

T H E P R E S T I G E

FADE IN:

TOP HATS. Clustered in a small glade. As we SUPER TITLES,
a BLACK CAT slinks its way through them. As TITLES END-

BORDEN (V.O.)
Are you watching closely?

A SECOND BLACK CAT Paces into frame, HISSING, SPITTING,
CHASING the first cat into the woods beyond and we-

CUT TO:

INT. CLUTTERED WORKSHOP -- DAY

Moving along a row of CANARIES in CAGES.

CUTTER (V.O.)
Every magic trick consists of three
parts, or acts...

Stop at a cage. Weathered HANDS envelope the canary. Hands
and voice belong to a man in his 60's- CUTTER.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
The first part is called the Pledge...

A LITTLE GIRL perches on a chest in the workshop, watching.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...the magician shows you something
ordinary-

Cutter moves to a small ORNATE CAGE resting on a prop table.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
A deck of cards, or a bird...

INT. SCALA THEATRE, LONDON -- NIGHT

A packed house. Many hands raised. Move in on a BEARDED
MAN, his gloved hand tentatively rising into the air.

CUTTER (V.O.)
...or a man...

A GLAMOROUS ASSISTANT beckons Bearded Man from the aisle.
He shuffles along his row towards her. Embarrassed.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
He shows you this object, and pledges
to you its utter normality...

Bearded Man and four other VOLUNTEERS follow the Assistant
down towards the stage...

On which stands the magician, leaning on his cane, smiling. This is ROBERT ANGIER, 35, an American. Looming over him is a large and complex ELECTRICAL MACHINE.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Perhaps he asks you to inspect it...

Bearded Man, FASCINATED, and the other Volunteers look over the vast machine. As Angier GESTURES theatrically at the various features of the metal and glass apparatus.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...to see that it is indeed real...

As the Assistant leads the Volunteers off the stage, Bearded Man slips through the gap at the side of the curtains-

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

...unaltered...

INT. SCALA THEATRE, BACKSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

-looks around, DISORIENTED, then darts for some stairs leading below stage where he runs into a burly STAGEHAND.

CUTTER (V.O.)

...normal.

STAGEHAND

Where'd you think you're going?!

CUTTER (V.O.)

But, of course, it probably isn't...

Bearded Man pulls off his beard, revealing the face of ALFRED BORDEN, mid 30's.

BEARDED MAN

I'm part of the act, you fool!

The Stagehand raises his eyebrows and steps aside. Borden RACES down below the stage. Cutter approaches the Stagehand.

CUTTER

Who was that?

INT. SCALA THEATRE, ONSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

As the machine GROANS to life. SPARKING and CRACKLING, Angier gazes at it, forgetting his audience. Entranced. Possessed.

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Borden fumbles through the darkened area, lit by flashes and sparks through gaps in the boards of the stage above. He GASPS as a flash illuminates a STAGEHAND with SOLID WHITE EYES sitting nearby. Borden waves a hand in front of the

INT. WORKSHOP -- DAY

Cutter gently places the canary into the ornate cage.

CUTTER (V.O.)
The second act is called the Turn...

INT. SCALA THEATRE, ONSTAGE -- NIGHT

Angier, facing the audience, steps into the machine.

CUTTER (V.O.)
The magician takes the ordinary
something...

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Borden lights a MATCH. In front of him is a LARGE GLASS TANK FILLED WITH WATER, ITS LID PROPPED OPEN. Borden frowns.

CUTTER (V.O.)
...and makes it do something
extraordinary.

INT. WORKSHOP -- DAY

Cutter places a SILK SHAWL over the cage. Then SLAMS his hands down on the shawl, which FLATTENS- The Little Girl FLINCHES. Then STARES, FASCINATED.

CUTTER (V.O.)
Now you're looking for the secret.

INT. SCALA THEATRE, ONSTAGE -- NIGHT

BOLTS of electricity draw inwards, wrapping Angier in a ball of lighting which CRACKS-

CUTTER (V.O.)
But you won't find it...

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

The ROOM fills with LIGHT as a TRAPDOOR snaps open and a BODY DROPS INTO THE TANK.

CUTTER
Because, of course, you're not really
looking...

The lid of the tank and trapdoor above SNAP SHUT, leaving the tank, and Borden, in complete DARKNESS.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...you don't really want to know.

INT. WORKSHOP -- DAY

Cutter WHIPS the shawl from the table. Cage and bird have DISAPPEARED.

CUTTER (V.O.)
...you want to be fooled.

The Little Girl stares, EXPECTANT.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But you wouldn't clap yet. Because making something disappear isn't enough. ~~So~~ you have to bring it back.

INT. SCALA THEATRE, ONSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

The Machine sputters to a stop. Angier is GONE. The audience sits, WAITING.

CUTTER (V.O.)
That's why every magic trick has a third act. The hardest part...

INT. WORKSHOP -- DAY

Cutter forms a fist. Drapes the shawl over it.

CUTTER (V.O.)
...the part we call...

Cutter WHIPS the shawl away to reveal- the CANARY. The Little Girl CLAPS.

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- NIGHT

Borden LIGHTS another match. Stares in HORROR-

CUTTER (V.O.)
...the Prestige.

Inside the tank, ANGIER IS DROWNING. His rolling EYES fixed on Borden, he POUNDS desperately on the thick glass, SCREAMING BUBBLES... The screen fades to BLACK.

PROSECUTOR (V.O.)
The Prestige...?

INT. COURTROOM -- DAY

The PROSECUTOR turns to face the witness in the box: Cutter.

PROSECUTOR
And did Robert Angier, the Great Danton, your employer, get to that final part of his trick that night?

CUTTER

No, sir. Something went wrong.

PROSECUTOR

What went wrong?

CUTTER

I saw a someone head below stage...
I followed... and I found Borden-

Cutter points at the dock: Borden is there, CHAINED TO THE FLOOR. FLANKED BY GUARDS. Cutter POINTS.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

-watching Mr. Angier drown in a tank.

PROSECUTOR

Would you describe your occupation to the jury please, Mr. Cutter?

CUTTER

I'm an ingeneur. I design illusions and construct the apparatus necessary for performing them.

PROSECUTOR

And for how long had you been Mr. Angier's "ingeneur"?

CUTTER

Eight years. I was privvy to the secrets of his entire act.

PROSECUTOR

So, Mr. Cutter, was this water-filled tank beneath the stage part of Mr. Angier's illusion- the illusion billed as "THE REAL TRANSPORTED MAN"?

CUTTER

No, sir. The tank had been used for the first trick, then taken offstage. Borden must have put it under the trap door after the interval.

Cutter looks across at Borden, who is absently tapping his hand against the rail- it is MUTILATED, MISSING 2 1/2 FINGERS. The DEFENDER stands.

DEFENDER

How large was this tank?

CUTTER

The sort of tank used for underwater escapes- four or five hundred gallons.

DEFENDER

How do you think Mr. Borden was able to move the tank under the trap door without anyone noticing?

CUTTER

Ask him- he's the magician.

Titters from the gallery. The Defender turns to the JUDGE.

DEFENDER

(impatient)

I ask again that this man explain the mechanics of Mr. Angier's illusion.

CUTTER

(angry)

If I reveal my magician's secrets here in open court, I'll be unemployable and the secrets will be worthless. The Real Transported Man is the most sought-after illusion in the business and I have the right to sell it on-

DEFENDER

How, then, can we know that the tank wasn't simply some part of the trick that went wrong?

The Judge considers this. He looks at Cutter. Sympathetic.

JUDGE

Mr. Cutter, I see your predicament, but we are talking about a capital offence- Alfred Borden's life hangs in the balance.

Cutter looks down. Quiet.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

If you were prepared to disclose the details to me in private, I might be able to judge their relevance to the case.

(addresses lawyers)

Might this be an acceptable compromise?

Amid murmurs of assent, the Judge ADJOURNS the proceedings.

As the Guards begin the complex ritual of unlocking Borden's chains from the floor, Borden looks across the courtroom:

The LITTLE GIRL from the opening stands in the gallery, looking back at him. Borden gives her a little WAVE. She waves back, then is GUIDED OUT by a man wearing GLOVES and BOWLER HAT- this is FALLON. He NODS at Borden.

EXT. PRISON YARD, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

OWENS, 50's, a lawyer, stands at the entry gate. The CAPTAIN of the guard walks out to greet him.

CAPTAIN

I'm going to have to ask you to turn out your pockets.

Owens raises his eyebrows.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Not my idea, sir. The Warden saw his show in Manchester last year where he vanished into thin air- he's convinced he'll try an escape.

Owens smiles as he hands over his pocket watch and wallet. They walk along a tall wrought iron fence. The PRISON looms over them.

A door in the prison opens and Borden emerges, trussed absurdly in chains held by two WARDERS. The other INMATES begin cattle-calling and whistling as Borden is paraded up to a WOODEN SECTION of the fence.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

I told him the only way Borden's going to disappear is if I leave him out here with the other inmates.

At the fence, the Warders lock the ends of their chains to a thick eye hook set into the ground.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

(to warders)

Check the locks. Twice.

They check the locks. Then retreat to allow privacy. The Captain marches away. Borden looks at Owens. Bored.

OWENS

My name is Owens- I'm a solicitor

Borden says nothing.

OWENS (CONT'D)

I represent Lord Caldlow, an accomplished amateur magician and historian of magic-

BORDEN

How much?

OWENS

Lord Caldlow is interested in-

BORDEN

(cold)
How much for my tricks?

OWENS

Five thousand pounds.

BORDEN

Talk to Fallon, my ingenuer- the
money's for him.

OWENS

I did. ~~He~~ offered to sell all of
your tricks... except the most
valuable one - The Transported Man.

BORDEN

I'd never forgive myself for selling
my greatest trick.

Borden signals the Warders to come and unlock him.

OWENS

Even for your daughter?

Borden looks up. Owens moves closer, quietly assertive.

OWENS (CONT'D)

If the newspapers are right, and
you're for the drop, your daughter's
going to need looking after-

BORDEN

Fallon can take care of-

OWENS

Bernard Fallon? A man with a past
even more obscure than your own?
The courts have already motioned to
have the girl removed from his "care".
No, the girl is to be an orphan.
I've been to the work house...

Owens looks around the prison yard. Shrugs.

OWENS (CONT'D)

It's better than this.

Borden looks at Owens, hard. The Warders unlock Borden.

OWENS (CONT'D)

I'm offering you a way to wrap up
your affairs with dignity, and I'm
offering your daughter a future. As
Lord Caldlow's ward she will want
for nothing. Ever.

(hands him a card)

Think it over.

Borden absently VANISHES the card as a REFLEX.

OWENS (CONT'D)

Lord Caldlow wanted you to have this-
(produces a leather-
bound JOURNAL)

As a show of good faith. He thought
it might be of interest.

A SULLEN WARDER TAKES the journal, flicks through it.

OWENS (CONT'D)

Robert Angier's diary... it includes
the time he spent in Colorado learning
your trick...

Sullen hands the journal to Borden. Borden takes it.

BORDEN

Angier never learned my trick.

OWENS

Really? When he returned from
Colorado he mounted a version of the
Transported Man that the papers said
was better, even...

(with relish)

Than your original.

BORDEN

(acid)

If you want Angier's secret you can
dig him up and ask him for yourself.

Borden TURNS, dragging the Warders with him.

OWENS

I want your secret, Mr. Borden...

(louder)

Consider your daughter!

INT. CELL, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

Borden, on the bed, opens Angier's JOURNAL. Starts to read...

ANGIER (V.O.)

A cypher. An enigma...

CUT TO:

LETTERS ON A PAGE. IN MEANINGLESS COMBINATIONS. GIBBERISH.

INT. TRAIN, MOUNTAINS -- DUSK

Angier, with a SIGH, closes a CARDBOARD-COVERED NOTEBOOK.
OPENS his LEATHER-BOUND JOURNAL. Starts to write.

ANGIER (V.O.)

...Borden's cypher is simple-
unraveled by a single word. Now it
takes only patience. And a passion
to know his mind.

Angier looks up at his own reflection in the train window.

EXT. TRAIN STATION -- DUSK

No platform, no office, no sign. Just an electric streetlight
which, as Angier watches, FLICKERS ON. Angier, leaning
heavily on his cane limps over to the light and stares up
at it as if he's never seen one before.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. Angier,
Springs Welcome to Colorado

Angier looks back and smiles. A driver is looking down
expectantly from atop a STAGECOACH. Angier hands his cane
up to the driver and, with some difficulty, hitches his way
up to the roof of the rig. As he does, the town of Colorado
Springs rises into view, a few hundred yards down the road,
lit brightly with ELECTRIC STREETLIGHTS.

ANGIER

(disbelief)

The whole town has electricity?

The driver nods and WHIPS the horses into action.

EXT. ROAD, PIKE'S PEAK -- EVENING

The stagecoach flies along, inches from a precipitous drop.

It rounds a corner and pulls to a halt in front of the CLIFF
HOUSE INN, equal parts log cabin and crystal palace.

INT. CLIFF HOUSE INN -- CONTINUOUS

The lobby is cavernous and immaculate. The entire STAFF of
the hotel - BELLBOYS, MAIDS, COOKS, and GARDENERS - are lined
up along the sides like a regiment of soldiers.

Angier reaches the reception desk and the smiling MANAGER.

ANGIER

Quite a reception.

MANAGER

You're our first guest of the season,
Mr. Angier.

(opens guest book)

Your telegram didn't indicate how
long you would be staying with us.

ANGIER

As long as it takes.

(signs book)

I'll need a coach tomorrow to take me up the mountain.

MANAGER

The peak is closed, sir. For scientific experimentation.

ANGIER

(smiles)

That's why I'm here.

EXT. ROAD, PIKE'S PEAK -- MORNING

A stagecoach rumbles along a dirt track. The driver pulls on his reins and the coach pulls to a stop.

DRIVER

You have to walk the rest, I'm afraid, sir.

Angier nods. Lowers himself down to the roadway.

EXT. CLEARING, PIKE'S PEAK -- MORNING

Angier comes through the trees to find a wire fence with a sign: **EXTREME DANGER- NO TRESPASSING**

Beyond the fence is a COMPOUND of three BARNs. Rising from the center barn is a 200ft steel TOWER capped with a GIANT STEEL BALL. GIANT ARCING BOLTS of electricity run down the tower from the ball. The windows of the building RADIATE with BLUE EXPLOSIONS.

Angier steps forwards, entranced, and threads his fingers through the fence.

He is sent FLYING backwards -- the fence has been electrified.

The tower is SHUT OFF- a door opens and a stout little MAN, shotgun under one arm, MARCHES up to the fence. He uses a RUBBER PAD to pry open the fence and stands over Angier, who is CURLED on the ground, GROWLING in pain, trying to stand.

SHOTGUN

I'm amazed at how many of you newspaper writers can't read my sign.

Shotgun picks up Angier's cane and hands it to him.

ANGIER

Not the welcome I was expecting.

Shotgun RECOGNIZES Angier, AMAZED.

SHOTGUN

I know you. You're that magician-
the Great Danton.

(helps Angier up)

I'm Alley. I saw your show. In
London. Seven times- you guessed
every object the audience had in
their pockets.

Angier leans on his cane and gently brushes off the dirt.

ALLEY

I'm sorry about the fence. People
keep interfering with our work.

ANGIER

I've come to see Tesla.

ALLEY

Why?

ANGIER

He built a machine for a- for a
colleague of mine. A long time ago.
Can you get me a meeting with him?

(off his look)

I've come a very long way.

ALLEY

Impossible, I'm afraid.

ANGIER

I've brought a lot of money.

Beat.

ALLEY

I'm sorry, Mr. Angier. I simply
can't help you.

Alley pulls the fence closed.

ANGIER

I'll be staying at the hotel.
Indefinitely.

Alley watches Angier walk away. He pulls something from his
pocket.

ALLEY

What am I holding?

Angier doesn't look back.

ANGIER

Your watch.

Alley GRINS, opening his hand. He is holding a gold watch.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, COLORADO -- DAY

Angier sits, the cardboard-bound notebook on the table in front of him. He makes a notations in his own journal as he deciphers Borden's words.

ANGIER (V.O.)

April 3rd, 1893... a few days after
he first met me...

Angier runs his finger along the first line, translating...

BORDEN (V.O.)

We were two young men at the start
of a great career...

INT. THEATRE -- NIGHT

Borden sits in the audience. Younger- both hands intact.

BORDEN (V.O.)

Two young men devoted to an
illusion...

Two rows in front sits Angier. Similarly youthful.

BORDEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Two young men who never intended to
hurt anyone.

Onstage is a TANK. Standing beside the tank is a beautiful young magician's assistant. JULIA.

The magician, MILTON, address the audience.

MILTON

Which of you brave souls is willing
to bind this lovely young woman...

Milton GESTURES to Julia- the MEN in the crowd go wild- hands in the air, catcalls. Smiling radiantly, Julia selects two young men, who SCRAMBLE up to the stage- ANGIER and BORDEN: younger, full of energy- Angier has no limp.

They spring onto stage, beside Julia and take the ROPES she offers them. Milton GRABS a HOOK that descends from the flies on a chain.

Cutter is watching from the wings.

MILTON (CONT'D)

Are either of you two gentlemen
sailors?

Both shake their heads as they start to bind Julia with the ropes, Borden wrapping the rope around her wrists, Angier the one around her ankles.

MILTON (CONT'D)

Well, I'm sure you can both tie a strong knot...

As Borden finishes his knot he tests it, it SLIPS APART. Borden frowns, hastily RETYING it, covering.

Cutter NOTICES.

-Borden finishes, glancing at Julia who gives a small sign of assent with her eyes. As Angier finishes tying her ankles he sneaks a light KISS on her ankle. She frowns at him and raises her arms. Milton hooks the rope onto the chain.

Milton gesticulates in the wings, Cutter signals to a stagehand who starts HOISTING Julia into the air.

Milton wheels the tank under Julia's bare feet. Cutter feels for the handle of an AXE placed by his feet and pulls out a STOPWATCH.

JULIA looks down at Angier. They smile at each other. Julia DROPS into the tank with a massive splash- Milton SLAMS the lid shut, PADLOCKS it and raises a curtain around the tank...

Cutter checks his stopwatch, grips the handle of the axe...

A grand GESTURE from Milton- the curtain around the tank DROPS- Julia is GONE. Milton raises the curtain again, then, with another flourish, DROPS it to reveal Julia, beside the tank, one arm in the air, dripping wet, smiling.

The audience erupts in APPLAUSE. Angier smiles proudly.

INT. DRESSING ROOMS -- NIGHT

Angier, Borden and Julia sit around the cluttered room. Borden is in the middle of a passionate rant-

BORDEN

Milton's squandering their goodwill
on a bunch of tired second-hand tricks-

ANGIER

(amused)

Old favourites, please.

BORDEN

What about something fresh? He won't
even try a bullet catch-

CUTTER (O.S.)

Bullet catch is suicide.

They turn. Cutter stands in the doorway, counting out money.

CUTTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

All it takes is a smart-arse
volunteer dropping a button down the
barrel...

BORDEN

(indicates himself
and Angier)

Use plants-

ANGIER

He can't use plants for every trick.

JULIA

There'd no seats left for the
punters.

BORDEN

Fine- no bullet catch. But a real
magician tries to invent something
new, something other magicians scratch
their heads over-

CUTTER

Then sells it to them for a small
fortune.

Cutter hands Angier some money.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

I suppose you have such a trick,
Mr. Borden?

BORDEN

Actually, I do.

CUTTER

Care to sell it?

BORDEN

No one else could do my trick.

ANGIER

I could.

BORDEN

You don't even know what it is.

ANGIER

Show it to me twice, I'll do it.

Cutter looks at Borden, thoughtful.

CUTTER

I admire your spirit, Mr. Angier.
But if Borden here really has invented
his masterpiece it might well be
something only he can do.

ANGIER

Why?

CUTTER

It might be something only he is prepared to do.

(gestures to the props)

My illustrious employer, Mr. Milton, is a skilled showman. But Borden's right- he won't get his hands dirty. You want to see what it takes to make real magic- go to the Tenley. There's a Chinaman there who's got what it takes.

ANGIER

Chung Ling Soo.

BORDEN

Tickets are pricey.

CUTTER

I know a lad on the door. You two watch his show- whoever tells me how he does his goldfish bowl trick gets the prize.

ANGIER

Which is?

Cutter gives a sly smile.

CUTTER

Ten minutes onstage in front of my old friend, Mr. Ackerman.

Angier and Borden prick up at the name.

JULIA

Who's Ackerman?

BORDEN

The most powerful theatrical agent in London.

Cutter holds out money to Borden, who reaches for it- Cutter grabs his wrist. Serious.

CUTTER

I saw you drop the knot again, Borden.

JULIA

I think I had my wrist turned-

CUTTER

(ignoring Julia)

Some nights you just can't get it,
can you? If that knot slips when
Julia's on the hoist she'll break a
leg.

BORDEN

(defensive)

It's the wrong knot. A Langford
double would hold tighter.

CUTTER

The Langford double's not a wet knot-
it's too dangerous. The ropes could
swell and she'd never slip it-

JULIA

I can slip a Langford underwater.

BORDEN

We've practiced it-

ANGIER

(cutting in)

He said no.

Julia glances at Angier.

CUTTER

(to Borden)

No more mistakes.

Borden stares at Cutter. Leaves. Angier watches him go.

ANGIER

Where's he from?

CUTTER

Where are you from?

Angier nods. Fair enough.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

He shuffles props for Virgil at the
Hall.

ANGIER

He works for another magician? Aren't
you worried he'll steal your tricks?

CUTTER

(shakes head)

He doesn't deal in methods.

ANGIER

How do you know?

CUTTER

(sly smile)

Because I hired him to try and find
out Virgil's orange trick.

ANGIER

I don't know if I trust him.

CUTTER

He's a natural magician. Of course
you can't trust him.

JULIA

I think he's alright.

Angier turns to Julia. Smiles.

ANGIER

You think everyone's alright.

JULIA

Even you.

Julia kisses Angier. Cutter rises.

CUTTER

And Mr. Angier...?

(angier looks up)

Learn your sight lines- if I can see
you sneaking a peck on your wife's
ankle from the wings, the blokes on
each end of rows 3 and 4 can, too.

INT. THEATRE, COVENT GARDEN -- EVENING

Borden watches from the wings. Onstage, a magician, VIRGIL,
locks a CANARY into a cage then covers the cage with a SHAWL.

Borden notices a beautiful YOUNG WOMAN in the front row with
a little BOY who is watching Virgil's act, spellbound.

Virgil SLAMS the SHAWL down onto the table, as if nothing
were beneath it, then WHIPS it away- BIRD and CAGE are GONE.

The little BOY begins to WAIL and CRY.

Borden watches as the young woman tries to make him stop.
Virgil takes the flower from his lapel, covers it with the
shawl, and SNAPS it away- the flower has become the CANARY.

The audience bursts into enthusiastic APPLAUSE, but the little
boy is still CRYING INCONSOLABLY. Virgil takes his bows and
walks off, handing Borden the canary as he passes backstage.
As the audience leaves, Borden climbs off the stage and holds
the bird in front of the boy.

BORDEN

Look- he's all right. He's fine.

BOY

(sniffs)

But where's his brother?

Borden is at a loss. He turns to the young woman.

BORDEN

Sharp lad, your son.

YOUNG WOMAN

(laughs)

My brother.

Borden smiles back.

INT. WORKSHOP -- LATER

Borden gently strokes the bird's feathered head.

BORDEN

You're the lucky one tonight.

Borden walks to a wall of DOZENS of bird cages -- each one with an identical canary. He puts the bird into its cage and returns to the cart of props. He taps on the top of the TABLE- a panel POPS open, revealing the FLATTENED BIRD CAGE.

Borden inserts a ROD into the bird cage and PRIES it apart. A TRICKLE of BLOOD emerges, dripping into a bucket below.

Borden SLAPS the cage

And the FLATTENED CARCASS of the ORIGINAL BIRD slides out and SPLASHES into the bucket.

EXT. STAGE DOOR -- EVENING

Borden exits. The young woman, SARAH, is there with her brother.

BORDEN

(to the Brother)

Are you watching closely?

Borden reaches to the Boy's ear. Casually produces a coin. The Boy marvels as he takes the coin then looks at Borden.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Look closer.

BOY

It's got two heads.

Sarah smiles. Borden crouches to address the Boy, grave.

BORDEN

Never. Show. Anyone.

The Boy looks at him, a little afraid.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

They'll beg you and flatter you for the secret- but as soon as you give it up you'll be nothing to them. Understand? *Nothing*. The secret impresses no one- the trick you use it for is everything.

Borden looks into the boy's staring eyes. Then SMILES and pats him on the head. He stands. Sarah smiles at him.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Where do you two live?

SARAH

He lives with Mum.

BORDEN

And you?

INT. STAIRWELL -- EVENING

Sarah lingers at the top of the stairs to her flat. Borden tries to KISS her, but she pushes him back. He tests the LOCK of the open door.

BORDEN

Enough to keep me out?

SARAH

I think so. Will I see you again?

Borden SHRUGS and turns to go back down the stairs. Sarah looks after him, about to change her mind. Hesitates.

INT. SARAH'S FLAT -- CONTINUOUS

She closes the door and LOCKS it, smiling. After a moment she pads through living/kitchen area, draws back the curtain to her bedroom and SHRIEKS:

Borden is there, smiling. Sarah moves towards him, giggling.

INT. TENLEY THEATRE -- NIGHT

Onstage, CHUNG LING SOO, 60's, wearing a long silk robe, HOBLES painfully to the center of the stage. Clearly CRIPPLED. In the audience, Borden and Angier watch intently.

Soo lays a silk SHAWL on a BARE TABLE. He WHIPS it up, revealing a BOUQUET OF ROSES. Soo repeats the trick again and again, producing a different object each time.

Finally, with a drum roll, Soo whips the shawl aside to reveal a MASSIVE GOLDFISH BOWL, complete with GOLDFISH.

To THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE, Soo bows and HOBBLER off the stage. Angier, clapping, shakes his head, utterly baffled. He turns to Borden. Who has a small, knowing, smile.

EXT. RESTAURANT -- NIGHT

Borden and Angier watch Soo being helped down from his carriage by HANDLERS who treat him with great gentleness.

ANGIER

You're wrong. It can't be.

BORDEN

It is. He carries the bowl between his knees for the entire performance.

ANGIER

But look at the man!

BORDEN

(points)

This is the trick. This is why no one detects his method.

Soo hobbles into the restaurant, frail and fragile.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Total devotion to his art...

(looks at Angier)

Utter self-sacrifice. It's the only way to escape *this*.

Borden SLAPS the bricks of the wall behind them.

INT. BEDSIT -- NIGHT

Julia, in bed, watches Angier, SHEET wrapped around him like a robe, HOBBLING. He pulls up the sheet- between his knees is a goldfish bowl.

ANGIER

I can barely lift this thing and it's not even filled with water. Or fish. He must be strong as an ox.

JULIA

(incredulous)

He's been pretending to be a cripple for years?

ANGIER

Any time he's in public. Any time he goes out. It's *unthinkable*.

Angier puts the bowl down with a flourish. Climbs into bed.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Borden saw it at once. I couldn't fathom it- living your whole life pretending to be someone else.

JULIA

You're pretending to be someone else.

ANGIER

I don't think changing your name compares

JULIA

Not just your name- who you are, where you're from...

ANGIER

I promised my family I wouldn't embarrass them with my theatrical endeavors.

Angier cuddles up to Julia.

JULIA

I came up with a name for you...
"The Great Danton".
(Angier frowns)
You don't like it? It's sophisticated.

ANGIER

It's French.

INT. BEDSIT -- DAY

Sarah unlocks the door, but has to PUSH against MAGICAL PROPS stacked against it- the bedsit is FILLED with DEVICES.

SARAH

Alfred?!

Sarah surveys the confusion- spots Borden across the flat deep in conversation with another man. Borden spots her-

BORDEN

We have our routine for Ackerman!

The other man turns- it is Fallon.

SARAH

(cold)
We haven't had the pleasure.

Fallon nods. Borden comes over, holding a DUELING PISTOL.

BORDEN

Mr. Fallon is my ingeneur-

SARAH

Where did you get all of-

BORDEN

Begged, borrowed and don't ask.
Mr. Fallon's an enterprising soul.

SARAH

I need to talk to you.

Fallon slips past Sarah with a nod to Borden. Exits. Sarah looks at Borden. SENSE.

SARAH (CONT'D)

We can't afford to pay him-

BORDEN

We'll start making money once we have our audience-

SARAH

And until then? What I earn is barely enough for us.

BORDEN

(shrugs)

I'll give him half of my food.

Sarah looks meaningfully at Borden.

SARAH

You're already going to be sharing it with someone else.

Borden looks at her, confused. Then realizes.

BORDEN

You're...?

SARAH

Having a baby.

Borden freezes. Then SMILES, taking her in his arms. She FLINCHES against the gun he is holding.

SARAH (CONT'D)

What's this?

BORDEN

The trick to wake up Ackerman at the end of my audition.

SARAH

Your great trick? The "masterpiece that will make our fortunes"?

BORDEN

No. The world isn't ready for that one, yet.

Borden moves to the bureau and starts LOADING the gun. Pouring in SHOT, then WADDING...

BORDEN (CONT'D)

This is merely a run-of-the-mill daring and spectacular bullet catch-

Borden drops the BULLET into the barrel...

SARAH

I'm not letting you get shot.

Borden RAMS the bullet and charge down then removes the RAMROD and hands the pistol to Sarah.

BORDEN

It's perfectly safe. Shoot me.

Sarah looks at Borden then down at the pistol. She aims at Borden. Then aims off, at a mirror beside him.

BANG. Borden's hand SNAPS out to "catch" the bullet. The mirror is intact.

Borden looks at Sarah, grave, as he reveals the bullet in his hand.

SARAH

Show me.

(Borden shakes head)

Then you're not doing it. I can't raise a child on my own, Alfred.

Borden looks at her. Takes the bullet from her and places it on the bureau.

BORDEN

The bullet goes in the gun. Then comes the ramrod...

He takes the RAMROD and PUSHES it down onto the bullet, which disappears.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

And voila-

He points the ramrod at Sarah- she pulls the bullet out of its HOLLOW TIP.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

The bullet's not even in the gun when the charge is fired.

Sarah looks at the ramrod with disdain.

SARAH

Once you know it's so obvious.

Borden BRISTLES slightly. Takes the bullet back.

BORDEN

Yes, well, people still get killed performing it.

SARAH

How?

BORDEN

Some smart-arse drops something down the barrel.

SARAH

Such as

BORDEN

A penny, or a button. Or, of course, a bullet.

(off worried look)

But don't fret-

Borden embraces her, putting his hand on her belly.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

I'm not letting anything happen- I love you too much.

Sarah grabs his face, looking at his eyes, smiling.

SARAH

Say it again.

BORDEN

I love you.

SARAH

(matter-of-fact)

Nope. Not today.

BORDEN

What?

SARAH

(smiles)

Some days, it's not true. Today you don't mean it. Maybe today you're more in love with magic than me.

(off look)

It's alright. I like being able to tell the difference- it makes the days it is true mean something.

Borden shakes his head, grinning.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, COLORADO -- NIGHT

Angier closes Borden's notebook. He looks across at a photograph of Julia on the table. Reaches for his own diary.

ANGIER (V.O.)

Borden writes as if no one but he understood the true nature of magic...

INT. CELL, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

Borden sits on his cot reading Angier's journal.

ANGIER (V.O.)

...but what does he know of self-sacrifice more than the rest of us?

Borden looks up from Angier's journal.

BORDEN

Bloody fool.

Borden TOSSES the book across the cell.

INT. EVIDENCE ROOM, WAREHOUSE -- DAY

A POLICEMAN opens the door for the Judge and Cutter.

POLICEMAN

(pointing)

It's all laid out down the end, your honour.

The Judge NODS. The Policeman exits, LOCKING them inside.

The Judge follows Cutter, approaching a collection of magical apparatus, including a MASSIVE CRATE. Cutter looks up at it with AWE, touching the side where it says "COLORADO SPRINGS".

JUDGE

What's in there?

Cutter OPENS it, revealing metal and glass MACHINERY within.

CUTTER

Angier's machine.

JUDGE

You built this, Mr. Cutter?

CUTTER

(shakes head)

Oh no. This wasn't built by a magician... it was built by a wizard.

(off look)

A man who can actually do the things a magician pretends to...

Cutter closes the crate. The Judge turns to other props.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

Your honour, what will happen to these things when the trial is over?

The Judge is staring at a large glass tank.

JUDGE

They've been sold to a Lord Caldlow. An avid collector, apparently very interested in the case.

CUTTER

Don't let him take this.

The Judge looks over. Cutter is touching the crate.

JUDGE

Why ever not?

CUTTER

It's dangerous.

JUDGE

I'm sure beneath its bells and whistles it's got some simple and disappointing trick.

CUTTER

The most disappointing of all- it has no trick. It's real.

The Judge looks at Cutter. Smiles indulgently. Turns.

JUDGE

This is the tank Angier drowned in?

Cutter turns to look at the empty, smashed glass of the tank. Nods. Cutter indicates the top of the tank, where there is a PADLOCK. Cutter pushes down on a panel of the lid-

CUTTER

This lets the performer's hands reach the trick padlock...

-a small section POPS open.

JUDGE

A standard magical apparatus for escapes?

CUTTER

With one important difference...

Cutter grabs the PADLOCK. Rattles it.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

This isn't a trick lock... it's been switched out for a real one.

The Judge stares at the tank, appalled.

JUDGE

What a way to kill someone. Why in God's name go to such lengths?

CUTTER

These are magicians, your honour. Showmen. Men who live by dressing up plain and sometimes brutal truths to amaze. To shock.

JUDGE

Even without an audience?

Cutter stares at the tank-

INSERT CUT: ANGIER SCREAMING BUBBLES.

CUTTER

There was an audience.
(looks at Judge)
See, the water tank had a particular significance for the two men...

INT. THEATRE -- EVENING

Onstage, A SIMILAR TANK FILLED WITH WATER.

CUTTER (V.O.)

A particularly awful significance...

Julia stands next to the tank. Milton addresses the audience.

MILTON

Which of you brave souls is willing
bind this lovely young woman?

Milton gestures to Julia- the crowd goes wild. Julia makes a show of deciding. She picks Angier and Borden, who are made up to look different from the last performance. As they leap up onto stage, Borden makes eye contact with Cutter in the wings- Cutter's is a WARNING GLANCE.

As Angier ties Julia's ankles he can't resist tickling just under her toes- she KICKS him in the chin.

Borden starts to wrap the rope around Julia's wrists in a particular fashion. Stops. Reconsiders. Julia NODS at him, encouraging. Borden starts RETYING the knot.

Cutter watches. His hand checking for the axe handle.

Borden tests the rope- it is tight. Julia gives him the sign with her eyes- he steps back. Angier rises to his feet, grinning at Julia. As she raises her arms to the hook, she can't quite hide her smile back at him.

Milton gives the sign and Julia is HOISTED into the air. Cutter slips his STOPWATCH out of his pocket as Milton moves the tank under Julia's bare feet.

Angier looks up at Julia. Proud. She stares out over the audience, preparing herself. Looks down at Angier, smiling...

Julia PLUNGES into the tank- Milton SLAMS the lid shut- Cutter checks his stopwatch, hand caressing the axe handle...

Milton raises the curtain around the tank, then circles it, working his "magic". Angier shifts a little. Time passing... Milton looks at Cutter- TOO MUCH TIME...

Cutter GRASPS his axe and SPRINTS at the tank- Milton RIPS the curtain down- Julia, one arm free, is CONVULSING...

Angier and Borden look on in HORROR as Cutter SWINGS his axe into the glass- which CRACKS... Cutter SWINGS again and again- the web of cracks GROWING, Julia's convulsions SLOWING, her eyes PLEADING with Angier's, until-

CRASH- the glass gives way, FLOODING the stage- Cutter and Angier GRASP at Julia- PULL her onto the stage- Cutter ELBOWS Angier out of the way to POUND on Julia's chest- Borden watches, stunned, as Julia FLOPS, LIFELESS, onto the boards. Cutter looks up at Angier, stricken.

Angier takes Julia in his arms, looking down at her staring eyes. He desperately BRUSHES water from Julia's cheeks and forehead. Borden looks on, ashen.

BORDEN (V.O.)

*How often I've fought with myself
over that night... one half of me
swearing blind that I tied a simple
slip knot... the other half convinced
that I tied the Langford double. I
suppose I'll never know for sure-*

INT. HOTEL ROOM, COLORADO -- DAY

Angier looks up from Borden's journal, despairing.

ANGIER

How can he not know?!

Angier FLINGS Borden's journal across the room.

ANGIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

He must know what he did. He must.

INT. PRISON CELL -- DAY

Borden smiles as he reads Angier's diary.

BORDEN

"How can he not know?!"

(starts laughing)

Because, Angier, life is complicated,
people are complicated, knots are
complicated-

PRISONER (O.S.)

Shut it, professor, or I'll shut it
for you.

Borden quiets. Looking at the journal.

BORDEN (V.O.)

How could I not know? How can you
read my story and not understand?

INT. COURTROOM -- DAY

Cutter sits in the CROWDED GALLERY. Borden, in the dock,
SCANS the crowd. Finally SPOTS Fallon pushing to the front-
he is ALONE. Borden stares at him. Fallon shakes his head.

Borden is prompted to stand by two GUARDS as the Judge enters.
The JUDGE has a piece of black cloth draped over his wig.

JUDGE

Alfred Borden, you have been found
guilty of the murder of Robert Angier.
You will, in one month's time, be
hanged by the neck until dead. May
the Lord have mercy on your soul.

Borden barely reacts.

EXT. PRISON YARD, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

Borden stands at the fence with Fallon.

BORDEN

They took her away?

(Fallon nods)

To the workhouse?

Another slow nod. Borden closes his eyes with despair.
Then opens them and hands Fallon OWENS' CARD.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Tell him I've reconsidered.

(off look)

It's for the best.

INT. DINING ROOM, CLIFF HOUSE INN, COLORADO SPRINGS -- DUSK

Angier stares down at the NOTEBOOK, making notes on a napkin. Through large windows a THUNDERSTORM batters Pike's Peak. Angier is the only guest in the hotel's massive dining room.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mind if I join you?

- Angier looks around. Alley is standing by the table.

ALLEY

Tesla sends me down here during the storms. Perfect excuse to come share a drink with the Great Danton.

Alley sits, gesturing to a waiter.

ALLEY (CONT'D)

Have you tried our Bourbon yet, Mr. Angier? It matches the scenery nicely.

(to waiter)

Two of 'em.

(to Angier)

Beautiful, isn't it? I do miss New York, though.

ANGIER

Why are you here?

ALLEY

The lightning lives here. And not much else- our work is secret.

Alley glances down at the notebook and Angier's scribbles.

ALLEY (CONT'D)

A cypher?

Angier nods as Alley lifts the cardboard notebook.

ANGIER

My profession also deals in secrets.

Alley looks at the gibberish on the pages of the notebook.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

It's a rotating transposition that shifts every day of the diary. Simple but time-consuming to translate once you have the five-letter keyword.

ALLEY

Which is?

Angier smiles as he reaches for the notebook.

ANGIER

We magicians have a circle of trust.

ALLEY

You have a circle of trust with someone whose diary you stole?

ANGIER

Maybe I bought it.

ALLEY

Magicians sell their secrets?

ANGIER

It's how we pay for our retirements and how great tricks outlive us.

Alley considers this. Taps the cover of the notebook.

ALLEY

You're hoping to find a great secret in there?

ANGIER

I've already found it. That's why I'm here.

Angier reaches in his pocket and removes his own, leather-bound journal. He tears a PAGE from it and hands it to Alley, who unfolds it and stares at it.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Tesla built one for another magician.

ALLEY

Why would you want the same thing?

ANGIER

Call it a professional rivalry.

ALLEY

Tesla has built unusual machines for unusual people, but he would never talk about it.

ANGIER

I understand discretion. I just want the machine.

Alley looks at Angier. Thinking.

ALLEY

Finish your drink. You'll have a special appreciation for our work.

ANGIER

I thought it was a secret.

ALLEY

(smiles)

You're a magician. Who's going to believe you?

EXT. FIELDS, COLORADO SPRINGS -- NIGHT

The storm has abated. Angier's cane sinks into the muddy ground as he follows Alley through the moonlit field.

There are large glass GLOBES pushing out of the soil as if planted, all around them. They stop in the middle of the field, looking down at the electric LIGHTS of the town.

ALLEY

We do our tests when the townspeople are asleep- Mr. Tesla doesn't want to scare anyone.

Alley checks his watch by the moonlight.

ALLEY (CONT'D)

Not long now.

As they watch, the lights of Colorado Springs DISAPPEAR.

ALLEY (CONT'D)

Our equipment requires a great deal of current. Tesla electrified the whole town in exchange for using the generators when we need to.

The field around them EXPLODES with DAZZLING LIGHT. Angier laughs out in surprise- the field is full of a thousand large LIGHTBULBS, all glowing together. Alley bends down and picks up the nearest lightbulb -- as he does, the light in it extinguishes. He tosses the bulb to Angier. Except for the size, it's a normal lightbulb.

ANGIER

Where are the wires?

ALLEY

Exactly.

Angier bends and gently PUSHES the lightbulb into a random spot in the wet soil. The lightbulb FLICKERS on again.

ANGIER

Where's the generator?

ALLEY

You saw it last week.

ANGIER

But that must be ten miles from here.

ALLEY

Fifteen. And I have to ride all of them before I get to bed.

(turns to leave)

I'll send word for you in a few days, Mr. Angier.

Angier bends to pick up his lightbulb. As he does, the light **FADES** in all of them, and the lights in town come back on. Angier is alone.

INT. BATHROOM, LONDON -- DAY

Angier has his head **SUBMERGED** in a sink full of water. He **BURSTS FREE, GASPING** - **COLLAPSES** to the floor, **SOBBING**.

INT. BATHROOM -- LATER

Angier lays out **MAKE-UP SUPPLIES**. He takes out a **BULLET**. Places it on the sink next to a **FALSE MOUSTACHE**.

EXT. PRINCE'S ARMS BAR AND THEATRE -- NIGHT

A crude sign leaning against the wall: **THURSDAYS: "THE PROFESSOR" PERFORMS FEATS OF MAGIC AND MYSTERY**

INT. PRINCE'S ARMS BAR AND THEATRE

Rough. Unwelcoming. Crowded. A small "stage" at one end: Borden works his way through the Chinese rings. The crowd is **JEERING**.

VOICE

Get out your gun, Professor!

Someone **HURLS** a bottle at the stage- it narrowly misses. Borden **GLARES** out into the audience. Pulls out his **GUN**.

BORDEN

A volunteer.

The crowd **SURGES** forward with **EAGER VOLUNTEERS**. Fallon scans the crowd, passing over the too-eager and too-drunk before settling on a **MOUSTACHED MAN** and bringing him up onstage.

Borden **LOADS** the pistol, hands it to Moustache and steps backwards, pulling his coat apart, **CHALLENGING**.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Are you man enough, sir?

MOUSTACHE

(quiet)

Yes.

Something in Moustache's tone makes Borden look closely-behind the moustache... Angier. **QUIVERING WITH TENSION**.

Borden looks at the trembling gun. Then at Angier. Spreads his hands, inviting.

BORDEN

(smiles)

I think not.

Angier purses his lips, straining to pull the trigger.

- INSERT CUT: JULIA'S FACE, SCREAMING BUBBLES...

Angier's eyes are almost closed as he SQUEEZES the TRIGGER-

Fallon HITS Angier's wrist- the gun ROARS- Borden SCREAMS as his RIGHT HAND EXPLODES-

PANDEMONIUM. Fallon JUMPS to Borden's side, GRABBING his BLEEDING HAND. The CROWD is SCREAMING, PUSHING for the door, or STRAINING for a closer look at Borden.

Angier, SHOCKED, melts into the crowd.

INT. PUB -- DAY

Angier sits at the bar. Staring. He raises his pint glass. Downs it, then STOPS, looking at the bottom- there is a PLAYING CARD. He looks around. Cutter is sitting at a table with two fresh pints in front of him. Angier heads over.

ANGIER

Never thought I'd find an answer at the bottom of a pint glass.

CUTTER

Hasn't stopped you looking.

(Angier sits)

I heard about a booking. Nice little theatre. Good up-and-coming magician.

ANGIER

Who?

CUTTER

You.

ANGIER

You got me a booking? Why?

Cutter looks down into his beer.

CUTTER

Because I want to keep working...

(looks up at Angier)

And who's going to hire the ingeneur who killed Julia McCullough in front of a sellout crowd at the Orpheum?

Angier looks back at Cutter.

ANGIER

Someone who knows that it wasn't your fault. Someone who knows Alfred Borden and his repertoire of exotic knots.

CUTTER

Heard he had a spot of bad luck doing a bullet catch South of the river.

Angier looks down at the liquid in his glass.

ANGIER

To die like that. Locked in water... lungs screaming...

(shakes head)

What did she go through, Cutter?

Cutter watches Angier's distress.

CUTTER

I knew an old sailor. Told me about a time he got pulled over the side tangled in the sheets... they dragged him out, but it was five minutes before he coughed...

Angier stares at Cutter. Hanging.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

He said it was like... going home.

Angier considers this. Collects himself.

ANGIER

Which knot did Borden tie that night?

CUTTER

He wouldn't say.

ANGIER

Wouldn't say?!

CUTTER

It was as if... as if he didn't know.

INT. WORKSHOP -- DAY

Angier and Cutter inspect a large empty room.

CUTTER

We'll have to whitewash the windows to confound the more curious members of your audience...

(looks around)

But this should do.

ANGIER

We should see about an assistant.

CUTTER

I've made arrangements. Have you settled on a name?

ANGIER

Yes, I have. The Great Danton.

CUTTER

Hmm. Bit old-fashioned?

Angier smiles gently at Cutter.

ANGIER

No. It's sophisticated.

INT. ANGIER'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Angier is sitting at a worktable, pensive. He is moving one hand across the other, making a ROSE appear and disappear. The windows have been WHITEWASHED and the room has filled with an array of magical apparati: cabinets, costumes, props.

On the other side of the room Cutter watches as OLIVIA WENSCOMBE, 20s, equal parts grace and mischief, squeezes herself into a tall cabinet, looking past Cutter to Angier.

OLIVIA

What's so hard about this?

Cutter leans into the cabinet and pops up a TRICK PANEL in the floor, revealing a tiny chamber.

CUTTER

In here, Miss Wenscombe. No point meeting Mr. Angier unless you fit.

Olivia shrugs and hands Cutter her hat, then her thick skirts, and folds herself into the bottom of the box.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

Breathe as little as possible.

Cutter closes the lid over her and walks over to Angier.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

Not much experience, but she knows the basics. She knows how to present herself and a pretty assistant's the most effective form of misdirection.

Angier nods. There is a small SNEEZE from inside the cabinet.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

(smiles)

I suppose I should let her out.

INT. SARAH'S FLAT -- DAY

Sarah is frantically REDRESSING Borden's injured hand. BLOOD has SEEPED through the bandages.

SARAH

I don't understand, Alfred. How can it be bleeding again?

- She examines the wounds: 2 1/2 FINGERS ARE MISSING. The injuries are black but wet and fresh.

SARAH (CONT'D)

What have you been doing to it? It looks as bad as the day it happened. We need to get the doctor back-

BORDEN

(snaps)

We can't afford the doctor back!

A BABY STARTS CRYING in the bedroom. Sarah glares at Borden.

SARAH

You've woken her.

BORDEN

I'm sorry. I just need this to heal so I can get back to work.

Sarah looks at Borden. Reluctantly:

SARAH

Alfred, you have to face things. What tricks could you perform with this kind of injury?

BORDEN

Some of the card pulls, prop tricks...
(leans forward, excited)
And the trick I've been telling you about. The trick they'll remember me for.

INT. ANGIER'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Angier and Cutter, at the workbench, examine a BIRD CAGE. Cutter is wearing a strange LEATHER HARNESS over his shirt it has LARGE SPRINGS and small PULLEYS on the back.

ANGIER

The bird cage can't be our climax- everybody knows it.

CUTTER

Not like this, they don't.

ANGIER

And I don't want to kill doves.

CUTTER

(snaps)

Then stay off the stage.

(glares at Angier)

You're a magician, not a wizard- you have to get your hands dirty to achieve the impossible.

ANGIER

You sound like him.

CUTTER

(holds up cage)

Put your hands on the sides...

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- DAY

A heavy, disinterested man slouches in the third row of the empty theatre with a newspaper- MERRIT, the stage manager. Onstage, Angier energetically YANKS coloured handkerchiefs from a hat and TOSSING them into the air. Olivia, in the glamorous, revealing costume of Magician's Assistant, darts back and forth PLUCKING the handkerchiefs from the air.

Angier finishes with a flourish. Merrit shrugs. Angier places an ORNATE CAGE onto the table.

ANGIER

I need a volunteer.

Merrit rolls his eyes. Climbs to his feet. Angier produces a DOVE. Places it in the cage.

INT. ANGIER'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Now Angier is wearing the harness. He places a dove in the cage and picks it up.

Close on: HOOKS concealed on Angier's palm slip into CATCHES on the bars of the cage.

CUTTER

Hang on, hang on...

Cutter reaches in and slips a NOOSE around the bird's ankle...

CUTTER (CONT'D)

There we go. Now you tell the volunteer to put his hands here...

Cutter places his hands on the TOP and BOTTOM of the cage...

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- NIGHT

Merrit places his hands on the TOP and BOTTOM of the bird cage. Angier's hands are on the sides. Olivia reaches around Merrit to place her hands on the remaining two sides. Merrit looks up at Angier over his glasses.

MERRIT

You'd best not be intending to hurt this animal, Mr. Angier.

ANGIER

Of course not.

Angier raises and lowers their hands in a rythm...

ANGIER (CONT'D)

And one... two... THREE!

The bird cage, and the dove, VANISH.

INT. ANGIER'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Angier and Cutter have their hands on the bird cage.

ANGIER

...THREE!

The bird cage BREAKS APART, WHIPPING UP ANGIER'S FOREARMS, WHERE SLEEVES WOULD BE, YANKED BY THE HARNESS. Angier smiles.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Bloody marvelous, Cutter.

CUTTER

And the best part...

Cutter reaches to Angier's armpit... pulls up the DOVE, HANGING BY ITS ANKLE, ALIVE.

ANGIER

Thought you said I had to get my hands dirty.

CUTTER

Someday, perhaps you will. I needed to know that you can.

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- DAY

Merrit nods, impressed, stepping backwards. Angier REACHES into Merrit's pocket. Removes a dove.

MERRIT

Very nice. Very nice indeed.

Olivia packs up the props. Cutter approaches from the wings.

ANGIER

(smiling)

I haven't had a chance to compliment you on your beautiful theatre yet, Mr.Merrit.

MERRIT

A lot more beautiful when it's full, Mr.Angier.

ANGIER

Don't worry.

MERRIT

You all worry that. Why should I worry? If your Chicks don't get 'em in, someone else's will. Maybe someone willing to do a bullet catch or a water escape.

CUTTER

Cheap thrills, Mr.Merrit. People hoping for an accident- and quite likely to see one, too. What would that do for your business?

MERRIT

(shrugs)

You've got a week.

EXT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- EVENING

A line of PATRONS runs from the box office to the street. The marquee above the theatre reads: "THE GREAT DANTON PERFORMS FEATS OF MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION"

INT. THEATRE -- EVENING

Angier is performing to a good crowd. He steps forward.

ANGIER

You sir, in the hat. Could you show us your handkerchief?

A MAN in the audience STANDS and pulls a HANDKERCHIEF from his pocket. He stares at it, CONFUSED. The audience LAUGHS.

MAN

This isn't mine.

ANGIER

Perhaps you'd be so good as to return it to the other man. He has yours.

Another man stands and pulls out a handkerchief. APPLAUSE. Angier bows and walks quickly off the stage, past the squad of DANCING GIRLS who run on to entertain in the break.

INT. BACKSTAGE -- EVENING

Cutter and Olivia are waiting for Angier as he comes off.

OLIVIA

I'm so nervous- I'm sorry, I'm making mistakes.

Cutter quickly REMOVES Angier's coat...

ANGIER

The audience doesn't seem to be responding much, Cutter.

Cutter puts the LEATHER HARNESS over Angier's arms...

CUTTER

This is a grand theatre with a sophisticated audience- They've seen most of these tricks before. But not this next one. You'll see.

Cutter checks the SPRINGS of the harness and replaces Angier's coat. He spots a STAGEHAND poking his head around the flies.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

You! Piss off out of it!

The dancers are wrapping up.

ANGIER

Wish us luck, Cutter.

CUTTER

(smiling)

I'll have the champagne ready.

Angier, followed by Olivia, steps out onto the stage.

INT. STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Angier steps to the table center stage. Pulls out the bird cage. There are one or two groans from the audience. Angier SMILES as he produces a DOVE with a FLOURISH.

ANGIER

You've seen this one before?

HECKLER (O.S.)

Seen 'em all before, mate!

Laughter.

ANGIER

Well, I'll make it a little harder, shall I?

In the wings, Cutter smiles and nods at Angier's showmanship.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Two volunteers, please. A lady and a gentleman to hold this cage with me...

Hands go up. Olivia pulls an ELEGANT LADY from the audience.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

I'll perform this feat in a manner never before seen by yourselves or by any other audience anywhere in the world...

Olivia brings Elegant Lady onto the stage along with a RED-BEARDED MAN. The audience is getting interested. Angier is on a role...

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Any magician can make this cage disappear... that's why I'll ask this good lady and fine gentleman to place their hands firmly on the cage...

Olivia guides Elegant Lady's hands onto the sides of the cage. Red-Beard places a hand underneath the cage.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

...to ensure that no trickery whatsoever is employed.

Angier RAISES the bird cage. The audience is RAPT.

Red beard's other hand appears on the top of the cage- it is MUTILATED, missing fingers.

Angier FREEZES- looks up at Red Beard... IT IS BORDEN.

Borden SMILES as he WORMS his little finger into the cage mechanism...

SNAP! HALF THE CAGE WHIPS UP ANGIER'S SLEEVE- THE OTHER HALF COLLAPSES ON THE DOVE AND THE ELEGANT LADY'S FINGERS- SHE SCREAMS- BIRD BLOOD SPLATTERS ONTO THE THREE OF THEM- THE AUDIENCE GOES CRAZY-

Borden smiles at Angier through his blood-spattered fake beard and retreats into the chaos surrounding the Elegant Lady who is still SCREAMING as Angier tries to free her fingers from the mechanism.

INT. BACKSTAGE -- LATER

Angier and Cutter watch the STAGEHANDS clear the stage.

ANGIER

I should've spotted him.

CUTTER

You had a lot of plates spinning.

Angier looks down at the harness in his hands.

ANGIER

Don't suppose they'll let us do this one again.

CUTTER

No.

ANGIER

So what's the climax of our show?

MERRIT (O.S.)

Show? You don't have a show.

ANGIER

Mr. Merrit, we have a week's engagement-

MERRIT

To perform magic- not butcher birds and break my customer's fingers! Clear out, anything here in the morning gets burned.

Cutter puts his hand on Merrit's arm.

CUTTER

Mr. Merrit-

MERRIT

It's done, John. I've hired a comedian. You know I hate comedians, which should indicate the way I feel about your friend's future as a stage magician.

Cutter nods. Merrit leaves. Cutter turns to Angier.

CUTTER

There are plenty of good theatres... if we can come up with another trick and change the name of the act-

ANGIER

The name stays.

Cutter sees Angier's resolve.

CUTTER

Right. Well, the new trick will have to be irresistible, then. I've a couple of methods to try out, but we'll need a fresh angle on the presentation.

Angier nods.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

If you need inspiration, there's a technical exposition at the Albert Hall this week. Scientists and engineers. That sort of thing captures the popular imagination.

EXT. ROYAL ALBERT HALL -- AFTERNOON

The large concert hall is surrounded by crowds and covered in banners advertising a Technical Exposition. Angier makes his way past a giant STEAM ENGINE and into the building.

INT. ALBERT HALL -- AFTERNOON

The lobby is filled with displays and models. Angier pokes around, looking thoroughly disinterested until he comes to an information booth plastered with illustrations of electrical bolts.

TICKET HAWKER

Would you like to know the future, sir? The man who will change the world is speaking right now. Continents divided no more. Free, clean power. The mysteries of the world solved.

The posters show a tall, handsome man bathed in lightning and standing astride the world like colossus. In bold print it says:

THE WONDERS OF "ALTERNATING CURRENT"...NIKOLA TESLA

INT. AUDITORIUM, ALBERT HALL -- CONTINUOUS

The hall is completely darkened, but bright blue FLASHES illuminate ANGIER as he pushes his way to a seat.

On the stage, a tall rod capped with a steel ball is transmitting a steady, sparking stream of electricity onto a matched ball across the stage.

A FIGURE walks around from behind the machine and the audience GASPS as a shower of sparks bounce off of his immaculate evening wear. This is TESLA- but Angier is too far from the stage to get a good look at him.

TESLA

With a system like this I could have the entire city electrified within two years.

The audience breaks into LAUGHTER. The spell is broken. Tesla must be a lunatic.

TESLA (CONT'D)

Mr. Edison's direct current system
is flawed and dangerous. With my
alternating current devices-

Someone from the audience chimes in:

AUDIENCE MEMBER

(yells)

Fraud.

Angier turns to look. The man who called out is leaving.
He's not alone. Angier FREEZES, staring down the aisle-

Borden is sitting here, RAPT, lit by FLASHES from the
machinery on stage. As Tesla continues his demonstration,
Angier STARES at Borden.

EXT. STREET -- DAY

Borden walks down the street. Angier is following him.
Borden meets Sarah, pushing a PRAM. Borden looks down at
the baby then up at Sarah.

BORDEN

I love you.

Sarah smiles.

SARAH

See? Today, it's true.

Angier watches Borden kiss his wife then his baby.

ANGIER (V.O.)

I saw happiness...

INT. HOTEL ROOM, COLORADO -- NIGHT

Angier writing in his leather-bound journal.

ANGIER (V.O.)

*...happiness that should have been
mine. But I was wrong.*

Angier glances at Borden's notebook sitting on the desk.

ANGIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*Reading his account I realize that
he never had the life I envied.*

Angier flips open the notebook. Staring at the coded writing.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

*The family life he craves one minute
he rails against the next, demanding
freedom. His mind is a divided one...*

INT. PRISON CELL -- DAY

Borden sits on his cot. Reading Angier's journal.

ANGIER (V.O.)

*His soul restless. His wife and
child tormented by his fickle and
contradictory nature...*

Borden is crying. He puts the journal down and jumps to his feet BANGING on the cell door.

BORDEN
Guard! Guard!!

The viewing slot slides open.

GUARD
What do you want, Professor?

BORDEN
Paper and pencil. Please.

INT. PRISON LIBRARY, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

The library is long and tiled, with two long tables. It looks as if it used to be a latrine.

Borden sits at a table. WRITING on a stack of notepaper. His arms have been unbound, but long chains runs from his elbows to where the Sullen Guard sits smoking, craning his neck to read Borden's writing.

SULLEN
Let me see?

Sullen SNATCHES up the papers. Borden makes no move to stop him. The top sheet is a sketch of a cabinet.

SULLEN (CONT'D)
I'm going to know all of the
Professor's secrets.

BORDEN
(smiling)
Only if I teach you how to read.

Sullen mashes the papers into a ball and drops them.

SULLEN
Just stupid tricks, right? Haven't
helped you get out of here-
(tugs chains)
Have they? Or can't you open real
locks, Professor?

BORDEN

Perhaps I'm just biding my time.
Perhaps one day I'll just hold up my
hand-

Borden produces a RUBBER BALL in front of Sullen's face.
Sullen stares

BORDEN (CONT'D)

-get your attention. Then quietly
say-

(whispers)

"are you watching closely"... perhaps
say a magic word or two... then I'll
be gone.

Borden VANISHES the ball, but FUMBLES it, it drops to Borden's
feet. Sullen LAUGHS as Borden SCRABBLES around his ankles
to retrieve the ball.

SULLEN

How'd you get so famous, then?

Borden STANDS.

BORDEN

Magic.

Borden TURNS, NO LONGER CHAINED. Sullen JUMPS to his feet
to follow, but HIS ANKLE IS CHAINED TO THE TABLE. The other
PRISONERS are LAUGHING and CHEERING.

SULLEN

Oi, Borden, get back here!

Sullen FUMBLES with his keys as Borden takes a BOW. Another
warder CRACKS Borden over the head with a TRUNCHEON. Sullen,
now free, KICKS Borden in the ribs.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON AN ADVERTISEMENT: "the Professor has DEFIED DEATH
to return with a new SPECTACULAR!" Pull wider-

INT. ANGIER'S WORKSHOP -- NIGHT

A NEWSPAPER on the makeup table. Angier sits at the mirror.

He rubs BROWN PASTE into his hair and then combs it out.
Then he chooses a beard, seats it on his chin and begins to
adjust it. He drops the BOTTLE of spirit gum as he looks in
the mirror and sees OLIVIA standing behind him.

ANGIER

(embarrassed)

I thought you'd gone.

Olivia shifts. Embarrassed.

OLIVIA
I don't really... have anywhere to go.

Angier slips the newspaper from the table.

ANGIER
You've been sleeping here?

OLIVIA
Cutter said it would be okay till we get another booking.
(beat)
What are you doing?

ANGIER
Research. Part of a magician's job is to watch his competition, to see what illusions they're-

OLIVIA
You're going to do something to that man, aren't you?

Olivia moves closer. Angier is quiet.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
Cutter's hoping you'll let things lie. He says if Borden thinks things are even between you then we can-

ANGIER
Even? My wife for a couple of his fingers? He has a child now. And he's performing again.
(bitter)
Borden is out there, living his life just as he always intended. As if nothing had happened. And look at me. I'm alone. And no theatre will touch me.

OLIVIA
Us.

Olivia moves towards him.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
You're going to need a better disguise.

Olivia reaches for Angier's beard.

INT. TINY, GRUBBY THEATRE -- NIGHT

Angier, almost unrecognizable as a blonde, slips into the back of the theatre, which is as rough and unwelcoming as Borden's last venue.

On the small raised stage, Borden works through his way through the Chinese rings with GLOVED HANDS to hide his damaged fingers. The tough crowd is JEERING AT HIM.

Borden puts the rings down on the table and PICKS up a bag.

BORDEN

I need a volunteer.

- Angier takes a few steps towards the stage.

Borden produces a RUBBER BALL.

He TOSSES the ball to Angier.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

As you can see, it's just a rubber ball. But it's not normal at all.

Angier examines the ball. Hands it back to Borden who shows no sign of recognizing Angier.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Thank you.

Angier notices that two TALL BLACK CABINETS are standing twenty feet apart on the stage.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

(to audience)

You're not impressed?

Borden BOUNCES the BALL on the ground and catches it.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

It's a magic ball.

Borden continues to BOUNCE the ball on the floor. The audience looks bored, waiting for something to happen.

OLIVIA (V.O.)

What happened?

INT. ANGIER'S WORKSHOP -- NIGHT

Angier, still in disguise, is slumped in an armchair, drink in hand. He is SMILING, remembering.

Olivia, sitting on the workbench, waits for him to continue.

OLIVIA

What happened, Robert?

ANGIER

He had a new trick.

OLIVIA

Was it good?

Angier looks at her...

INT. TINY, GRUBBY THEATRE -- EVENING

Now it's CUTTER standing in the audience, watching. Onstage, Borden BOUNCES the ball over and over again.

ANGIER (V.O.)

It was the greatest magic trick I
have ever seen.

Borden walks to one side of the stage and OPENS the door to one of the cabinets. It's empty. He CLOSSES it again and crosses the stage, BOUNCING the ball the whole way.

At the far cabinet, Borden repeats the process, OPENING the door to the empty cabinet. This time, however, he leaves the door OPEN.

He steps forwards and GENTLY BOUNCES the ball SIDEWAYS, across the stage...

Borden STEPS into the CABINET behind him, CLOSING the door.

With no one on stage, the audience watches as the BALL continues to BOUNCE across the stage. BOUNCE. BOUNCE. BOUNCE. The ball loses speed and height...

Just as reaches the second cabinet, something IMPOSSIBLE happens.

THE DOOR TO THE SECOND CABINET OPENS AND BORDEN STEPS OUT, CATCHING THE BALL.

Cutter FLINCHES, then studies Borden. The audience is BEMUSED. FINALLY, a trickle of applause.

INT. ANGIER'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Angier is talking to Cutter. Olivia is watching.

ANGIER

Did they applaud when you saw it?

CUTTER

Not very enthusiastically.

INT. TINY, GRUBBY THEATRE -- NIGHT

Angier, in disguise, starts CLAPPING loudly, FIRMLY, as if he can't help it, LEADING the applause.

Borden BOUNCES the ball once again, then BOWS deeply. The APPLAUSE peters out. Borden walks off the stage.

INT. ANGIER'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Angier turns to Cutter.

CUTTER

The trick is too good -- too simple-
the audience hardly knows what they've
seen.

ANGIER

He's a dreadful magician.

CUTTER

He's a wonderful magician- he's a
dreadful showman. He doesn't know
how to dress it up, how to sell the
trick.

ANGIER

How does he do it?

CUTTER

He uses double.

ANGIER

(shakes head)

It's not that simple. This is a
complex illusion.

CUTTER

You think that because you don't
know the method. It's a double who
comes out at the end. It's the only
way.

ANGIER

I've seen him perform it three times
now, Mr. Cutter- the Prestige *is* the
same man-

CUTTER

It's not-

ANGIER

The same man comes out of the second
cabinet. I promise you.

OLIVIA

It *is* the same man.

They both turn to look at Olivia.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

He wears padded gloves to hide his
damaged fingers, but if you look
closely you can tell.

Angier looks at Cutter.

ANGIER

He doesn't know how to sell his trick
to an audience. But *I* do.

CUTTER

(nods)

It would give us our climax.

ANGIER

The man stole my life. I'm going to steal his trick.

CUTTER

We'll have to find someone who can look like you on stage.

ANGIER

He doesn't use a double-

CUTTER

(impatient)

I don't know how Borden does it, Robert. So either you wait for Borden to retire and buy his secret, or you can listen to how I would do this trick.

(Angier nods)

And the only way I know is to find you a bloody good double.

Angier smiles. Turns to Olivia, pointing to his face.

ANGIER

Take a good look- let's get out there and find me.

EXT. ROAD, PIKE'S PEAK -- MORNING

Angier, swinging his cane, walks slowly up the mountain road.

EXT. TESLA'S LABORATORY -- CONTINUOUS

Alley pulls the fence open with a rubber pad. They make their way down to the laboratory. Alley holds the door open, and Angier steps inside.

INT. TESLA'S LABORATORY -- CONTINUOUS

The lab is illuminated by thirty foot STREAMERS of electrical DISCHARGE that pour from the base of the tower.

Angier stops, fearful.

ALLEY

It's perfectly safe.

As Angier stares, a MAN begins to emerge from the very center of the CONFLAGRATION.

Bolts SNAP and TRAIL after the man as he walks, in SILHOUETTE, towards Angier.

TESLA

So this is the Great Danton.

Tesla emerges from the ball of electricity, dressed as if he were on his way to the opera. He brushes SPARKS from the sleeve of his jacket as he extends a hand to Angier.

TESLA (CONT'D)

Mr. Alley has effused about your act to me on any number of occasions. Something you did with pockets?

Angier returns the handshake.

ANGIER

I saw a lecture you gave in London, several years ago. I'm flattered you agreed to see me.

Tesla keeps hold of Angier's hand.

TESLA

Hold out your other hand.

Angier, confused, does so. Alley hands him a lightbulb, which starts to glow as he grasps its metal base.

ANGIER

What's conducting the electricity?

TESLA

Our bodies, Mr. Angier, are quite capable of conducting, and indeed, producing energy.

Tesla releases Angier's hand. The bulb goes out. Alley takes it from Angier who looks at the palms of his hands.

TESLA (CONT'D)

Have you eaten, Mr. Angier?

EXT. DECK, LABORATORY -- MORNING

Angier, Alley and Tesla are seated around a table on a deck overlooking a spectacular view. They are eating sandwiches.

TESLA

Alley has explained that you require a very interesting device.

ANGIER

I need something impossible.

TESLA

You're familiar with the phrase 'Man's reach exceeds his grasp'?

(MORE)

TESLA (CONT'D)

(off his look)

It's a lie. Man's grasp exceeds his nerve. The only limits on scientific progress are those imposed by society.

Tesla looks out at the mountains.

TESLA (CONT'D)

The first time I changed the world I was hailed as a visionary. The second time I was asked politely to retire. The world only tolerates one change at a time. And so here I am.

(gestures at laboratory)

Enjoying my "retirement".

(looks at Angier)

Nothing is impossible, Mr. Angier. What you want is simply expensive.

Tesla rises, washing his hands in a basin on a side table.

TESLA (CONT'D)

Alley says you are a stage magician. If I built you this device, you would be presenting it only as an illusion?

ANGIER

If people thought the things I did on stage were real, they wouldn't clap- they'd scream. Think of sawing a woman in half.

Tesla nods. Considering.

TESLA

Mr. Angier, the cost of such a machine-

ANGIER

Price is not an object.

TESLA

Perhaps not. But have you considered the cost?

ANGIER

I'm not sure I follow.

TESLA

I can make your machine, Mr. Angier. But I can also give you some advice...
(pointed)

Go home. Forget this thing. I can recognize an obsession. As Mr. Alley could tell you, I myself am given to one now and then. It will not do you any good.

ANGIER

Have your obsessions done you no good?

TESLA

At first. But I've followed them too long- I am their slave. Their whipping boy. And one day they may choose to destroy me.

Angier looks into Tesla's eyes.

ANGIER

If you understand an obsession then you know you won't change my mind.

TESLA

(smiles)
So be it

ANGIER

Will you build it?

TESLA

I have already begun to build it, Mr. Angier. I hope you enjoy the mountain air. This will take time.

Tesla disappears into the lab.

INT. GREEN ROOM DRINKING CLUB -- EVENING

The club is warm and dark. Olivia, Cutter and Angier make their way to the bar. Olivia points to the far end of the bar, to a TRAMP in tattered clothing, curled over a pint.

OLIVIA

(to tramp)
Gerry?

The tramp sees Olivia, hoists himself up and spills his way down the bar to them. As he draws closer, we understand why Olivia has brought them here:

Underneath the filth and matted hair, this man is the SPITTING IMAGE of Robert Angier- *HE IS PLAYED BY THE SAME ACTOR.*

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

Mr Angier, Mr Cutter, I would like you to meet Mr. Gerald Root.

ROOT

A pleasure to meet you fine gentlemen.

Angier is staring a little too much. Root throws an ARM over Angier's shoulder and draws him in.

ROOT (CONT'D)

(whisper)
Would you like for me to tell you a
little joke?

Angier smiles uncomfortably. Suddenly Root WRAPS his hands around Angier's neck and begins to THROTTLE him.

Cutter breaks it up and pushes Root back.

ROOT (CONT'D)

(yelling)
Are you laughing?

Angier is shaken. Root picks his hat off of the bar and disappears onto the street.

ANGIER

He's out of his mind.

OLIVIA

He's an out-of-work actor- of course
he's out of his mind.

CUTTER

He's perfect. A little work, mind
you, but when I'm done with him he
could be your brother.

ANGIER

I don't need him to be my brother.
I need him to be me.

CUTTER

Give me a month.

EXT. NORTH HILL -- DAY

Borden escorts Sarah and their TODDLER, a girl, up the tree-lined street.

Borden stops abruptly. Crouches to his daughter.

BORDEN

Would you like to see a magic trick?

Borden reaches up and pushes a wayward LOCK of her hair over her ear. When his hand returns, it's holding a KEY.

He stands, and places the key in Sarah's hand.

SARAH

What is this for?

Borden takes her gently by the shoulders and turns her around, until she's facing a modest two-story HOUSE. She looks down at the key in her hand.

SARAH (CONT'D)

When I asked last week you said we couldn't afford-

BORDEN

You caught me in the wrong mood.

SARAH

But you went through all the-

BORDEN

Sarah. I'm allowed to change my mind, aren't I? The act is taking off, maybe soon I'll get us into a bigger theatre. Things will work.

Sarah turns and embraces her husband.

INT. EMPIRE THEATRE

The auditorium is empty. Two doors in simple frames have been erected in the middle of the stage. Angier fiddles with one, opening it, walking through it. Olivia is watching.

OLIVIA

You walk through this one- then...?

Angier stands Olivia in front of the door.

He pushes the door all the way open. Suddenly, a TRAP-DOOR set into the floor POPS open. Angier JUMPS through it-

INT. BENEATH THE EMPIRE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

-LANDING on a STRAW MATTRESS positioned under the hole. He BECKONS to Olivia, above him.

INT. EMPIRE THEATRE -- CONTINUOUS

Olivia gathers up her skirts and DROPS through the hole-

INT. BENEATH THE EMPIRE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

-LANDING beside Angier on the straw mattress.

OLIVIA

Oof. Couldn't you find a softer one?

ANGIER

(smiles)

It's not for sleeping on.

Olivia looks around the below stage area.

OLIVIA

And Root goes up through there?

She gestures at a LIFT twenty feet away with a TRAP DOOR MECHANISM above it. Angier nods. Olivia looks at Angier.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

It's going to be amazing, Robert.

ANGIER

It has to be. Borden's trick is getting noticed. The place was packed today.

Olivia looks at him strangely.

OLIVIA

You went and saw his show again?

Angier looks away, embarrassed.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

You're becoming obsessed, Robert.

CUTTER (O.S.)

Ready to meet yourself, Mr. Angier?!

Angier and Olivia look up to see Cutter at the trap door.

INT. EMPIRE THEATRE -- MOMENTS LATER

Angier and Olivia sit in the front row. Cutter beckons Root onstage. He's been cleaned up and dressed in Angier's stage costume. He TRIPS on his way across the stage.

ANGIER

All I have to do is keep myself stinking drunk all the time and no one will be able to tell the difference.

CUTTER

A little faith, sir. Could you favor us with a performance, Mr. Root?

Root picks himself up and dusts himself off.

Suddenly, ROOT HAS BECOME ANGIER. He is channeling everything from his facial expressions to his walk. Angier nods, starting to believe this might work. The illusion is PERFECT -- till he opens his mouth.

ROOT

You would drink, too, if you knew the world half so well as I do.

Angier hops up onto stage, examining Root from different angles. Root starts APING his every movement. Olivia starts laughing. Angier is getting uncomfortable.

ROOT (CONT'D)

Did you think you were unique, Mr. Angier? I have been Caesar. I have been Faust. How difficult could it possibly be to play 'The Great Danton?'

CUTTER

You can go back to being yourself, Root. For free.

Root looks challengingly at both men.

ROOT

I'd rather be him, for now. I find it amusing.

Root WAVES his hands across his chest, in the same manner that Angier does onstage. He produces a bottle of Gin from thin air, and takes a long swallow and jumps down to Olivia.

CUTTER

Root has to keep a low profile- anyone sees him the game's up.

ANGIER

(watching Root)

I don't know how you do these things, Cutter. I'm not sure I want to know.

CUTTER

Have you thought about what we should call the trick?

ANGIER

No point being coy. Borden calls his trick 'The Transported Man'?

Cutter nods.

EXT. LEICESTER SQUARE -- EVENING

The enormous MARQUEE of the Empire Theatre:

'The Great Danton performs THE NEW TRANSPORTED MAN'

Beneath it, a CROWD. Fallon amongst them. STARING up at the sign.

INT. EMPIRE THEATRE -- EVENING

Angier is onstage, nearing the end of his show, SMILING BROADLY as he pulls dozens of FLOWERS from thin air and tosses them to the crowd. APPLAUSE fills the theatre.

The DOORFRAMES are wheeled out on either side of the stage. Angier approaches the edge of the stage to address the audience with a suddenly SOLEMN demeanor.

ANGIER

Ladies and gentlemen, much of what you've seen tonight can be termed *illusions*. Entertaining trifles of the sort you may have seen other magicians perform.

Angier puts on a TOP HAT.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Alas, I cannot claim this next feat as *illusion*. Watch carefully- you will see no trickery, for no trickery is being employed. Merely a technique familiar to certain citizens of the orient and various holy men of the Himalayas. Indeed, some of you may be familiar with this technique, but for those of you who aren't, do not be alarmed, what you are about to see is considered safe...

Angier gracefully TURNS and heads upstage to the right-hand door, opens it, SLAPS it to show that it is solid.

Then strolls through crossing the stage-

-to the other door, which he opens, SLAPPING to show its solidity, then walking through the frame.

Angier removes his TOP HAT and THROWS it high into the air. It sails back down to him and he catches it.

Angier THROWS the HAT again, even harder this time, and it disappears up into the rafters. After a beat, it is clear it's not coming back down.

LAUGHTER. Angier snaps his fingers and the hat is dropped back down to him. He catches it.

Angier moves to the first door and THROWS HIS HAT in a HIGH ARC across the stage. He OPENS the door- steps behind it...

The second DOOR, FAR ACROSS THE STAGE, IMMEDIATELY opens and ANGIER/ROOT EMERGES, REACHING UP TO CATCH THE HAT.

BOTH DOORS SLAM SHUT behind him. He puts on the hat.

THE AUDIENCE ERUPTS- A STANDING OVATION, Fallon the only one in his seat as Angier/Root takes his BOWS.

INT. UNDER THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Angier, hearing the MASSIVE APPLAUSE, climbs off the straw mattress, PEERING up through the cracks in the floorboards.

Smiling, Angier turns to the unseen audience and BOWS.

INT. DRESSING ROOM -- EVENING

Angier, Olivia, and Cutter are CELEBRATING their success. Empty bottles of champagne line the makeup table.

OLIVIA

(toast)

To our achievement.

- They drink.

CUTTER

The manager said he's never seen a reaction like it.

Angier smiles, rueful.

ANGIER

At least he got to see it. I spent the ovation hidden under the stage. No one cares about the man who disappears, the man who goes into the box. They care about the man who comes out the other side.

OLIVIA

I care about the man in the box.

Angier turns to Olivia, raises his glass.

ANGIER

Thank you.

(to Cutter)

Maybe we could switch before the trick. That way I could be the Prestige and Root ends up below stage.

CUTTER

(shakes head)

The anticipation of the trick is everything- it needs your showmanship to build suspense. If Root opens his mouth, it's all over- he can't introduce the trick.

ROOT (O.S.)

Of course I can. I'm the Great Danton.

They turn. Root is lying behind a trunk, still in costume.

CUTTER

Root, you bloody fool, get that costume and makeup off right now, anyone could walk in here!

Cutter is SLAPPING Root to his feet. He grabs his collar and turns to Angier and Olivia.

CUTTER (CONT'D)
 Congratulations, all.

Cutter DRAGS Root out. Olivia slides onto the makeup table.

ANGIER
 I suppose I should get some rest.

OLIVIA
 Life is not full of these moments,
 Robbie.

Olivia pours him some more champagne.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
 We've worked hard for this, and we
 need to celebrate properly.

Angier looks up at her with a gentle smile. She pulls him
 in closer and they KISS. She wraps her legs around him.
 They kiss again.

Angier pulls back.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
 What's wrong?
 (softly)
 Is it your wife?

Angier shakes his head, distracted.

ANGIER
 The trick isn't good enough.

Olivia stares at him.

OLIVIA
 Didn't you see the audience?

ANGIER
 No.

OLIVIA
 Well, they loved it.

ANGIER
 It's not as good as his trick.

OLIVIA
 Borden's trick is nothing compared
 to ours. He doesn't have any style-

ANGIER
 He doesn't have to spend the finale
 hiding under the stage.

Angier rises, turning out of her embrace.

ANGIER (CONT'D)
I need to know how he does it.

OLIVIA
Why?

ANGIER
So that I can do it better.

- Angier turns to her. Looks her in the eye.

ANGIER (CONT'D)
I need you to go and work for him.

OLIVIA
Work for him? Are you joking?

ANGIER
You'll be my spy.

OLIVIA
(taken aback)
We just got our start and you want
me to leave?

ANGIER
It's how we advance.

Angier moves to Olivia, placing his hands on her shoulders.

ANGIER (CONT'D)
Think of it, Olivia... we've got
people excited about Cutter's version
of the trick- imagine what we could
do with the real illusion. We'll
have the greatest magic act anyone's
ever seen.

OLIVIA
(frustrated)
He knows I work for you.

ANGIER
Exactly why he'll want to hire you.
He'll want my secrets.

OLIVIA
Why would he trust me?

Angier thinks for a second. Then smiles.

ANGIER
Because you're going to tell him the
truth.

INT. TESLA'S LABORATORY -- DAY

Alley shows Angier in. Tesla is sitting, reading.

TESLA

You must be curious to see what so much money has bought you, Mr. Angier.

Tesla RISES. Leads Angier to a back corner of the room and pulls a SHEET from a ten-foot tall apparatus- the ELECTRICAL MACHINE Angier used on stage in the opening of the film.

TESLA (CONT'D)

Fitting that you should be here for the maiden voyage.

Alley FIRES a GENERATOR connected by thick cables to the machine. It RUMBLES into life, smoke pouring from its slats.

TESLA (CONT'D)

Your hat

Angier takes off his hat and tries to hand it to Tesla. Alley intercepts the hat and lays it on a chalk hashmark directly underneath the machine. He returns to the controls.

ALLEY

You might want to stand back.

TESLA

No, no. It will be fine. Mr. Alley, please proceed.

Without further ceremony, Alley FIRES the machine.

Nothing happens. Then, as they watch, the GLOBE on top of the tripod FLASHES white hot. BOLTS shooting out of it, wrapping themselves around the legs of the tripod. The CHARGE reaches a FRENZY and then emits a loud BANG, as if it has broken the sound barrier.

Suddenly the room is still.

Tesla walks forward. Looks down into the pit.

Alley joins him at the edge of the pit. Angier, limping, is the last to arrive, looking into the pit-

-at the TOP HAT, which hasn't moved an inch.

ANGIER

I don't understand-

Tesla STARES at the hat as if trying to melt it with CONCENTRATION. Alley pulls Angier away from the pit.

ALLEY

Perhaps it would be best if you left us to it. We'll see you next week?

Angier begins to protest but Alley gestures towards the door.

INT. BORDEN'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

A small, disused shop off an arcade, crowded with tools, cabinetry and props, windows plastered with playbills. Borden is sitting at a workbench, sleeves rolled up, working a lathe.

Fallon enters, Olivia behind him. Borden looks back at her, turns back to the table, instinctively putting on his gloves.

OLIVIA
(looking around)
Interesting workshop.

BORDEN
We make ~~it~~.

OLIVIA
My name Olivia Wenscombe.

BORDEN
I know who you are. Are you here to steal the rest of my show?

Olivia sees one of the theatrical notices that litter the shop: **"THE GREAT DANTON BREAKS HOUSE RECORD WITH HIS ASTONISHING NEW TRICK"**

OLIVIA
No. I'm here to give your show what it's missing.

BORDEN
And what might that be?

OLIVIA
Me.

BORDEN
(to Fallon)
Wasn't I just saying that, Bernard?
A woman's touch.

Fallon leaves, closing the door.

OLIVIA
I've left Angier. I want a job.

Borden sits there.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
I know you have no reason to trust me-

BORDEN
Why on earth shouldn't I trust you?
The mistress of my enemy.

Olivia is taken aback. Changes tack.

OLIVIA
Mr. Borden-

BORDEN
Alfred.

OLIVIA
Alfred. I'm going to tell you the truth.

BORDEN
Ah. The truth. A slippery notion in our line of work, Miss Wenscombe.

OLIVIA
I'm here because he sent me here. He wants me to come and work for you and steal your secret.

BORDEN
What does he need my secret for? His trick is top notch. The Great Danton vanishes and instantly reappears on the other side of the stage -- mute, overweight, and, unless I'm mistaken, rather drunk.

Borden rises, moves closer to Olivia.

BORDEN (CONT'D)
Tell me, Olivia. Does he like taking his bows under the stage?

Olivia meets his gaze.

OLIVIA
No. It's killing him. He's obsessed with discovering your method. He thinks of nothing else, and takes no pleasure in our success. I've had enough. There's no future with him. He sent me here to steal your secrets, but I've actually come to offer you his.

BORDEN
He *has* no secrets from me.

Borden stares at her, unsure.

BORDEN (CONT'D)
And this is the "truth"?

She gives Borden a challenging smile/shrug.

INT. BACKSTAGE -- DAY

Cutter is fixing a prop mechanism. Angier approaches, in his undershirt, looks over his shoulder. Cutter glances up.

CUTTER

Best be getting changed for the matinee, sir.

- Angier nods. Cutter REALIZES.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

ROOT! You're late.

(sniffs)

And even more drunk than usual. Get yourself below stairs, right away!

ROOT

No.

CUTTER

No?!

Root looks at Cutter with genuine malice.

ROOT

We need to have a chat, Mr. Cutter.

INT. DRESSING ROOM -- DAY

Angier is applying his makeup. Cutter enters. Angier looks at him through the mirror.

ANGIER

We have a problem, Cutter.

He holds up the paper, folded to an advertisement:

PANTAGES THEATRE- FROM NEXT WEEK- THE PROFESSOR WILL DEMONSTRATE THE ORIGINAL TRANSPORTED MAN- ACCEPT NO CHEAP IMITATIONS!!!

ANGIER (CONT'D)

He'll be performing right across the street.

CUTTER

We have a bigger problem. Root.

ANGIER

Don't tell me he fell over again.

CUTTER

Worse. He realized he can make demands.

ANGIER

He's blackmailing us?

CUTTER

In a word, yes. I'm surprised, to be honest- it usually takes them a lot longer to figure it out.

ANGIER

How much does he want?

CUTTER

It makes no difference- we have to stop doing the trick.

ANGIER

(wields paper)

Stop doing the trick? Look at this.

CUTTER

Look at yesterday's. And last week's, where they called you "London's premiere stage performer", not "magician" mind. Performer. Of any kind.

ANGIER

What's your point?

CUTTER

My point, Robert, is that you've climbed too high to get away with any kind of professional embarrassment. We're not doing any tricks we can't control.

Angier considers this. Nods. Thinking.

ANGIER

Pay him whatever he wants, for now. We keep doing the trick till Borden opens, then we'll phase it out.

INT. BENEATH THE EMPIRE STAGE -- NIGHT

Root smokes a cigarette. PULL BACK to reveal he is standing on the LIFT beneath the stage...

The trapdoor OPENS and Angier DROPS onto the straw mattress. He looks over to see Root finishing his cigarette.

ANGIER

(hisses)

Get up there!!

Root smirks at Angier- TOSSES the cigarette and CATAPULTS up-

INT. STAGE, EMPIRE THEATRE -- CONTINUOUS

-onto the stage and STEPS/STUMBLES out from behind the door to LOUD APPLAUSE.

Root has a SLOPPY GRIN as he STRUTS across the stage, milking the applause from every angle, blowing kisses, winking... loving it. He turns to Cutter in the wings. Blows him a kiss.

Cutter GLARES. Then TURNS to a stagehand.

CUTTER

Get it down!

ANGIER (V.O.)

Cutter was always surprised how fast Root turned bad.

The stagehand starts LOWERING THE CURTAIN.

INT. RESTAURANT, CLIFF HOUSE INN -- DAY

Angier sits with Borden's diary.

ANGIER (V.O.)

We paid him enough to keep him in beer- you wouldn't expect him to rock the boat. Today I learned Borden's view on the episode...

INT. TAVERN -- EVENING

The bar is dark and seedy, packed with an unpromising lot.

ANGIER (V.O.)

...and his account suggests a reason.

Root is hanging precariously from his barstool, head lolling towards his empty glass. He is in his own clothes, but cleaned up to look like Angier.

A full PINT arrives in front of him. Root turns to face his benefactor- BORDEN. Root takes several large GULPS, staring at Borden. Suppresses a belch.

ROOT

To what do I owe the pleasure of this rather welcome pint of ale?

BORDEN

You are the Great Danton, aren't you?

Root gestures silence, glancing around them.

ROOT

Of course I am. But don't advertise it- I'll be mobbed with fans.

(grins at Borden)

And who might you be?

BORDEN

Just a humble admirer. And fellow practitioner.

ROOT

Ah, very good.

Root DOWNS the rest of his new pint, placing the empty glass in front of Borden with an emphatic THUNK.

BORDEN

Another?

ROOT

If you insist. I'm not performing tonight. Well, only one show, and, to be frank, my people pretty much run things these days.

BORDEN

You could probably do it blindfolded.

ROOT

Bloody good idea.

BORDEN

Have it.

ROOT

Thanks.

A new pint arrives. Root sips.

BORDEN

Actually, there's something I might warn you about.

ROOT

Oh?

BORDEN

Well, It's your Transported Man illusion. Now, I'm not claiming to know your method... but I had a similar trick in my act- and I used...
 (looks around,
 whispering)
 ...a double.

ROOT

Oh, I see, very good.

BORDEN

At first. Then it went bad. You see, I hadn't counted on the fact that once I incorporated this bloke into my act, he had complete power over me.

ROOT

Complete power, you say?

BORDEN

(nodding gravely)

Well, he was the secret, you see.
And the more successful I became,
the more outrageous his demands
became. He practically bankrupted
me. In the end I had to stop
performing the illusion completely.

(looks at Root)

You must be very careful about giving
someone that power over you.

Root looks at Borden. Drunken wheels spinning.

ROOT

Thanks for the warning.

INT. STAGE, EMPIRE THEATRE -- EVENING

Angier is almost all the way through his act.

ANGIER

...some of you may be familiar with
this technique, but for those of you
who aren't, do not be alarmed, what
you are about to see is considered
safe...

Angier takes his time, confident, MILKING IT. He throws his
HAT into the air, catches it.

He throws it ACROSS THE STAGE- RUNS at the first door, FLINGS
it open, and FALLS through the trap door.

INT. UNDER THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Angier DROPS ten feet to the concrete floor. But there is
NOTHING to break his fall-

He SMASHES painfully to the ground. CLUTCHING his leg in
AGONY, he looks up and sees SOMEONE standing on the lift
twenty feet away... BORDEN.

INT. STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

The first door SLAMS shut. The audience turns their attention
to the second door.

The door remains closed. The HAT falls gently to the floor.
SILENCE, broken by a COUGH in the audience.

INT. UNDER THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

BORDEN bows to Angier- the LIFT ROCKETS BORDEN UP THROUGH
THE STAGE FLOOR.

INT. STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

The second door OPENS, and BORDEN steps through, looking all around, CONFUSED, as if he doesn't know where he is. He looks back at the door, then picks up the HAT...

INT. UNDER THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Angier looks at his leg- a nasty COMPOUND FRACTURE. As he chokes on pain he can hear LAUGHTER from the AUDIENCE.

INT. STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

As Borden mugs with the hat, trying it on and finding it too small, something is LOWERED from the flies above:

ANGIER/ROOT, BOUND AND GAGGED, HANGS from a chain. A sign around his neck reads: "OPENING AT PANTAGES- THE PROFESSOR"

Borden looks up behind him.

BORDEN

Great Danton, I must apologize! I simply had too much magic for my stage at the Pantages!

The Great Danton comes to rest three feet above the stage.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Pardon my intrusion!

Borden places the top hat on ANGIER/ROOT at a JAUNTY ANGLE.

THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE and LAUGHTER. Borden BOWS, hops down off the stage, and walks up the aisle, bowing, enjoying it all the way.

INT. STAGE -- LATER

Cutter crouches over Angier, fixing a LONG SPLINT to his broken leg. Behind them, Root still hangs above the stage, groaning in protest.

CUTTER

I don't see how Borden found him- I had him under wraps, I was careful.

ANGIER

Well, he did.

Cutter helps Angier to his feet.

CUTTER

Sir, do you think it might be her? Olivia?

Angier stops to look at Cutter.

ANGIER

No. I don't.

Cutter gestures at Root.

CUTTER

Shall we cut him down?

ANGIER

He's the Great Danton. Let him cut himself down.

EXT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- NIGHT

Angier, thinly disguised, leg in long metal brace, pushes through the crowd outside the box office. The marquee: **The Professor Performs His Masterpiece- THE ORIGINAL TRANSPORTED MAN!!**

On the box office: **SOLD OUT THRU SUNDAY.** Angier STARES.

SCALPER (O.S.)

Need tickets, sir?

Angier turn to the SCALPER. Nods.

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- EVENING

Angier slumps into a seat at the back of the PACKED theatre.

ONSTAGE: Borden works through his show with a SUPERIOR DEGREE OF SHOWMANSHIP, even cracking a smile when called for. Working WITHOUT GLOVES, he makes much of performing tricks ONE-HANDED. He is assisted by Olivia, who looks STUNNING.

Borden performs the Transported Man. BORDEN HAS DRESSED IT UP WITH ELECTRICAL APPARATUS. Two large glass balls transmit SPARKS between one cabinet and the other along BARE WIRES.

Angier watches, anger rising as he watches Olivia's close RAPPORT with Borden.

INT. APARTMENT -- EVENING

Olivia enters in to the darkened bedroom. She strikes a match and lights one of the gaslights...

...and SCREAMS as the gaslight illuminates Angier, sitting in an armchair, cane leaning against the arm of the chair.

ANGIER

You weren't expecting me?

OLIVIA

I was expecting you sooner, Robbie. Your message said "afternoon".

ANGIER

Well, it takes a bit for me to get around these days...

Angier RAPS his leg brace with his cane. HOISTS himself up.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

He's taken everything from me. My wife, my career... now you.

OLIVIA

What do you mean? You sent me to-

Angier takes her by the shoulders, ROUGHLY.

ANGIER

I sent you to steal his secret- not to improve his act-

OLIVIA

That's my job-!

ANGIER

Or to fall in love with him!

OLIVIA

You abandoned me to him!

Angier SLAPS her. She shakes her head at him.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

I did everything you asked.

ANGIER

(challenging)

Yes? Then how does he do it?!

OLIVIA

Cutter was right- it's a double.

Angier shakes his head, furious.

ANGIER

Of course Borden said that-

OLIVIA

He didn't say anything- he'd never say. I've seen things- make-up, glasses, wigs. We don't use any of it for the show, but I've found it hidden backstage.

ANGIER

(scorn)

It's misdirection- he leaves those things lying around to make you think he's using a double.

OLIVIA

All the time? He doesn't know when
I'm looking-

ANGIER

All the time, Olivia- that's who he
is, that's what it takes- he lives
his act, don't you see?!

(beat)

And just because you're sleeping
with him doesn't mean he trusts you.

Olivia glares at him, tears forming in her eyes.

OLIVIA

You think you can see everything,
don't you?

She moves to her bed, REACHING below the mattress.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

But the Great Danton, is a blind
fool.

Olivia tosses something at Angier: a CARDBOARD-BOUND NOTEBOOK.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

His notebook.

Angier starts leafing desperately through pages.

ANGIER

You stole it?

OLIVIA

I borrowed it for tonight. I thought
you'd be able to translate some of
it, but now I realize-

ANGIER

I can't.

OLIVIA

(scorn)

You can't.

ANGIER

Olivia, no one could-
(studies pages)

It's a cypher- with a transposition
that probably shifts every day of
the diary. Even with the keyword it
would take months to decode...

OLIVIA

And without the keyword?

ANGIER

Perhaps never. We'll see.

Angier puts the cardboard-bound notebook into his pocket. Olivia, worried, holds out her hand for the notebook.

OLIVIA

No, we won't- if I don't get that back tomorrow morning, he'll know I took it.

Angier looks at her, incredulous.

ANGIER

You can't possibly think I'd let this go? This is his diary, Olivia. All of his secrets are right here, in my hands.

OLIVIA

(pleading)

Don't do this to me, Robert!

ANGIER

(shrugs)

Leave him.

OLIVIA

He knows where I live!

ANGIER

I need to know his method.

OLIVIA

(desperate)

It won't get your wife back, Robert.

ANGIER

I don't care about my wife- I care about his secret!

Angier stops, realizing what he said. Calms himself.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Look, I'll go to his workshop and stage a break-in-

OLIVIA

He'll know it was you-

Angier puts his hands GENTLY on her shoulders.

ANGIER

Yes, me, not you. Understand?

Olivia nods, crying. Still scared. Angier drags his leg to the door. She watches him go, torn.

OLIVIA

Robert? I have fallen in love with him.

Angier looks at her, sympathetic.

ANGIER

Then I know how hard this has been hard for you.

INT. BORDEN'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

CLOSE ON: SHATTERED GLASS, BROKEN PROPS AND CABINETRY.

Borden and Fallon survey the WRECKAGE of their shop. Borden looks at Fallon.

BORDEN

Notebook

Fallon nods. Borden sighs. Weary.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Then he's just getting started.

EXT. STAGEDOOR, PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- EVENING

A small CROWD of autograph SEEKERS crowd the stagedoor. A BODYGUARD steps through the door and begins ushering them away as Fallon and Borden follow him through the door.

The bodyguard holds the door to a carriage open and Fallon steps up. Borden stops at the open door.

BORDEN

I'm walking tonight, gentlemen.

Fallon looks concerned.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Let him come. I don't care.

Borden doffs his hat and walks onto the crowded street.

Fallon steps down, reaches into the bodyguard's jacket and pulls out a PISTOL. He checks that it's loaded and slips it into his own jacket. Then he sets off after Borden.

EXT. STREETS, WEST END -- EVENING

Fallon continues to follow Borden at a distance. Borden steps into a tobacconist's. Fallon stops and idles at the street corner.

As Fallon watches, across the street, another man STOPS. Fallon slips back around the corner and looks:

It's Angier, leaning on his cane.

Borden emerges from the tobacconist and continues down the street, a cloud of pipe smoke drifting after him.

Fallon waits for Angier to set off after Borden, then follows both men from a distance.

Borden crosses to the same side of the street as Angier. Fallon picks up his pace and tries to cross the street but is HELD UP for a second by passing traffic.

As he reaches the other side, Borden is gone, but he sees Angier disappearing down an alleyway.

EXT. ALLEY -- CONTINUOUS

Fallon rounds the corner and stops. The alleyway is EMPTY. -- he has lost them. Finally, he sees an open, darkened doorway towards the end of the alleyway.

INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Fallon stops at the doorway, his gloved hand gripping the doorframe.

Angier stands at the other end of the hallway, watching him.

Fallon takes a step towards him and CRASHES through the rotten floor to the basement below.

INT. BASEMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Fallon drops heavily into an almost-vertical OPEN COFFIN.

DISORIENTED, Fallon just glimpses CUTTER DROP THE LID INTO PLACE, shutting him in. Cutter starts NAILING it down.

A GUNSHOT TEARS through the lid of the box. Cutter falls back, but is caught by Angier.

Angier rolls Cutter off to one side. He is clutching at a BLOODY WOUND on his arm.

CUTTER

I'll live.
 (to coffin)
 You saved me the trouble of making
 you an air hole!

Angier picks up the hammer and continues NAILING.

EXT. HIGHGATE CEMETERY -- MORNING

Borden picks his way through the overgrown cemetery. He hears a KNOCKING and turns:

Angier is behind him, RAPPING on a broken headstone with the head of his cane.

BORDEN
I'm impressed.

ANGIER
Why's that?

BORDEN
You're finally getting your hands
dirty. This is what a good trick
costs, Angier. Risk. Sacrifice.

ANGIER
The sacrifice, I'm afraid, is all
going to be yours. Unless you give
me what I want.

BORDEN
Which is?

ANGIER
Your secret.

Borden tries to gauge Angier's expression.

BORDEN
My secret?

ANGIER
Your method for the Transported Man.
Fallon wouldn't tell me. In fact,
he doesn't talk at all.

BORDEN
(shrugs)
You have my notebook.

ANGIER
Useless without the keyword.

Angier pulls a sheaf of writing paper and a pencil stub from
his pocket. He offers them to Borden.

ANGIER (CONT'D)
Write down your method Mr. Borden.
Describe it in full.

Borden takes the paper and pencil and stares Angier in the
eye, gauging him.

Beat.

Borden writes a SINGLE WORD on the top page and folds it up.

ANGIER (CONT'D)
I want the *method* not the keyword- I
don't even know if the secret is in
your notebook.

Borden looks at Angier with a glint in his eye.

BORDEN

The keyword is the method.

Angier reaches for the folded paper, which Borden lifts out of reach.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Where is my ingeneur?

Angier pulls a SHOVEL free from a pile of dirt beside him. He STAKES it into a fresh pile of dirt in front of Borden. Borden looks at Angier, CONCERNED.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Is he alive?

Angier plucks the folded paper from Borden's hand.

ANGIER

How fast can you dig?

Angier moves away through the headstones, leaning heavily on his cane. Borden begins to DIG.

INT. HOSPITAL -- EVENING

Cutter is slumped in a chair by the wall, his arm bandaged. He smiles up at Angier, who sits down next to him.

ANGIER

How's the arm?

CUTTER

Still attached. Did you get your answer?

Angier holds up the folded paper.

ANGIER

Our answer, Cutter. I haven't looked yet, I wanted you to share this.

Cutter looks curiously at Angier.

CUTTER

I already know how he does it, Robert. The same way he always has, the same way we do. You just want it to be something more.

Angier looks at Cutter, uneasy.

ANGIER

Well, let's find out, shall we?

Angier opens the piece of paper. A large GRIN spreads across his face. He turns it to Cutter- it reads-

- T E S L A -

Cutter frowns, confused.

CUTTER

What does it mean?

ANGIER

(excited)

It means, Cutter, that we have a journey ahead of us. To America.

Cutter watches Angier's excitement. Awkward.

CUTTER

Robert, listen to me.

(gentle, but definite)

Obsession is a young man's game, I can't follow you any farther in this.

Angier looks at Cutter, uncomprehending. He considers saying something. Stops. Restrains himself.

ANGIER

Then the rest is up to me.

INT. ELEGANT RESTAURANT -- EVENING

Sarah sits by herself at a table for two. Borden ENTERS with a swagger, Olivia beside him, Fallon behind. The MAITRE D' hurries over, signaling WAITERS. Sarah looks up, UNCOMFORTABLE.

SARAH

I didn't know we'd be joined for dinner.

BORDEN

Absolutely. We're celebrating.

The Waiters spirit another table and chairs to join Sarah's. Borden pulls out a chair for Olivia.

SARAH

Miss Wenscombe. Mr. Fallon.

Olivia smiles cheerfully. Fallon nods, embarrassed.

BORDEN

(to wine waiter)

Champagne. Your finest.

SARAH

What are we celebrating, dear?

BORDEN
Well, we've hit upon a new trick,
haven't we, Fallon?

OLIVIA
What trick, Freddy?

SARAH
(brittle)
Yes, "Freddy". What trick?

The WAITER presents a bottle of champagne. Borden nods without looking at it.

BORDEN
(loud)
I'm going to bury myself alive.
Every night. Then someone's going
to come along and dig me up!

OTHER DINERS are glancing over. The waiter uncorks the bottle with a muffled POP and pours champagne into Borden's glass.

SARAH
(to waiter)
I'm not sure my husband needs-

BORDEN
Who are you to tell me that?!

Awkward silence. Olivia shifts in her seat.

OLIVIA
Perhaps-

SARAH
Perhaps, Mr. Fallon, you might escort
Miss Wenscombe home. My husband's
being a bore, I see no reason for
the two of you to suffer as well.

Fallon is on his feet, pulling back Olivia's chair.

OLIVIA
Good-night, Mrs. Borden. Good-night,
Freddy.

They leave. Borden glares at his wife.

SARAH
"Freddy"?

BORDEN
It's my name.

SARAH
Not at home.

BORDEN

I'm not always at home.

Sarah is clearly on the verge of tears.

SARAH

Alfred, why are you being like this?

Borden, seeing her distress, softens.

BORDEN

Sarah, I had a terrible ordeal today. I thought I'd lost something very precious to me.

SARAH

What?

Borden looks at her speechless. Shrugs helplessly.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I see. More secrets.

BORDEN

Secrets are my life, Sarah. Our life.

Sarah brushes away a tear.

SARAH

When you're like this, Alfred, I'm not seeing the real you. You're treating me like your audience. Performing. I can't live with that.

Borden just sits there. Offering nothing.

EXT. CLIFF HOUSE INN -- DAY

Angier walks up to the hotel. A MOTORCAR is parked in front, and TWO MEN are unloading it. One of the men STARES at Angier as he enters the hotel.

INT. CLIFF HOUSE INN

Angier walks to the reception desk.

ANGIER

I thought I had the place to myself.

MANAGER

Unexpected guests.

(looks out the window
at the men)

Not very polite. A lot of questions. At first I thought they might work for the government.

ANGIER

No?

MANAGER

(lowers voice)

Worse. They work for Thomas Edison.

Angier stares out the window at the men unloading equipment.

- INT. HOTEL ROOM, COLORADO -- CONTINUOUS

Angier sits at the desk, deciphering Borden's diary.

BORDEN (V.O.)

Today, a most curious development...

INT. BORDEN'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Borden turns to see Fallon show in Olivia.

BORDEN (V.O.)

His assistant came to us with a proposition...

They start to speak as Borden's V.O. continues.

BORDEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Obviously Angier has sent her, and told her to admit as much...

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Tell me, Olivia. Does he like taking his bows under the stage?

Olivia meets his gaze.

OLIVIA

No. It's killing him. He's obsessed with discovering your method. He thinks of nothing else, and takes no pleasure in our success. I've had enough. There is no future with him. He sent me here to steal your secrets, but I've actually come to offer you his.

BORDEN

He has no secrets from me.

Borden stares at her, unsure.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

This is the "truth" you spoke of?

She gives him a sly smile.

OLIVIA

No. This is what he told me to tell you.

Beat.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

The truth is that I loved him. And stood by him. And he sent me to you like he'd send a stagehand to pick up his shirts.

(looks him in the eye)

I hate him for that.

They sit there in silence, appraising each other.

BORDEN

I can spot Angier's methods from the back of the theatre. What could you possibly have to offer me?

Olivia smiles, moves to Borden, reaching for his gloved hand. Borden flinches, surprised.

OLIVIA

You may know how he does his tricks... but you can't understand why no one can see that yours are better.

She tenderly PEELS OFF his padded glove revealing his mutilated hand.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

You hide this. I had to look closely to spot it when you performed the Transported Man.

(looks into his eyes)

But this makes you unique... it shows the audience that you aren't using a double. You musn't hide it, you must display it proudly...

(looks at hand)

I'm sure it takes great skill to perform illusions with one good hand.

BORDEN

(quiet)

It does.

OLIVIA

Then let people know. You can be so much more than he is. I can show you how.

Borden looks into her eyes.

BORDEN (V.O.)

I think she is telling the truth.

INT. BEDROOM, BORDEN'S WORKSHOP -- NIGHT

Borden and Olivia are in bed together. It is raining outside.

He watches her get out of bed and moves to the window to smoke a cigarette.

BORDEN (V.O.)

I think we cannot trust her. But I love her. I need her. We need her.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

How could he send you away? He must be blind, deaf and dumb.

She smiles quietly at this.

OLIVIA

Robbie's blinded by his jealousy. He'd do anything for your secret. Sending me away was the least of it.

Borden considers this.

BORDEN (V.O.)

Trust is not the point- love is the point... who have we ever trusted? To open myself to such a relationship,

EXT. NARROW ALLEYWAY -- DAY

Olivia makes her way past crowded MARKET STALLS.

BORDEN (V.O.)

...to the dangers of such an affair... I need assurances of fidelity. Of love.

Fallon is SHADOWING her from a distance.

BORDEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

But how to be sure when truth is layered like the skin of an onion? I know a way... she must help me rid ourselves of Angier. It is the only way to know her mind.

INT. HOTEL ROOM, COLORADO -- DAY

Angier looks up from Borden's diary. Pale. He flips pages and pages forward TO THE LAST ENTRY...

BORDEN (V.O.)

Today my mistress proves her truthfulness. Not to me, you understand.

(MORE)

BORDEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I have been convinced since she led me to Root... today, Olivia proves her love for me to you, Angier.

Angier looks up from the notebook. Mind reeling.

BORDEN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Yes, Angier. She gave you this notebook at my request. Yes, she led me to Root, and yes, Tesla is merely the key to my diary, not to my tricks. Did you really think I would part with my secret so easily after so much? Good-bye, Angier, may you find solace for your thwarted ambition back in your American home.

Angier STARES at the pages, unblinking. JUMPS to his feet...

EXT. TESLA'S LABORATORY -- DAY

Angier STRIDES up to the fence.

ANGIER

TESLA!

(nothing)

TESLA!!

Angier takes his cane and starts running its METAL TIP across the electrified fence- causing SPARKING and CRACKLING.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

ALLEY, GET OUT HERE AND LET ME IN!!

Alley emerges from the building, confused.

INT. TESLA'S LABORATORY -- DAY

Alley opens the door- Angier BURSTS IN past him, ENRAGED.

ANGIER

I've been played for a fool!

ALLEY

Who by?

ANGIER

Tesla never made a machine like the one I asked for.

ALLEY

We never said he had.

ANGIER

You let me believe that he had, Alley!

(MORE)

ANGIER (CONT'D)

You stole my money because your funding was cut off- you've been shooting sparks at my top hat, laughing at me all along while you use my money to stave off ruin. I've seen Edison's men-

ALLEY

Where?

ANGIER

In the hotel. I've every mind to bring that up here myself-

TESLA (O.S.)

That would be unwise, Mr. Angier.

Tesla is holding a cage containing a large tabby CAT.

TESLA (CONT'D)

It is true, sir, that you are our one remaining financier. But we have not stolen your money...

ALLEY

Sir, my cat?

Tesla silences Alley with a tiny GLANCE.

ALLEY (CONT'D)

When I told you I could make your machine I spoke the simple truth. Science is just a name for the art of rendering the exotic mundane. It has no boundaries- its very purpose is to destroy boundaries.

ANGIER

Then why isn't the machine working?

Tesla gives Angier the slightest of smiles.

TESLA

Because exact science, Mr. Angier, is not an exact science. The machine simply does not operate as expected. It needs continued examination.

ANGIER

Where did my top hat go?

ALLEY

Nowhere.

Alley points to the top hat, which is sitting on a workbench.

ALLEY (CONT'D)

We've tried the damn thing a dozen times. And the hat went nowhere.

TESLA

Which is why we need to try a different material. It may provoke a different result.

- Tesla opens the cage and points the open end at Alley.

TESLA (CONT'D)

You don't expect me to handle the thing myself?

Alley reluctantly reaches into the cage and pulls out the TERRIFIED CAT. He jumps down into the pit and secures the animal by its collar to a eye-hook sunk into the ground.

ALLEY

You are responsible for whatever happens to this animal, Doctor.

Alley pulls himself out of the pit, and Tesla CHARGES the generator.

The cat stares up at the machine around it and HISSES.

Without ceremony, Tesla FIRES the machine. As before, large BOLTS spew from the head of the machine, down towards the unseen cat. The machine builds to a DEAFENING ROAR, then sputters out.

Silence. The three men begin edging towards the pit.

Suddenly, a terrifying SCREECH. The CAT is still there, still tied to the hook.

Alley breathes a sigh of relief and starts to free the cat. Tesla looks frustrated. Suddenly, the cat bursts free of Alley and ROCKETS through the open side door of the lab.

ANGIER

I'll go.

Angier limps after the cat.

EXT. TESLA'S LABORATORY -- CONTINUOUS

Angier sees the cat disappearing along the edge of the building and into the forest beyond.

Angier follows.

EXT. FOREST -- CONTINUOUS

Angier pushes his way through the dense undergrowth, trying to keep up, but the cat has disappeared.

ANGIER

Here, kitty, kitty.

Suddenly, a HORRIBLE SCREECHING reaches Angier. He begins to follow the noise.

He stops at the opening of a tiny GLADE, no more than ten feet across.

- Two IDENTICAL CATS are fighting viciously in front of Angier. He tries to separate the two animals, and succeeds in grabbing one. The other cat RACES off.

Angier takes a few steps after it, then FREEZES, staring at TOP HATS. Clustered in a small glade. The first cat slinks its way through them.

The SECOND BLACK CAT jumps from Angier's hands- RACES into the glade, HISSING, SPITTING, CHASING the first cat into the woods beyond-

Angier is left alone in the clearing, staring at the pile of dozens of IDENTICAL TOP HATS.

EXT. PORCH, TESLA'S LABORATORY -- DAY

The top hats are in a pile on the deck. Tesla is at the table, measuring two HATS with a pair of calipers. Angier and Alley are watching.

ANGIER

So the machine was working?

ALLEY

I never bothered to check the calibration. The hat never moved.

TESLA

These things never quite work as you expect them to, Mr. Angier. That's one of the principal beauties of science.

Tesla looks carefully at the hat in his hands. It has a tiny TEAR on the inside of the brim. He picks up another hat. It has the same TEAR.

TESLA (CONT'D)

We'll need a couple of weeks to iron out the-

(looks at hats)

-problems with the machine. I'll send word when it's ready.

Angier, still dazed, takes his cane and heads for the door.

TESLA (CONT'D)

Don't forget your hat.

Angier stops and looks at the pile of hats.

ANGIER

Which one is mine?

TESLA

They are all your hat, Mr. Angier.

Tesla smiles at him.

INT. BORDEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Borden's daughter, JESS, now four, RUNS into the room and tries to hop up into his lap. Laughing, he helps her up.

JESS

Are we going to the zoo this afternoon, daddy?

BORDEN

Daddy's got some business this afternoon.

JESS

But you promised.

BORDEN

Did I?

Jess nods at him, solemnly.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Then go to the zoo we shall.

Borden holds the newspaper open for her to look at.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

(gestures to newspaper)

Who's that?

A large advertisement features a picture of Borden: **The Professor- England's premiere magician!**

JESS

That's you, daddy.

Borden picks the girl off of his lap and stands.

BORDEN

Daddy has some errands to run. I'll be back before you know it, so get ready.

Borden walks to the door. As he does, Sarah enters, avoiding his eyes, then ducking him as he tries to kiss her.

She reaches for the sherry decanter. He watches her pour. Sarah looks at him, eyes red from crying.

SARAH

We each have our vices.

Borden moves to her, gentle concern in his eyes.

BORDEN

Sarah. Whatever you may think, your only competition for my affections is my little girl. I love you. I will always love you, and you alone.

She looks into his eyes. Fascinated.

SARAH

You mean it today.

BORDEN

Absolutely.

SARAH

That makes it so much harder when you don't.

She turns from him. Borden watches her sadly. Leaves.

EXT. CANAL -- AFTERNOON

Borden walks along a disused stretch of industrial canal that snakes through the poorer neighborhoods of the city.

Borden wanders into a tunnel. Another man is waiting for him -- Fallon.

Fallon hands Borden a folded piece of paper. He studies it.

BORDEN

More shopping. She does like the smell of money, doesn't she?

Fallon looks away. Borden tears up the paper.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

The little lady wants to visit the Zoo, I thought you could take her. I'll do it tomorrow, if not.

(looks at his feet)

Sarah... she knows. At least, she knows things aren't right.

(looks at Fallon,
pleading)

Help me with her. Try and convince her that I love her. Please.

Borden, embarrassed, pats Fallon on the shoulder and makes off down the path. Fallon sets off in the opposite direction.

INT. OLIVIA'S APARTMENT

Olivia, barely wearing a dressing gown, answers the door to Borden. She pulls him in, trying to draw him into a kiss, but he backs away.

OLIVIA
What is it, Freddy?

BORDEN
Please don't call me that. It's nothing, just... sometimes things seem... wrong.

Olivia looks at him. Cold.

OLIVIA
Freddy, I've told you before. When you're with me, you're with me. Leave your family at home where they belong.

BORDEN
I'm trying, Olivia. Please.

OLIVIA
I'll get dressed.

Borden watches her move down the hall.

OLIVIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I saw Fallon hanging around my house again, after you left.

Olivia comes back in, half-dressed.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
There's something about him I don't trust.

BORDEN
You trust me?
(off her look)
Then trust Fallon- he protects the things I care about.

EXT. CLIFF HOUSE INN -- MORNING

Angier walks out from the lobby. The two MEN he saw before are loading up their automobile. Smiling, laughing.

EXT. ROAD, PIKE'S PEAK -- MORNING

The coach pulls to a stop. Angier and the driver look up.
A plume of SMOKE is rising from further up the hill.

EXT. CLEARING, PIKE'S PEAK -- MOMENTS LATER

Angier rounds the bend in the road and comes into view of the laboratory. He FREEZES.

The fence has been TORN DOWN. Beyond it, the LAB has been BURNED TO THE GROUND. The metal tower is in SMOLDERING PIECES. Everything else is gone.

Angier notices a piece of metal lying in the road near him, and, using his cane, flips it over. It's Alley's sign warning trespassers to keep out.

INT. ANGIER'S ROOM, CLIFF HOUSE INN -- EVENING

Angier takes down the picture of Julia from the mantel. He studies it a second, then puts it in the top of his packed suitcase.

INT. LOBBY, CLIFF HOUSE INN -- MORNING

The BELLBOYS wrestle with Angier's cases as Angier walks to the reception desk. The manager smiles up at him.

MANAGER

We're sorry to see you go, Mr. Angier.

Angier takes out his wallet and begins laying down bills.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

We were sorry to see Mr. Tesla leave as well. He was very good to Colorado Springs. A very generous man.

Angier smiles up at him, absently and begins to leave.

MANAGER (CONT'D)

Mr. Angier?

(Angier turns)

I didn't feel it was necessary to tell the other men about the box.

Angier stops.

ANGIER

What box?

The manager smiles..

INT. HALLWAY, CLIFF HOUSE INN -- MORNING

Angier follows the manager down a darkened hallway.

MANAGER

We never use these rooms in the off - season. It's a shame.

The manager stops at a set of DOUBLE DOORS and unlocks them. He pushes them open and ushers Angier through.

INT. BALLROOM, CLIFF HOUSE INN -- CONTINUOUS

Angier steps into the massive, elegant room.

Standing on the dance floor is an ENORMOUS SHIPPING CRATE. Stencilled on one side "COLORADO SPRINGS"

Angier walks up to the huge crate, awestruck.

An envelope addressed to him has been stuck to the front. Angier opens it and begins to read.

Page 96
Scene 10
Continued

TESLA (V.O.)

My dear Angier, you will find what you were looking for in the box. I apologize for leaving without saying goodbye.

EXT. TESLA'S LABORATORY -- NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

Under cover of night, a group of FIGURES ransack the laboratory.

TESLA (V.O.)

But I seem to have outstayed my welcome in Colorado.

The figures begin setting FIRE to the sides of the laboratory.

TESLA (V.O.) (CONT'D)

The extraordinary is not permitted in science and industry. Perhaps you'll have more luck in your field, where people are happy to be mystified. As to the use of the machine...

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

The open crate sits empty at the side of a derelict stage. Angier, in shirt sleeves is running cables to the MACHINE, which is standing center stage.

TESLA (V.O.)

Alley has written you a thorough set of instructions. I add only one suggestion on using the machine-

EXT. COLORADO SPRINGS -- NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

Alley holds open the door to a coach. Tesla steps up into it and looks back from the coach's open door, up the mountain.

TESLA (V.O.)
-Destroy it. Drop it to the bottom
of the deepest ocean.

High on the mountain, the laboratory is ABLAZE.

TESLA (CONT'D)
Such a thing will only bring you
misery.

Tesla folds himself into the coach, shutting the door as it
moves off down the mountain.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

Angier moves to one side of the stage where he makes a hash
mark with a piece of chalk.

ANGIER (V.O.)
Tesla's warning is as unheard as he
knew it would be. Today I tested
the machine...

He LOADS A GUN and places it next to the machine.

ANGIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Taking precautions in case Tesla
hadn't ironed out the kinks in its
operation...

Angier THROWS THE SWITCH. The Machine GROANS into LIFE-
SPARKING and GLOWING as it gets up to full power.

ANGIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...if it went wrong I would not want
to live like that for long...

Angier closes his eyes for an instant, listening to its power,
then THROWS HIMSELF INTO THE MACHINE. HE IS CONSUMED BY
LIGHT...

WHITE SCREEN-

ANGIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But here, at the Turn, I must leave
you, Borden...

The WHITE becomes handwriting on a page and we are-

INT. PRISON CELL -- DAY

Borden STARES at Angier's journal in disbelief.

ANGIER (V.O.)
Yes, you, Borden. Sitting there, in
your cell, reading my diary. Awaiting
your death. For my murder.

Borden SLAMS the journal shut. Staring at it.

EXT. PRISON YARD, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

BORDEN stands at the fence again.

OWENS

Lord Caldlow was happy to hear that you'd reconsidered his offer.

BORDEN

Angier's journal, the "gesture of good faith"? It's a fake.

OWENS

(surprised)

I assure you it's not.

BORDEN

It has to be- it refers to events that happened after his death.

OWENS

Clever predictions, I'm sure. The provenance of the journal is clear and under no doubt. It's written in Angier's own hand, of which we have numerous examples.

(looks at Borden)

What makes you think it's a fake?

Borden looks away, uncomfortable.

BORDEN

It doesn't matter.

Borden leans forward and stuffs ROLLED PAPERS through the fence. Owens takes them carefully.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

My tricks. All of them.

OWENS

Including the Transported Man? Lord Caldlow will be very pleased.

BORDEN

No he won't. They're not complete- you only have the Pledge and Turn for each.

Owens leafs through the papers, annoyed.

OWENS

Without the Prestige for each trick these are worthless.

BORDEN
You'll get the rest after you bring
my daughter here.

Owens looks at Borden.

BORDEN (CONT'D)
I want to say goodbye.

- INT. BORDEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Jess sits at the foot of the stairs, listening to her parents
SHOUT at each other in the living room. She is CRYING.

BORDEN (O.S.)
Stop it! Just stop it!

SARAH (O.S.)
Deny it all you want- I know!

INT. LIVING ROOM, BORDEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Sarah is WILD, eyes red, hair a mess. Utterly DISTRAUGHT.
Borden is trying to calm her.

BORDEN
Sarah, it's not true! I've told you
Olivia means nothing to me!

SARAH
I'll go to her! I know what you
really are, Alfred!

BORDEN
(quietly firm)
Sarah. You can't do that.

INT. HALLWAY, BORDEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Jess looks up. Fallon is standing above her. Listening.

SARAH (O.S.)
I'll do what I have to!

Jess reaches up a hand. Fallon takes it in his.

BORDEN (O.S.)
Sarah, you can't talk like this!

INT. LIVING ROOM, BORDEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Sarah turns to face Borden. Deperate.

SARAH
I can't live like this!

BORDEN

(angry)

What do you want from me!

Sarah pauses. Catches her breath.

SARAH

(quiet)

I want you to be honest with me. No tricks, no lies, no secrets.

Borden calms. Looks into her eyes. Nods.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Do you love me?

Borden looks into her eyes. Sincere.

BORDEN

Not today.

Sarah takes this in. Borden watches, helpless.

SARAH

(whispers)

Thank you.

Borden watches her turn away from him.

INT. HALLWAY, BORDEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Jess reaches up to Fallon with her other hand. He takes her gently in his arms. We stay on Jess's tear-stained face over Fallon's shoulder as he carries her up the stairs.

INT. BORDEN'S WORKSHOP -- MORNING

CLOSE ON A POSTER: Borden, in costume, looking intense: **THE PROFESSOR- MASTER OF DARK FORCES**. As we PULL BACK we hear a GENTLE CREAKING...

PULL BACK past a hanging PAIR OF FEET, one shoe missing... wider shows us that it is SARAH, HANGING BY HER NECK FROM A BEAM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SHOP. Gently swinging.

INT. PUBLIC HOUSE -- NIGHT

Cutter is finishing his meal at the bar. He goes to take a swig from his pint and FREEZES- at the bottom of the glass: A PLAYING CARD. He looks around the bar. No one he recognizes. He reaches into the glass.

Cutter pulls out the card- an ADDRESS is written up one side.

EXT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

Cutter walks along labyrinthine streets. Stops at an ABANDONED THEATRE. He looks up at the building, then enters.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- EVENING

Cutter makes his way past the tattered box office and into the derelict auditorium.

In the middle of the room is the CRATE. Cutter stands and stares at it.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Who's there?

Cutter turns. A STAGEHAND. His eyes are solid white. The man is clearly BLIND.

CUTTER

I- I'm looking for an old friend-

ANGIER (O.S.)

I heard about a booking...

Cutter turns. Angier is behind him, leaning on his cane. Beside Angier is a SECOND BLIND STAGEHAND.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Nice little theatre. Good up-and-coming magician.

CUTTER

You came back.

ANGIER

It's good to see you, John.

Cutter sizes Angier up. Looks around the theatre.

CUTTER

Good rehearsal space. Blind stagehands. I like it-
(knowing smile)

You always had an eye for publicity.

Angier sits in one of the stalls. Cutter follows suit.

ANGIER

I need your help, John. My last show. A limited engagement.

CUTTER

Your last show?

ANGIER

A wise man once told me that obsession was a young man's game. I'm almost done. One thing left...

(points at crate)

The real Transported Man.

Cutter stares at the crate.

CUTTER

You want to design a show around it?

ANGIER

I don't want you backstage, I need you front of house, managing.

Cutter considers this. Uncertain.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

I need you calling in any favours and connections you have left to get us the right booking for the run.

CUTTER

What sort of booking are you after?

ANGIER

The sort that Borden can't ignore.

Cutter looks at Angier. Nods.

EXT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- DAY

A long, expensive CARRIAGE creeps to a halt outside the abandoned theatre, and the confused driver pulls over.

DRIVER

This is the address, sir.

The carriage opens, an imposing man in his 50's, steps out, looks the place up and down, then heads inside.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- CONTINUOUS

The man enters the auditorium and stares down at the BRIGHTLY LIT STAGE.

Cutter moves quickly up the aisle, hand outstretched.

CUTTER

Mr.Ackerman. It's an honor to see you again, sir.

Ackerman shakes Cutter's hand.

ACKERMAN

When you said you only wanted to show me one trick it piqued my interest.

CUTTER

It's a very special trick, Mr.Ackerman.

Angier has appeared.

ANGIER

Pleased to meet you, Mr. Ackerman.

ACKERMAN

Likewise, I'm sure. Let's get on, shall we?

Angier smiles.

CUTTER

(downs to stage)

Turn it on, please.

After a moment, the machine SPARKS INTO LIFE. ELECTRIC BOLTS CASCADE from the GLOBE and SPLASH on the stage.

ACKERMAN

Very pretty.

Angier smiles at Cutter and heads back down the stage. He STEPS himself into the machine and DISAPPEARS.

The machine SPUTTERS out and is silent.

ACKERMAN (CONT'D)

That's it, Cutter? He simply disappears? That's not a trick. He has to come back. There has to be a-

VOICE (O.S.)

-a Prestige?

ACKERMAN

Exactly-

Ackerman begins to turn around- then STOPS-

ANGIER IS STANDING DIRECTLY BEHIND HIM.

Ackerman is dumfounded. He looks back down at the stage.

ACKERMAN (CONT'D)

(quiet, haunted)

Pardon me. It's very rare to see... real magic. It's been many years since I've seen...

Ackerman steadies himself.

ANGIER

Are you interested in helping us?

ACKERMAN

(nods)

Yes. But you'll have to dress it up a little. Disguise it. Give them enough reason to doubt it.

INT. STAGE MANAGER'S OFFICE, PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- DAY

Merrit sits eating a sandwich. The door to his office opens and ACKERMAN strides in. Merrit STRUGGLES to his feet.

MERRIT

(surprised)

Mr. Ackerman. When they said...I didn't think you'd be here in person.

Ackerman sits without being asked to.

ACKERMAN

I have an act for your venue.

MERRIT

(flustered)

Well, of course, sir...But I'm afraid I'm booked. The Moscow Ballet. They're playing through next year.

ACKERMAN

Get rid of them. This is a magical act. An excellent one. I believe you booked his first engagement several years ago. The Great Danton.

MERRIT

You really want me to-

Ackerman stands.

MERRIT (CONT'D)

I'll do it. Of course.

Ackerman picks up a pen and paper from Merrit's desk.

ACKERMAN

There will be one hundred performances. No more, no less. Five performances a week. No matinees, no weekends.

Ackerman scribbles onto the paper and hands it to Merrit.

ACKERMAN (CONT'D)

(smiles)

And that's what you'll be charging for each ticket. Good day.

Ackerman sweeps out of the room, leaving Merrit dumbfounded, staring at the scrap of paper in his hands.

INT. RESTAURANT -- EVENING

Olivia and Borden are seated across from each other, finishing their meal. Olivia watches Borden eat.

OLIVIA
You haven't spoken about her, Freddy.
Not once.

BORDEN
Who?

OLIVIA
Don't be cruel.

BORDEN
Why would I talk about her to you?

OLIVIA
Because she was part of your life
and now she's gone.

Borden says nothing.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)
She wanted to meet me the day before
she killed herself. Said she had
something to tell me about you.
(looks away)
I was such a coward, I couldn't bring
myself to face her.
(looks at Borden)
What would she have said, I wonder?

BORDEN
(snaps)
You want the truth about me, Olivia?
(she nods, wary)
I never loved Sarah.

OLIVIA
(appalled)
You married her, had a child with
her-

BORDEN
Part of me loved her. But part of
me didn't. The part that found you.
The part that's sitting here now. I
love you. That is the truth that
matters.

Olivia tosses her napkin on her plate.

OLIVIA
You could be sitting in some other
restaurant talking to some other
woman about me that way. It's inhuman
to be so cold.

Borden watches her rise from the table. She looks at him.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

By the way, have you seen who's opened at the Pantages?

(Borden shakes head)

The Great Danton.

BORDEN

He's back?

OLIVIA

After two years. And he has a new trick. They're saying it's the best that London's ever seen.

Borden cannot hide his reaction.

OLIVIA (CONT'D)

If you could see the look on your face, Professor. You should go to him- you deserve each other.

Olivia smiles at him and leaves.

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- EVENING

Borden, in disguise, takes his seat halfway along the aisle.

The lights dim. Curtains RISE on a simple stage. Bare except for a WATER-FILLED GLASS TANK.

Borden STIFFENS in his seat, perplexed.

Angier limps onto the stage. Addresses the audience.

ANGIER

Ladies and gentlemen, my first trick of the evening is one that involves considerable risk.

(removes his coat)

Anyone in the audience who would be irrevocably damaged by seeing a man drown should leave now, for when I tell you that the young lady who taught me this illusion actually died performing it, you will understand the seriousness of the dangers involved.

Borden watches the hook descend from the flies. Remembering.

INSERT CUT: Borden STARES as Angier desperately BRUSHES the water from Julia's face.

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- LATER

Angier steps forward as another curtain is drawn up behind him, revealing TESLA'S MACHINE.

ANGIER

In my travels I have seen the future,
and it is a strange future indeed.
The world is on the brink of new and
terrifying possibilities.

The audience RECOILS in terror as the MACHINE is STARTED and BOLTS fly from it. SMOKE drift over the audience.

-Borden inches forwards in his seat. Angier stands in front of the machine, silhouetted by the FRENZY of electricity behind him. He TOSSES his cane to his assistant and steps into the machine.

The audience SCREAMS as large bolts BLAST from the machine and wrap themselves around ANGIER'S ARMS and LEGS.

Borden is watching very carefully. Angier is almost impossible to see as the machine builds to a climax, but, just before it does, Borden catches a glimpse of ANGIER'S BODY FALLING THROUGH A TRAP DOOR.

The machine sputters out. Angier has DISAPPEARED. The lights are dim. A FOLLOW SPOT FIRES into the BOXES, audience looks up with a gathering commotion-

ANGIER IS STANDING ON THE RAIL OF THE ROYAL BOX, thirty feet above the stalls. He smiles down at the audience.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Man's reach exceeds his IMAGINATION!

The audience breaks into a MASSIVE STANDING OVATION.

INT. BORDEN'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Fallon is at the workbench, staring at a sketch of Tesla's machine. Borden paces, AGITATED.

BORDEN

Why only 100 performances? Do his methods dictate it, or is it simply a publicity move?

Borden walks back and stares at the sketch.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Fifty yards in a second. And all I know is that he uses a trapdoor. What's going on under that stage?

EXT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- NIGHT

The theatre is closed, and three BLIND STAGEHANDS are wrestling a TARP-WRAPPED BOX onto a cart in the alleyway behind the theatre.

Fallon is watching from the shadows.

EXT. LABYRINTHINE STREETS -- CONTINUOUS

Fallon shadows the cart as it slowly makes its way.

EXT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- LATER

Fallon watches from further down the alley as the Blind Stagehands unload the box onto a dolly and wheel it through the stage door.

He moves closer, then STOPS. Seeing something. CUTTER has emerged from a nearby doorway and slipped through the stage door.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- CONTINUOUS

The blind stagehands wheel the tarp-covered box to two LARGE METAL DOORS in the floor of the auditorium and start hooking it up to a winch. The metal doors open with a metal HOWL...

Cutter slips down the aisle. WATCHING.

BLIND STAGEHAND
WHO'S THERE!

The man turns precisely to Cutter, flashing his white eyes.

CUTTER
It's Cutter.

BLIND STAGEHAND
What do you want?

CUTTER
I'm looking for Angier.

ANGIER (O.S.)
You found him.

Cutter turns. Angier approaches.

ANGIER (CONT'D)
I told you, John- I don't want you backstage on this one.

CUTTER
What are they doing?

ANGIER
Disposing of the Prestige materials.

Cutter looks down at the BLACK HOLE in the floor.

CUTTER
What's down there?

Angier looks at him, serious.

ANGIER

Do you really want to know?

Cutter considers Angier's grave tone.

CUTTER

Perhaps not.

Cutter leaves by the stage door.

INT. BORDEN'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Borden sits at his work bench. Fallon fiddles with his bowler hat.

BORDEN

They do this every night. After each performance?

Fallon nods. Borden gets to his feet with a sigh. Turns to a POSTER on the wall- **"The Great Danton Performs THE REAL TRANSPORTED MAN- 100 SHOWS ONLY"**

He studies the image of Angier. There is a small DEVIL looking over his shoulder.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

We're done.

(turns to Fallon)

Let him have his trick. You're not to go back there. I don't need to know his secret. Leave him alone.

Fallon puts on his hat with a shrug.

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- EVENING

A packed house. Many hands raised. Move in on a BEARDED MAN, his gloved hand tentatively rising into the air. IT IS BORDEN.

A GLAMOROUS ASSISTANT beckons Borden from the aisle. He shuffles along his row towards her. Embarrassed.

Borden and four other VOLUNTEERS follow the Assistant down towards the stage...

On which stands Angier, leaning on his cane, smiling. Looming over him is the large and complex ELECTRICAL MACHINE. Borden STARES at the machine as he mounts the stage.

Borden, FASCINATED, and the other Volunteers look over the vast machine. As Angier GESTURES theatrically at the various features of the metal and glass apparatus.

As the Assistant leads the Volunteers to the side of the stage, Borden slips through the gap at the side of the curtains-

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE, BACKSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

-looks around, disoriented, then darts for some stairs leading below stage where he runs into a burly STAGEHAND.

STAGEHAND

Where'd you think you're going?!

Borden pulls off his beard.

BORDEN

I'm part of the act, you fool!

The Stagehand raises his eyebrows and steps aside. Borden RACES down below the stage. Cutter approaches the Stagehand.

CUTTER

Who was that?

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE, ONSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Angier throws switches on his machine. As it GROANS into life, SPARKING and CRACKLING, Angier gazes at it, forgetting his audience. Entranced. Possessed.

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Borden fumbles through the darkened area, lit by flashes and sparks through gaps in the boards of the stage above. He GASPS as a flash illuminates a STAGEHAND with SOLID WHITE EYES sitting nearby. Borden waves a hand in front of the Stagehand's face. He is BLIND. Borden moves on.

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE, ONSTAGE -- NIGHT

Angier, facing the audience, steps backwards into the machine. He looks up at the electricity sparking just above him.

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Borden lights a MATCH. In front of him is a LARGE GLASS TANK FILLED WITH WATER, ITS LID PROPPED OPEN. Borden frowns.

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE, ONSTAGE -- NIGHT

BOLTS of electricity draw inwards, wrapping Angier in a ball of LIGHTING which CRACKS-

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

The ROOM fills with LIGHT as a TRAPDOOR snaps open and a BODY DROPS INTO THE TANK. The lid of the tank and trapdoor above SNAP SHUT, leaving the tank, and Borden, in complete DARKNESS.

INT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE, ONSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

The Machine sputters to a stop. Angier is GONE. The audience sits, WAITING.

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- NIGHT

Borden LIGHTS another match. Stares in HORROR-

Inside the tank, ANGIER IS DROWNING. His rolling EYES fixed on Borden, he POUNDS desperately on the thick glass, SCREAMING BUBBLES...

Borden, HORRIFIED, tries forcing the lid of the tank open. It's sealed shut. He leaves the tank and begins searching around under the stage. He finds a SPANNER.

Borden SMASHES again and again at the glass of the tank, which spiders, then CRACKS, and finally GIVES WAY.

WATER bursts from the tank, sweeping Angier's body into Borden, and both of them onto the ground.

Above them we can hear YELLING. Borden rolls Angier onto his side and POUNDS on his back. Water and blood OOZE from the man's lungs. His eyes are dilated and lifeless:

ANGIER IS DEAD.

Borden is frozen, unable to move.

Cutter appears behind him, SHOCKED by what he sees. Borden turns to look at him, his eyes wild with confusion.

CUTTER

What did you do?

INT. MORGUE -- EVENING

A MORTICIAN pulls back a sheet draped over a CORPSE.

Angier's lifeless eyes stare up at us. Cutter looks at Angier, then up at the Mortician. Nods.

JUDGE (V.O.)

Alfred Borden, you have been found
guilty of the murder of Robert
Angier...

INT. COURTROOM -- DAY

Borden stands chained to the dock. The JUDGE has a piece of black cloth draped over his wig.

JUDGE

You will, in one month's time, be
hanged by the neck until dead. May
the Lord have mercy on your soul.

INT. EVIDENCE ROOM, WAREHOUSE -- DAY

A POLICEMAN shows Owens into the room, walking him past all of the equipment to the far end where Cutter stands staring at the MACHINE'S CRATE.

OWENS

Mr. Cutter?
(Cutter turns)

Owens.

They shake hands.

CUTTER

Thank-you for coming, Mr. Owens.
It's fallen to me to dispose of
Mr. Angie's equipment. Looking at
the manifest, it's clear that Lord
Caldlow has purchased the bulk of
the items.

OWENS

Mr. Cutter, if you needed to know
where to deliver the items you surely
could have just-

CUTTER

It's not just that, Mr. Owens. There
is a particular item
(turns to crate)
This item, in fact, that I wish to...
well, that is to say, I want to-

OWENS

You want to buy it instead.

CUTTER

I suppose so, yes.

Owens moves closer to the crate. Sees the COLORADO SPRINGS
stencil.

OWENS

This is the machine?
(off look)
I'm afraid Lord Caldlow was adamant
about procuring this particular item.

CUTTER

Perhaps if I could talk to Lord
Caldlow in person.

OWENS

Out of the question, I'm afraid.

Cutter nods. Owens starts to walk away. Turns.

OWENS (CONT'D)

Of course, I suppose... if, in the course of your delivery arrangements your paths were to cross... I can't stop you from speaking your mind.

Cutter nods.

INT. CONDEMNED MAN'S CELL, NEWGATE PRISON -- MORNING

Borden is sitting quietly in a large cell.

Sullen opens the door.

SULLEN

(sardonic)

Still here, Borden?

Borden looks up.

BORDEN

For now.

SULLEN

Got a visitor. Lord Caldlow. With a little girl.

Borden HURRIES to his feet.

EXT. PRISON YARD, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

Borden, clutching an envelope, is escorted across the yard, PEERING at the fence. He catches a glimpse of his daughter walking beside a man on the other side of the fence. His eyes light up and he HURRIES to the wooden section.

As Borden reaches the fence he CROUCHES to greet his little girl, forcing the Sullen and the other Warder to crouch to undo his chains.

BORDEN

Jess, how are you?

Jess SMILES at him and reaches through the fence.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Are you alright?

She nods.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

I've missed you. Fallon's missed you. We both have.

Borden drinks in her face, her hair. She grasps the fence.

JESS

Can I come in there, Daddy?

BORDEN

Everything's going to be okay.

It is only then that he notices the **HAND ON HER SHOULDER**.
He rises to come face-to-face with Lord Caldlow-

BORDEN (CONT'D)

You must be Lord-

--who is ROBERT ANGIER. Risen from the dead.

ANGIER

(English accent)

Caldlow. Yes, I am. I always have
been.

Borden STARES at Angier.

BORDEN

I saw you die.

Angier just SMILES.

ANGIER

They flatter you with all those
chains, Alfred. Don't they know you
can't escape without your little
rubber ball?

Borden says nothing.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

All I wanted to do was prove that I
was the better magician. But you
couldn't leave me alone.

BORDEN

You were always afraid to get your
hands dirty...

(looks down at his
jess)

Not anymore.

ANGIER

No. Not anymore. And I win. Because
no one cares about the man in the
box, the man who disappears.

BORDEN

You win. But don't take my little
girl...

Angier looks at Borden. Bitter.

ANGIER

I know how hard it is to have someone
so precious taken away, don't I

(MORE)

ANGIER (CONT'D)

Borden? But you can't take her with you now, can you?. She'll be looked after. Good-bye, Professor.

Angier gently pulls Jess back from the fence. She PROTESTS Desperate, Borden holds out the envelope.

BORDEN

Wait. Don't you want this? You paid for it.

ANGIER

Your secret?

Borden nods. Angier steps up, takes the envelope.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

You always were the better magician, Borden. We both know that.

He TEARS the envelope in half. Then again. And again...

ANGIER (CONT'D)

But whatever your secret was, you'll have to agree-

He tosses the pieces on the ground.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

(victorious)
-mine is better.

Angier TURNS.

BORDEN

Angier! Let me say good-bye. Please.

Angier stops. Lets Jess come to fence. She is crying.

JESS

When are you taking me home, Daddy?

BORDEN

Soon. I promise. Soon.

ANGIER

For God's sake, Borden.

BORDEN

Daddy's coming, I promise. I promise. Here-

Borden PRODUCES his RUBBER BALL. Jess looks at it.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

I promise.

Borden VANISHES the rubber ball. Angier pulls Jess back from the fence and starts walking away. Borden rises.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

You think this place can hold me,
Angier?!

Angier continues walking Jess away. Shaking his head.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Angier!

Borden is alone. He watches as the wind scatters the pieces of his prestige over the muddy yard.

EXT. LARGE COUNTRY ESTATE -- EVENING

Angier steps out of an ornate carriage with Jess.

INT. LARGE COUNTRY ESTATE -- EVENING

Angier steps inside with Jess. The HOUSEKEEPER comes to take her.

HOUSEKEEPER

Come here, love.
(to Angier)
Sir, there's a gentleman waiting.

Angier looks at her, surprised.

INT. DRAWING ROOM, COUNTRY ESTATE -- CONTINUOUS

Cutter is in the drawing room, looking at the carriage clock on the mantle. Angier enters. Cutter spots his reflection.

CUTTER

Dear God.

ANGIER

Hello, Cutter.

CUTTER

You're alive.
(Angier nods)
You're Lord Caldlow.
(Angier nods again)
How?

ANGIER

(shrugs)
I learned an American accent from-

CUTTER

(angry)
How are you alive, Robert?! I saw you on the slab, for God's sake.

Angier fixes Cutter with a steady gaze.

ANGIER

A magician never reveals his secrets.

The Housekeeper appears with Jess at her side.

HOUSEKEEPER

Go on, child.

JESS

Good night, sir.

Angier smiles kindly at her.

ANGIER

Good night, Jess.

They leave.

CUTTER

Who's the girl?

Angier says nothing.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

I've seen her. I've seen her in court with Fallon...

Cutter, realizing, looks at Angier, SHOCKED.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

(quiet)

What have you done?

ANGIER

She needs looking after-

CUTTER

She needs her father, but you're letting him hang. And I helped you.

Cutter moves to the door. In a daze. Pauses.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

I came here tonight to beg Lord Caldlow to let me destroy that machine. But I won't beg you for anything.

ANGIER

You don't have to. I'm going to make sure the machine is never used again.

(shrugs)

A good magician never repeats his tricks.

Cutter considers this. Makes a decision.

CUTTER

Then, Lord Caldlow, where would like me to deliver it?

ANGIER

My theatre. It belongs with the Prestige materials.

Cutter looks at Angier. Sad.

CUTTER

I once told you about the sailor who described drowning to me...

ANGIER

(nods) He said it was like going home.

CUTTER

I was lying. He said it was agony.

Cutter opens the door. Angier watches him go.

EXT. PRISON YARD, NEWGATE PRISON -- MORNING

Borden is at the fence. Fallon is on the other side.

BORDEN

We go alone now- both of us. Only I don't have as far to go as you.

Borden looks down at his feet.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

You were right. I should've left him to his damned trick... I'm sorry. I'm sorry for so many things. For Sarah. I didn't want to hurt her.

Fallon wipes tears from his face. Borden looks at him.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Don't cry. Not for me. Go live your life in full. For both of us.

Borden pulls the RUBBER BALL from his pocket and BOUNCES it up and down. He TURNS to be led back into the prison, DROPPING the ball.

The ball bounces gently past the fence. Fallon catches it.

INT. PRISON CORRIDOR, NEWGATE PRISON -- MORNING

Borden is led along the empty corridor, braced by six guards.

The procession stops at a large windowless metal door, sunk deep into the wall. Sullen opens the door and Borden is led inside. As Borden passes Sullen he leans in to his ear-

BORDEN

(quiet)

Are you watching closely?

Sullen stares back at him, terrified.

INT. DEATH CHAMBER, NEWGATE PRISON -- CONTINUOUS

The room is low and small. Two parallel beams, eight feet high, run from one wall to the other. Hanging from the center of the beams is a chain. Below the chain is a trap door.

Sullen locks the door to the chamber.

EXT. LARGE COUNTRY ESTATE -- DAY

Jess is playing in the grounds. A NURSEMAID some distance off chats to a GARDENER.

Jess looks up from playing. Someone is there. Cutter.

EXT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- EVENING

A CART pulls up to the side of the theatre.

Cutter and two WORKMEN step down from the cart and move to the back of it. Cutter pulls the tarp off the back of the cart. Underneath it is the MACHINE'S CRATE.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- EVENING

The crate is sitting on the dolly in the auditorium.

CUTTER

Thank-you gents.

WORKMAN

Where do you want it?

CUTTER

Don't worry. Someone's coming to help.

The workmen leave. Cutter looks at the crate.

Angier emerges from the darkness.

INT. DEATH CHAMBER

The warders remove Borden's chains and shackles and replace them with strong leather belts that bind his feet together and his hands to his sides.

They shuffle him forward onto the trapdoor.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

Angier and Cutter load the crate onto a platform suspended by a rope. Angier pulls open the two metal doors sunk into the floor.

Cutter begins turning a WINCH, lowering the crate into the HOLE. Angier indicates a pile of bricks and a bag of sand.

CUTTER

I'm bricking this over after we're done.

ANGIER

Cautious as ever, Cutter. No one's going to use the place. I own it.

INT. CELLAR, ABANDONED THEATRE -- EVENING

Angier slowly climbs down a ladder from the hole to join Cutter in the darkness below.

Cutter is standing next to the platform and the crate. The only light comes from a LANTERN Angier is carrying. We can see only a small flicker of the high moldy walls of the cellar, but it is a large open space.

CUTTER

No room left- you couldn't have accommodated 100 performances.

ANGIER

It's a good thing I retired early, then.

Angier puts the lantern and his cane on the lid of the crate and the two men heft it off the platform.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

We'll put it down the end.

Angier and Cutter move into the darkness with the crate. From the small pool of light afforded by the lantern, we can see that they are navigating their way through a large space filled with LARGE GLASS BOXES.

They arrive at the end and set the crate down.

CUTTER

I'll go mix the cement.

Cutter looks at Angier, cold.

CUTTER (CONT'D)

Take a minute to consider your achievement.

Cutter turns.

ANGIER

Cutter, I tried not to involve you.

Cutter looks at Angier. Nods. Then disappears into darkness.

EXT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- MOMENTS LATER

Cutter comes across the stage and up through the auditorium.

- Fallon is coming in the other direction.

As they pass they nod gravely at each other.

INT. DEATH CHAMBER, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

Borden is held in place on the trapdoor by two warders. The HANGMAN walks up behind him and attaches a NOOSE to the chain hanging above Borden. He slips the other end of the noose over Borden's neck. Positions it under Borden's jaw.

INT. CELLAR, ABANDONED THEATRE -- CONTINUOUS

Angier is alone bathed in the light of the lantern. He turns to the nearest glass box and smooths a hand along its face.

ANGIER

(whisper)

No one cares about the man in the box.

Behind him, a NOISE.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

(calling)

Cutter?

No response.

INT. DEATH CHAMBER, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

The WARDEN looks at Borden.

WARDEN

Alfred Borden, on this day, in the name of the King and the high court of England, you will meet your end. Do you have anything to say for yourself?

Borden says nothing. The Warden gestures to the HANGMAN, who begins to PULL the lever.

BORDEN

(whisper)

Abracadabra.

The trap DROPS from under Borden and he FALLS into the room below. His rope SNAPS to a halt-

INT. CELLAR, ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

Angier PEERS down the row of glass boxes with the lantern.

ANGIER

(tense)

CUTTER?

Angier FREEZES. He can hear a small THUD, THUD, THUD getting closer, approaching from the darkness...

Angier FLINCHES as a RUBBER BALL bounces into the light-

Angier DROPS his lantern to CATCH the ball. He turns it around in his hands, confused.

Light EXPLODES around him as a GUNSHOT rings out.

Angier stands for a moment, confused, staring at the ball, then COLLAPSES to the ground, clutching at his stomach.

Fallon's BOWLER HAT breaks into the circle of light. He is holding a smoking pistol...

Angier drops the ball and it rolls across the floor, coming to rest at Fallon's feet. But it is not Fallon's gloved hand that picks up the ball-

-it is a MUTILATED HAND, WITH 2 1/2 FINGERS MISSING. Angier looks up:

ALFRED BORDEN REMOVES THE BOWLER HAT AND TAKES A BOW.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

(weak)

You- you died.

Borden shakes his head.

Realization sweeps over Angier like a nightmare.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

A brother. A Twin.

INT. BASEMENT -- CONTINUOUS -- FLASHBACK

Fallon DROPS into the coffin. As Fallon stares up at us, WE SEE, FOR THE FIRST TIME, SOMETHING FAMILIAR IN HIS FACE -- FALLON IS REALLY BORDEN IN DISGUISE.

ANGIER (V.O.)

You were Fallon. The whole time...

Fallon/Borden's face disappears as Cutter seals the coffin.

INT. CELLAR, ABANDONED THEATRE

Borden smiles.

BORDEN

We were both Fallon. And we were both Borden.

Angier considers this. Minds spinning.

ANGIER

Were you the one who went into the box-

INT. STAGE -- EVENING -- FLASHBACK

As the ball bounces across the stage, Borden steps into the cabinet, shutting the door behind him.

ANGIER (V.O.)

-or the one who came back out?

Borden steps out of the second cabinet and catches the ball.

INT. DRESSING ROOM -- EVENING -- FLASHBACK

A stagehand wheels the two stage cabinets into the dressing room and leaves. Borden bolts the door after him.

BORDEN (V.O.)

We took turns. The trick is where we would swap...

Borden opens the first cabinet and pulls up the false bottom.

His TWIN BROTHER, in identical stage clothes, uncurls himself from the hidden compartment and hauls himself out.

INT. DRESSING ROOM -- LATER -- FLASHBACK

Fallon and Borden are seated at the makeup table. Fallon begins removing pieces of his costume and makeup and handing them to the other brother. As we watch, **THEY SWITCH IDENTITIES.**

INT. CELLAR, ABANDONED THEATRE -- EVENING

Angier stares up at Borden. Appalled.

ANGIER

Cutter knew. But I told him it was too simple. Too easy.

BORDEN

Simple, maybe. But not easy.

INT. WORKSHOP -- EVENING -- FLASHBACK

Both Bordens are standing at the workbench. One brother is gripping the other by his wrist and placing a CHISEL on his finger.

He checks the placement of the chisel against his own mutilated fingers, adjust the chisel's position, then picks up the hammer.

BORDEN (V.O.)

Nothing easy about two men sharing one life.

The second brother SWIGS from a gin bottle, then BITES down on a padded stick as the first brother BRINGS DOWN THE HAMMER-

INT. CELLAR, ABANDONED THEATRE -- EVENING

Borden stares at his mutilated hand clasping the rubber ball.

ANGIER

What about Olivia? And your wife?

BORDEN

We each loved one of them. We each had half a full life. Enough for us, but not for them.

Borden puts the ball in his pocket. Tears in his eyes.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

Sacrifice, Robert- that's the price of a good trick.

Borden looks down at Angier with contempt.

BORDEN (CONT'D)

But you wouldn't know anything about that, would you?

Angier is dying. He opens his mouth to talk, but his voice is so weak that Borden has to stoop to hear him.

ANGIER

(very quiet)

I've made sacrifices.

BORDEN

It takes nothing to steal someone else's work.

ANGIER

It takes everything.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- DAY -- FLASHBACK

Angier stands in front of Tesla's machine. Loading the pistol. He places the pistol by the machine...

Angier takes off his jacket and steps towards the HISSING machine. BOLTS curl themselves around him.

ANGIER HURLS HIMSELF INTO THE LIGHT.

This time we do not cut away.

The machine sputters out.

ANGIER IS STILL STANDING BENEATH IT.

ANGIER

(confused)

It didn't work.

VOICE (O.S.)

Yes it did.

Angier turns...

ANOTHER ANGIER is standing on the chalk hashmark, STEAM rising off his shoulders.

The first Angier reaches for the pistol and levels it at the second Angier.

SECOND ANGIER

(horrified)

No, wait! I'm the-

BANG! BANG! The first Angier FIRES TWO SHOTS and, grim-faced, drops the pistol. SHOCKED. He stumbles back, in a daze, clothes still steaming.

INT. CELLAR, ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

Angier looks down, a slight smile on his face. He gestures to the lantern.

ANGIER

(weaker)

Do you want to see what it cost me?
You didn't see where you are, did
you? Let me show you.

Angier slumps to the floor as he tries to reach for the lantern. He can't get his hand to obey him.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

It took courage to climb into that
machine every night...

INT. UNDER THE STAGE -- EVENING -- FLASHBACK

A drowning tank, identical to the one we have already seen. A blind stagehand sits behind it, smoking.

ANGIER (V.O.)

Not knowing if I'd be the Prestige...

Suddenly, a trap door flashes open as Angier falls from the stage above and SPLASHES into the tank. The lid snaps shut.

ANGIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Or the man in the box...

Angier pounds on the glass, frantic. The blind stagehand continues smoking. Oblivious.

INT. WORKSHOP -- DAY -- FLASHBACK

Two hands SLAM shut on the lid of a birdcage.

EXT. PANTAGE'S THEATRE -- EVENING -- FLASHBACK

The blind stagehands are wrestling a LARGE CRATE onto a cart in the alleyway behind the theatre.

INT. CELLAR, ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

Angier stops trying to move and leans back, resigned.

BORDEN

(scorn)

You went halfway around the world.
You spent a fortune. You did terrible things... and all of it for nothing.

Angier looks up at him with his last spark of competitiveness.

ANGIER

Nothing? You never understood, did you? Why we did this?

(coughs)

The audience knows the truth- that the world is simple. Miserable. Solid all the way through. But if you could fool them, even for a second, you could make them wonder. Then you got to see something very special...

(coughs, looks up)

You really don't know?

Borden just stares at Angier. Who smiles.

ANGIER (CONT'D)

It was the look on their faces.

Angier's body TOPPLES over, KNOCKING over the lantern. Borden steps back as the oil spreads, flaming, from the lantern.

CUTTER (V.O.)

Every magic trick consists of three parts, or acts...

Borden watches Angier for a moment, then turns to leave.

INT. WORKSHOP -- DAY

The workshop from the opening of the film. We now recognize it as Borden's. Cutter performs the bird cage trick for the Little Girl we now know as Jess.

CUTTER (V.O.)

The first part is called the Pledge.

- Cutter is showing her the canary.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

The burning lamp ~~of~~ SPREADS LIGHT through the cellar...

CUTTER (V.O.)

The ~~second~~ part is called the Turn.
I take ~~the~~ ordinary something...

Angier lies in his pooling blood.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And I make it do something
extraordinary...

Angier's eyes move around, looking at the shapes around him increasingly illuminated by the hellish light...

INT. WORKSHOP -- DAY

Cutter WHIPS the shawl away- cage and bird have disappeared.

CUTTER (V.O.)

But you wouldn't clap yet.

Jess stares, EXPECTANT. Cutter holds up his handkerchief-covered hand...

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Because making something disappear
isn't enough...

Cutter whips the handkerchief from his hand, revealing a canary. Just then, Jess SEES something and JUMPS off the chest, running past him...

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)

You have to bring it back.

BORDEN IS IN THE DOORWAY- JESS LEAPS INTO HIS ARMS. Borden holds her tight. Looks at Cutter, who is putting on his coat. Nods. Cutter leaves.

Borden reaches into his pocket and hands Jess his rubber ball. She smiles, then buries her head in his neck.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

Borden STOPS at the ladder. He notices the shadows from the burning oil playing on the walls...

CUTTER (V.O.)
Now you're looking for the secret...

Borden turns slowly to look back into the cellar, PEERING into the flickering light of the burning lamp oil.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But you won't find it...

Borden stares back into the cellar. What he sees puts a look on his face that is beyond words:

LARGE GLASS TANKS. DOZENS OF THEM. ROW AFTER ROW STRETCHING INTO THE CAVERNOUS CELLAR.

CUTTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...because you don't really want to know...

FLOATING IN EACH AND EVERY TANK, DRESSED IN ROTTING STAGE CLOTHES, IS YET ANOTHER ROBERT ANGIER.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- DAY

Cutter spreads MORTAR on the last BRICK of the wall he has built in the opening to the cellar.

He places the brick in the wall, sealing it up.

EXT. FOREST -- DAY -- FLASHBACK

A cat slinks its way through a pile of top hats, knocking one over as it disappears into the forest beyond.

CUTTER (V.O.)
...you want to be fooled.

We are left alone in the glade, staring at the top hats.

FADE OUT.

CREDITS.

END.