns to see the Ghost of Algiers, Algiers turns to him as well.

DANTE

Al?

The partition bursts into flames.

Dante looks around once more, unsure what to do. He tugs at one locked box, then another. He can't open anything. He can barely breathe.

A set piece falls, on fire.

Finally, he exits the theater as it
burns to the ground.

END OF ACT.

ACT THREE: DEATH OF A MAGICIAN

17 SCENE SEVENTEEN: THE IROQUOIS THEATER

17

Two STAGEHANDS enter the burnt down remains of the theater. They hold gas lamps, which provide the only light.

STAGEHAND 1

My god.

STAGEHAND 2

Like walking into hell.

They walk through the space, surveying broken and burnt pieces of the show.

STAGEHAND 2

What exactly are we looking for?

The first stagehand has by now made his way over to what once may have been the prop table. He stands over a melted, not quite square, metal container: the safe.

STAGEHAND 1

This.

He picks it up, lugging it to center stage.

STAGEHAND 2

That's it?

He slams it down onto the ground with a KLANG.

STAGEHAND 1

That's it. Open it.

The other stagehand grabs a large crowbar and a sledge hammer.

STAGEHAND 2

What's supposed to be in here?

STAGEHAND 1

None of our business. They just want it's all.

STAGEHAND 2

Whatever's inside's burned up. Safe's near melted.

STAGEHAND 1

Just open it.

He sets to it, sparks flying as they loudly try to break the safe apart.

CURTAIN.

18 SCENE EIGHTEEN: A HOSPITAL

18

LIGHTS UP. Dante lies in bed, badly burnt. Molly enters. He looks up to her.

DANTE

The Daughter of Algiers.

Molly starts, but conceals it well.

MOLLY

Billed as The Great Molly now.

DANTE

I know, I know.

MOLLY

How you doing, Tony?

DANTE

You know.

MOLLY

The Evanston deal went through.

DANTE

Good, that's good.

They sit in silence a few moments.

MOLLY

We had a fine first show back. Didn't have a single prop, except a ladder and a broom they let me borrow from The Algonquin. But it was a fine show.

DANTE

I'm sorry Molly.

MOLLY

Lola and I bought twelve new hats in San Francisco.

DANTE

With Algiers... I was his friend, you know?

MOLLY

You should rest now.

DANTE

You understand? I knew. We worked together twenty six years, and he...

MOLLY

You let that go. That's years ago now.

DANTE

No, that's not. That's --

MOLLY

What then?

DANTE

I know! You understand? I know.

MOLLY

Know what, Ton?

DANTE

The hat. Al, he could do anything with that hat.

MOLLY

I am through talking about him. I've talked about him enough.

DANTE

You then. Always locked up, always safe. Nobody could touch it, nobody could know.

MOLLY

That's a part of the act. You know that. Mysteries and secrets.

DANTE

Roger suspected, and --

MOLLY

We decided --

DANTE

And then gone. But then I realized. That's why. You touched the hat next.

MOLLY

Tony, you handed me the hat. Remember?

DANTE

No.

MOLLY

You handed it to me, in Evanston. Tony? It's just a hat.

DANTE

Don't lie to me. Not to me.

MOLLY

I don't know what you're talking about.

DANTE

I'm the only one who knows. Just tell me. Just tell me for once.

MOLLY

You're the only one, Ton. That I didn't have to lie to.

DANTE

At the Iroquois. He was there, behind the curtain. We saw him, you and me. We both did.

MOLLY

Algiers is dead. He's been gone a long time.

DANTE

I let him, I let him take it back. I let everything go up in smoke.

Molly studies him for a moment.

MOLLY

Hey, hey.

Dante looks up at her. Molly magically produces the hat. It's tattered, singed, but it's Algiers' hat, her hat.

MOLLY

Not quite.

Dante smiles.

DANTE

I told you I knew.

MOLLY

You did.

DANTE

So, now you're here, you can make me better.

Molly shakes her head.

MOLLY

I don't think I can, Tony.

DANTE

I did everything for you. You can, you can do this for me.

She nods.

MOLLY

Okay. Let me take the pain away.

She rests a hand on his forehead, the other on his chest.

MOLLY

I'll need this.

She puts the hat back on.

DANTE

Thank you, thank you.

MOLLY

Shh. Close your eyes now, close them, heavy. So heavy. And just relax. Rest, sleep.

DANTE

You were always better than him. Always.

MOLLY

Quiet now. Rest, sleep.

Dante begins to relax under her touch.

MOLLY

You can let the pain go now. Let it go. Rest, sleep.

DANTE

I think it's working.

MOLLY

Sh. Quiet. Let everything go. Let go of your weight, of gravity, of me. There won't be any pain. There won't be any fear. Rest, sleep. Let yourself go. Let everything go.

Dante dies. Molly sits back, and looks at him a moment. She stands. She wipes her eyes, then readjusts her hair. She places the hat back on her head.

MOLLY

Goodbye my friend.

She exits. LIGHTS OUT.

LIGHTS UP on Burt, standing alone in the theater.

Molly enters, carrying a heavy trunk in one hand, her hat in the other.

She walks right up behind Burt, setting her trunk down behind him.

MOLLY

(booming)

Burt Sullivan!

He jumps, startled, turning to see Molly standing there, smiling.

BURT

Molly Mackenzie, as I live and breathe!

He turns to hug her excitedly, but suppresses some of his emotion. They don't touch.

BURT

You nearly scared me half to death.

MOLLY

I owed you a fright, didn't I?

BURT

Who can remember?

She surveys the theater. He studies her carefully.

BURT

So you're the mystery man who bought our theater?

MOLLY

Oh, no. I'm not cut out for that. Wouldn't know the first thing about managing a house. No, no. Someone I've known for a long time, that's all. A friend. He'll run the show.

BURT

I couldn't stand to see her in the wrong hands. You should've seen Teak when he had to sell.

MOLLY

I don't think you'll need to worry.

BURT

I can't get over it, Molly Mackenzie. The last time I saw you was right over here. I never thought... Ten years, huh?

MOLLY

Not quite.

BURT

Are you in town long? Or off on another adventure before I can even say goodbye?

MOLLY

Oh it's one night only.

BURT

We'll have to see it. Me and Emily, we got married.

Molly moves away, setting her trunk down.

BURT

Tried to send you an invitation in the mail, hoped you would come.

MOLLY

I never got the letter.

BURT

Well, don't go disappearing again.

MOLLY

It's strange. I used to think about this theater. Wonder if you were still here.

BURT

Closed probably the day after you left. Audiences just wouldn't come... not after. People used to say it was haunted.

MOLLY

You don't believe in all that now?

BURT

Course not. But you can't stop some. Spooked a lot of people.

(beat)

Wasn't your fault, you know.

Molly nods. She begins to move around the space, plotting, in a fog.

BURT

I'd walk by and wonder where you were. Then we started to hear about you, in the Evanston Local some. You should hear everybody in town talk about it now, what wonders you must be up to... miracles. Near convinced you really are magic.

MOLLY

Is that all?

BURT

People love to gossip. Make up all kinds of stories.

MOLLY

I've heard. We'll have to see what you think after the show.

BURT

You want to come by the house? Emily's fixed supper, she'd love to see you.

Molly doesn't seem to have heard. After a few beats, she turns to look up to Burt.

MOLLY

I'm tired, Burt. I don't know if I can do it.

BURT

Of course, all that travel.

They look at one another, sharing a quiet moment.

BURT

I should probably...

MOLLY

Wait.

She digs in her pocket.

MOLLY

I have something for you.

She digs in another, then pulls her hat off her head, and looks inside, smiling.

With a wave of her hand, two tickets hover out of the hat, levitating in thin air.

Burt APPLAUDS.

BURT

Always a dramatic touch.

She grabs them and offers them to him.

MOLLY

For you and Emily. You will come, won't you?

BURT

I wouldn't miss it. Not for anything.

He takes the tickets, carefully.

BURT

Molly Mackenzie, magician.

MOLLY

That's good to hear. I'll see you later, Burt.

BURT

Good.

He exits.

LIGHTS OUT.

20 SCENE TWENTY: THE EVANSTON THEATER

20

Molly stands center stage in a spotlight. She wears a tuxedo with her top hat. A small table top stands nearby.

She places the hat onto the table.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen, the life of a magician is a solitary one. It may look glamorous to the untrained, but it comes at a price. Hours go into perfecting each of our illusions, every syllable of every word is perfectly rehearsed, honed to be the most beautiful possible combination. And slowly, our acts grow.

She waves her hands over the hat, and a plant buds out of the opening. It slowly grows and begins to unfurl as she speaks.

MOLLY

Your applause waters it.

She waits for applause.

MOLLY

Or fails to. And our magician grows, stronger, better, more beautiful.

The plant continues to branch out, taking the form of a rose bush as it begins to blossom.

MOLLY

And we show the world something beautiful, something splendid, and unbelievable. And we ask you to believe in it. But we know, we know what really went into it, what the costs are.

We present an illusion, held together with hard work and determination. Spit and elbow grease cobbled together so you never see behind the curtain, never see behind the mask.

The rose bush, at this point fully bloomed and gorgeous with yellow flowers, begins to shed some of its petals.

MOLLY

It isn't possible to maintain an illusion forever. The winds of time buffet that which we've built, that which we've convinced you to believe.

The rose bush loses the last of its petals. It begins slowly to crumple.

MOLLY

At some point it becomes clear that the magic must fade. The magician's life is a lonely one. Wrapped in illusion, clouded in mystery, we present a character for you to enjoy. But never a full person. An empty shell.

The rosebush begins to dry out, turning gray and desiccated, shrivelling in on itself.

MOLLY

(continued)

Susceptible to the smallest gust of wind.

She blows on the rosebush, and it disappears in a cloud of ashes.

MOLLY

We are dust and ashes and illusion. Beautiful, but quick to disappear.

She shifts and as the LIGHTS RISE slightly, cracks form across her face and body. Suddenly, she collapses into several pieces.

She is nothing more than an image in a mirror, falling apart, shattering on the floor. Molly has vanished.

After a few moments of stillness, a hand pulls open a curtain slightly. Molly peers out at the audience, with a slight bow.

MOLLY

Are you ready to peek behind the curtain with me? Ladies and gentlemen, I am Molly Mackenzie, the world's greatest magician. I have learned to conjure beauty, to bottle love, and grasp eternal life. Let us begin simply, with something every magician must have in his or her act.

The curtains behind her part, revealing a beautiful set behind her.

Lola stands nearby.

MOLLY

Every magician must have her assistant, a faithful, beautiful young girl, preferably quite eager to learn. Lola, are you ready to learn a simple piece of magic?

Lola nods.

MOLLY

Also, the ideal assistant is, as you can see, silent.

She waits for Lola to reply. She nods.

MOLLY

Lovely. Lola, would you bring out the table?

Lola exits, returning with a large, simple table, long enough for her to lay on.

She brings it to center.

MOLLY

And is there anything suspicious about this table, Lola?

She shakes her head.

MOLLY

Wonderful. Oh, of course, I trust Lola, but perhaps some of you do not. Could I have a volunteer please?

Molly selects Burt from out of the house.

MOLLY

You sir, yes, you, come up here please.

Burt walks up to the stage a bit uncomfortably. He wasn't volunteering.

MOLLY

Now, could you state your name for the audience?

BURT

Burt Sullivan.

MOLLY

And are you my accomplice this evening, Mr. Sullivan?

BURT

I am not.

MOLLY

Do we know each other?

BURT

When we were kids.

MOLLY

Though I could wager that's true of everyone in the house?

BURT

You could.

MOLLY

But to your knowledge, we haven't agreed to collaborate in any way, have we?

BURT

No.

MOLLY

Excellent. Now, would you please inspect this table, and the stage around it for anything unusual. Any devices out of the ordinary, any rigging or hidden wires, perhaps... Take your time.

Burt begins to inspect the stage and the table, carefully.

MOLLY

You used to work here, so you would know anything out of the ordinary, correct?

BURT

That's right.

MOLLY

And do you see anything?

BURT

Just a table.

MOLLY

No hidden wires?

She waves her hand over head, looking for one herself.

BURT

No.

MOLLY

Many of my so-called peers would use a hidden wire for what I am about to show you. Thank you Mr. Sullivan, if you would step aside, here.

Lola guides him to a place off stage left somewhat.

MOLLY

Lola, if you please.

Lola moves to the table, sitting on it before swinging her legs up to lay atop it.

MOLLY

Now, a levitation requires an eager assistant, willing to trust fully in her fate. Close your eyes, rest, and sleep. Rest, sleep, and let everything go. Your fears, your hopes, even gravity. Rest, sleep. Let everything go. Rest, sleep.

As she speaks, she waves her hands over Lola, who breathes deeply, asleep. Lola begins to levitate up off the table, her body suspended in air a few feet above the table.

MOLLY

No wires, correct?

Burt nods.

She grabs a hoop which she waves, passing Lola through it to drive the point home.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen, this is your standard levitation. But you forget that I do not have a standard assistant. I have one who is eager to please, perhaps, overeager.

As she speaks, Lola begins to rise higher, slowly.

MOLLY

Lola, please, it's unbecoming. Show some modesty.

Lola is now several feet above the table, high in the air.

MOLLY

Lola, come down this instant!

Lola awakes.

LOLA

I don't know how, Miss Mackenzie.

MOLLY

We've gone over this, dear.

LOLA

I've forgotten.

MOLLY

I don't have time to teach you the end of the levitation again I'm afraid. Alright, come with me.

She produces a rope, which she tosses up to Lola, who grabs it. Molly pulls Lola, but she doesn't budge.

MOLLY

(to Burt)

Would you be so kind, Mr. Sullivan?

Burt grabs the rope with her, and they pull her off together, like a balloon, still aloft in the air.

Molly returns a few seconds later.

MOLLY

Ladies and gentlemen: The Over Eager Assistant.

Molly takes a little bow.

She steps back as a STAGEHAND brings on several pieces. A podium with a knife, a ladder, and a crystal ball.

MOLLY

That will have to be enough levity for now, as we move on to heavier matters. Many of you have heard the stories about me. Born the daughter of an Indian princess and The Great Algiers. That I've toured the Sudan, and studied with Tibetan monks. Those are stories, of course. Told by myself, and my management. Marketing, if we can be so commercial. But here in my hometown, many of you may know a little bit more about me. A little less rumor, a little more of "the truth," so to speak. Or, so you may think.

You will recall, ten years ago, in this very theater, there was a terrible tragedy. The Great Algiers, a once famous magician, was engaged here as a performer for a week-long run.

A made-up, stylized version of The Great Algiers enters, wearing a top hat. He's sleeker, better looking, and sober.

MOLLY

Algiers differed from the other important magicians of the age in one key way: he actually possessed something magical. His hat.

He shows off the hat to the audience, revealing it is empty.

MOLLY

He could produce miracles from the hat, something from nothing.

He places the empty hat on a trunk, standing on its end. He reaches into the hat, pulling out a rose.

MOLLY

He studied the dark arts, forbidden magic, trying to uncover the secrets that bound him. And with concentration, and practice, he improved. Significantly.

He repeats the process, but when he reaches into the hat, produces nothing. Instead, the trunk swings open, and a YOUNG BRIDE emerges (Lola).

They kiss.

MOLLY

But the hat came with another magic. A much more complicated magic, with his fame, with his fortunes, came a curse.

Algiers leads his young bride around the stage, slowly.

Algiers returns his bride to the trunk, placing her inside. He shuts the door.

ALGIERS

He would say goodbye to everything and everyone he loved. They would disappear before his eyes, never to be seen again.

Algiers pulls a bottle of rye out of the hat.

He takes a swig, then opens the trunk door once more. It is completely empty.

He slumps to the floor next to it. Algiers falls asleep cradling his hat carefully.

MOLLY

So The Great Algiers had only his hat to keep him company. But even that would change. For, even great magicians must sleep.

His hat disappears.

She takes the hat into her hands, lifting it into the air with reverence.

Algiers shifts uncomfortably in his sleep.

MOLLY

And when The Great Algiers awoke he found his hat was gone. He knew his time was done. He'd been sentenced to death. His only source of income, of friendship, and the only thing keeping him alive. The Great Algiers was said to be 150 years old, but without his hat, he would soon wither and die. But, like any good magician, he had one last trick up his sleeve.

He produces a long rope, then moves to the crystal ball.

He looms over it, hands waving. It glows as he forms some sort of enchantment.

MOLLY

In his studies, over many years, he had discovered dangerous, some might say, evil things.

He ties the rope into a noose, placing it around his neck.

MOLLY

A simple curse, one of the oldest pieces of magic. A revenge curse. Blood magic.

He walks up the ladder, and swings the other end of the rope over a pipe. He ties that end. He looks out to the house, bows slightly, then steps into midair, falling, breaking his neck.

LIGHTS OUT.

Through the darkness, Molly's voice rings out.

MOLLY

The town was surrounded in mystery. A great magician suddenly kills himself, and his prized possession goes missing, never to be found again. Did Algiers kill himself, or was he murdered? By stealing his hat, was our criminal not stealing his very life?

A soft light begins to glow center stage.

MOLLY

Wherever it went, whoever took the hat, would get what they had wished for. They would become just like The Great Algiers. They would have the hat, but nothing else.

As she has spoken, the soft glow has continued to become BRIGHTER and BRIGHTER, emanating from: ALGIERS' HAT. It sits by itself.

Backstage hangs a now empty rope, along with the still standing ladder.

MOLLY

His murderer would be cursed with shame, plagued with guilt, and destined to a life of unhappiness and unfulfillment. It was a most powerful curse, fueled by the blood of its most powerful maker.

Molly leans forward, gazing into the hat.

MOLLY

The Ghost of The Great Algiers. His soul has haunted his killer wherever she has gone since, for ten long years, whispering in her ear, when no one else could hear. But now, his killer is among us, in the very theater where his life was ended so long ago. Where is this fiend? This villainess? Can you help us find her, Algiers?

The light in the hat vanishes. Molly jumps to her feet.

MOLLY

Algiers! Algiers! Are you here with us tonight? Give us a sign.

The ladder is shoved over, falling to the ground with a CRASH. Molly starts.

MOLLY

Where is the person responsible for your tortured soul? Can you point her out to us?

A SPOTLIGHT shines on Molly.

MOLLY

Oh yes! It was me, Algiers. I stole from you, the secret of your fame, the secret of your powers! And I have carried it with me, along with your tortured spirit, every step for ten years. Now, I have brought you back to the very scene of the crime, to finish it once and for all. Mr. Algiers, this is the end! I will be done with you!

The curtains begin FLAPPING on either side of the stage.

MOLLY

Do not be alarmed, ladies and gentlemen.

Molly places the hat center stage, alone.

MOLLY

His quarrel is with me, not with you, and he has no power anymore.

Her spot stays on it as she moves away.

MOLLY

Show yourself, oh Great Algiers! Show yourself!

The theater doors begin BANGING, slamming open and closed.

MOLLY

Ever the showman, even in death!

The LIGHTS FLICKER.

MOLLY

I am not afraid of you Algiers! Not anymore!

A ghostly voice begins to LAUGH. It is disembodied, somewhat demonic, and BOOMING.

MOLLY

Algiers! I've run for ten years! Now here I am! Right before you!

Scenic elements begin to fall over, SANDBAGS, LIGHTS, a CABLE SNAPS and half the curtain falls.

The GHOSTLY voice WAILS, louder and louder, a GREAT WIND picks up, the theater seems to be falling apart.

MOLLY

(screaming over the noise)

Show yourself, Algiers! The Great Molly commands it!

LIGHTS OUT. The theater falls silent. Nothing moves at all. It is a COMPLETE BLACKNESS.

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

The Great Molly?

He laughs.

MOLLY

Do not move, ladies and gentlemen! Do not be alarmed. This battle does not involve you. What do you want, Algiers?

The crystal ball, sitting on the podium, begins to GLOW, providing a soft light. It levitates, moving around the stage.

Molly, seemingly hypnotized, moves slowly towards it.

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

You have blood on your hands.

MOLLY

I know.

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

You stole.

MOLLY

Yes.

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

My hat, my manager, even my name!

MOLLY

I wanted to be like you.

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

You wanted to be me!

I did. MOLLY

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)
You know how it ends.

I do. MOLLY

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)
Time for your final vanishing act. The disappearing girl.

Yes. MOLLY

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)
The rope is still there. The pipes. I'm waiting.

MOLLY
You forget what I've done these ten years Algiers. I've studied your blood magic, and learned, more than you even. I can still wash your blood from my hands.

Molly reaches the podium.

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)
And how is that, girl?

With my own. MOLLY

Molly grabs the knife from the podium, reaches into the air with it, and plunges it into her stomach. She keels over sharply, falling to her knees.

The Ghost of Algiers LAUGHS.

Burt enters slightly from the wing.

Molly! BURT (O.S.)

No! MOLLY

She puts her arm out, stopping him with a commanding glare.

Stay away.

MOLLY

Stupid girl.

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

Molly stands, bleeding, and leans against the podium. She grabs the crystal ball, the blood from her hands leaving red palm prints.

What do you think you're doing?

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

Algiers, I banish you from this world, as long as I live.

MOLLY

That won't be long now.

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

And as long as any who believe in magic should live.

MOLLY

Hocus pocus!

GHOST OF THE GREAT ALGIERS
(O.S.)

There's more to magic than hocus pocus you sad little man. I am Molly Mackenzie, the world's greatest magician, and I will make people believe.

MOLLY

She raises the crystal ball high in the air. It GLOWS as she flings it to the ground, SHATTERING.

LIGHTS FADE as a GHOSTLY SHRIEKING fills the air, seeming to come from the theater itself. Doors rattle and curtains shake until the sound dies down to silence.

The theater is immersed in still darkness once more. All we hear are Molly's panting breaths.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Exorcism of The Great Algiers.

MOLLY

LIGHTS RISE. Molly stands center, her shirt pristine, no longer soaked in blood. It's as though none of this ever happened. She's poised, cool, collected.

She picks the hat up off of the ground.

MOLLY

And now, I own this magic hat, which can produce beauty --

She pulls a rose out and drops it on the ground.

MOLLY

As well as terrors. And I have learned to believe. To trust. To know that wherever it goes, I go too. And I don't question it anymore, because I believe in its magic. And if I have convinced even one of you to believe in it as well, then I have succeeded.

She carefully, grips the hat in both hands, raising it high above her head. She slowly, gently, brings it towards the crown of her head.

MOLLY

And some magic is showy, with lights, and wires, and plain pretending. But the most impressive magic is simpler than that.

As she places the hat on her head, it disappears completely.

She bows. As she stands, blood starts to soak through her shirt once more. She touches the spot, blood seeping into the white cotton quickly.

She looks out at the house.

MOLLY

Where did it go?

CURTAIN.

BURT (O.S.)

Molly!

LIGHTS CHANGE and the curtain becomes a scrim through which we see Burt approaching Molly, now crumpled on the floor. Blood pools around her onto the stage.

Molly. BURT

He grabs her. She's weak, pale, dying.

MOLLY
Burt, I'm sorry you never believed.

BURT
Someone call a doctor! You'll be alright, Mol, you'll be alright.

MOLLY
I don't think so.

BURT
Get a doctor, she's hurt!

By this point the STAGE CREW, CAST & ASSISTANTS have also begun to hesitantly make their way on stage.

BURT
Someone find that hat.
(to Molly)
Where'd it go, Molly?

MOLLY
A magician never reveals her secrets.

BURT
Please, if you put it on.
(to crowd)
Search damn it! Search!
(points to a STAGEHAND)
You, find a doctor!

The Stagehands, Algiers, and the rest of the crew begin to bustle about. Lola stands, frozen in her place, unable to move at all.

MOLLY
I'm cold.

He takes off his coat, placing it over her.

BURT
Here. You'll be okay. You'll be okay.

MOLLY
I loved you. Not The Great Algiers.

BURT
Sh, sh. Save your strength.

MOLLY
Did I trick you?

BURT
You did.

MOLLY
Good. Good.

She pulls the coat over herself, like a blanket.

BURT
Mackenzie, you stay with me, okay?
(to Lola)
Where is the hat?
(back to Molly)
Molly?

She doesn't respond, unmoving beneath his coat.

BURT
Molly?

He pulls the coat off quickly, flinging it into the air. Molly has disappeared.

Burt looks to Lola in horror. She shrugs. Someone SCREAMS.

LIGHTS OUT.

21 SCENE TWENTY ONE: BURT & EMILY'S HOME

21

A few days later. Burt and Emily sit at home.

The room is lit by a single lamp, either on the table, or a standing lamp somewhere. It's a warm, soft, homey light, keeping out the darkness.

EMILY
Miss Roger says when it's sitting this low, we can be sure it's a boy, but...

Burt isn't listening.

EMILY
You couldn't have stopped her.

BURT

I know.

EMILY

Burt, you didn't ever... ?

BURT

No. How could I have even known? She was like my kid sister.

EMILY

Sometimes we carry things in our hearts, when we're lonely.

Burt nods.

EMILY

I'm happy with you.

BURT

I am too.

There is a KNOCK at the door. Emily stands, looking to Burt.

BURT

The police, maybe?

Emily opens the door, letting in Lola.

She enters, dutifully mournful, with a crumpled paper bag in hand.

LOLA

Mr and Mrs. Sullivan, good evening.

EMILY

It's after eight.

LOLA

I apologize for the hour, but... I had something for you, sir.

BURT

Well?

LOLA

I... Ms. Mackenzie's hat. I... when it disappears, in the trick. I know where it goes, and... here it is.

She sets the bag down, opening it. She pulls the hat out, placing it on the table.

Burt and Emily stare at it.

EMILY

Weren't the police looking for this?

LOLA

She told us, that nobody was to touch it. Under any circumstances. That it...

BURT

Did you know where it was?

LOLA

It was a secret.

EMILY

I need to go feed the dogs, if you'll excuse me.

She exits. Burt smiles after her.

BURT

Well?

LOLA

She told me that if anyone touched it, she'd die.

BURT

I see.

LOLA

The police, they went through everything. And once they found the rest of the hats, and once everyone was gone, and Molly was gone, it seemed like... I don't know. She wouldn't mind if I took this one.

BURT

You don't know where she went to?

LOLA

No, sir. But I don't know that I'd tell you if I did. Which is why I didn't tell the police. I didn't know what to do.

BURT

Why would you bring it to me? Don't have any special claim to it.

LOLA

Well, when I looked at it, sir, I noticed. In one of the secret pockets, here...

She digs into the hat. Burt smiles.

BURT

Secret pockets.

LOLA
Was a note addressed to you.

She pulls it out, offering it to Burt.

LOLA
I didn't read it if you're checking.

He opens the envelope, reading the letter. Lola waits until he finishes.

LOLA
And in the other compartment here, was the deed. Signed over to you, sir. The theater.

Burt takes the deed as well. He holds his hand out for the hat. Lola reluctantly hands it to him. He studies it, turning it over in his hands. He pulls one compartment inside open, then another.

He sets the hat down on the table, looking over the note once more.

BURT
Thank you, very much. For this.

LOLA
Could I ask, Mr. Sullivan, if... I might be able to keep it? The hat?

BURT
Hm? Oh, no. That's yours.

She picks up the hat reverentially.

LOLA
If you really want one, there's still about a dozen I could get for you.

BURT
You probably need a magic hat more than I do.

LOLA
Thank you.

(beat)
You know, she told me about you, about Algiers, what really happened. Not what she used to say on stage, or in the papers. The whole story.

BURT
I'll bet it was pretty magical.

LOLA

Well you can't trust everything in a magician's story. You know, when I started I thought... It's silly. There was really magic. But it's just a hat.

BURT

I wouldn't say that.

LOLA

Do you want to know, how it disappeared? I could tell you if you like.

BURT

Is it beautiful?

LOLA

Not especially.

BURT

Then I think I'd rather not know everything. I like her version. That was really something.

LOLA

Say, Mr. Sullivan, if you're ever hiring anyone for the theater...

BURT

You've got the job.

LOLA

Mean it?

BURT

You can count on it.

Lola puts the hat on her head.

LOLA

Oh, swell. Thanks, Mr. Sullivan!

She leaves. Emily enters soon after.
She was waiting. LIGHTS BEGIN TO FADE.

EMILY

Well? What did the assistant have to say?

Burt puts the note in his breast pocket.

EMILY

Did she really disappear?

I don't know.

BURT

All that illuminates the stage is the
lamp. The LIGHT FLICKERS. They look to
it.

LIGHTS OUT.

THE END.