

THE MAGICIAN

Written by

Holly Autry Jurbergs

8703 Camelia Ln. Austin, TX 78759
hollyjurbergs@gmail.com
512-626-3020

FADE IN:

EXT. EGYPTIAN HALL THEATER - DAY (1876)

Three pyramid-shaped twenty-foot wooden plaques mounted on the stone building's facade advertise the art gallery, magic shows, and late-night burlesque show.

The center plaque, framed by carved stone Egyptian god statues, reads "Egyptian Hall - England's Home of Mystery."

Light rain falls on cobblestone streets crowded with horse-drawn carriages in Piccadilly, London.

Women dressed in crinoline and corsets stroll next to men wearing tops and tails.

INT. EGYPTIAN HALL THEATER - DAY

Rows of wooden chairs face a stage framed with red velvet curtains in an ornate room with a vaulted ceiling.

Thirty-foot color paintings depicting Egyptian life hang on the walls between intricately carved stone pillars covered in hieroglyphics and topped with King Tut masks.

Magician EDWIN CLARK (60's), a wiry and handsome entertainer with a curious scientific mind, hoists a gold-gilded birdcage above the stage with a rope.

Edwin breaks into a wet COUGH as his assistant, DOUGLAS HARRIS (20's), a sturdy farmer's boy, enters through the back of the theater, walking the dog with a yo-yo.

EDWIN

Douglas, fetch the carriage. I need
a ride to the Doctor's Commons.

Douglas runs from the theater's back and jumps onto the stage, his black leather riding boots landing with a SMACK.

DOUGLAS

We'd best get going, sir. It's
bucketing down out there, and every
wanger in London will be trying to
get to the pubs.

EXT. EGYPTIAN HALL THEATER - DAY

Two stone pillars decorated with hieroglyphics stand on each side of the door to the lavish theater.

Douglas parks a stylish black Victoria carriage pulled by a handsome bay Clydesdale in front of the theater as Edwin emerges from the front door wearing a black top hat and overcoat.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LONDON - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Pedestrians dodge carriages and dash across muddy, bumpy, cobblestone streets.

Miserable cold rain pummels Douglas as he steers the carriage through the CLIP-CLOPPING clamor of heavy traffic and drivers SHOUTING commands at their horses and CRACKING their whips.

EXT. DR. BRANTLEY'S OFFICE - DAY

A brick building with a red and white awning and a glass-fronted pharmacy, "Lloyds Dispensing Chemists."

Douglas slows the carriage in front of a wooden door with a metal sign engraved with Dr. Brantley's name.

Edwin steps down from the carriage, CURSING, when his right foot lands in a deep puddle.

DOUGLAS

Mum's asked me to pick up a loaf of bread.

EDWIN

Pick one up for me, too. I won't be long.

INT. DR. BRANTLEY'S OFFICE - DAY

A six-foot-tall white pedestal scale sits next to a leather examination table.

Medicines and tinctures in small glass bottles fill a wooden cabinet with glass doors.

Edwin slumps on the exam table, a glum expression on his face.

Dr. BRANTLEY (50's), with boyish features and a warm, quick-witted demeanor, removes a stethoscope from around his neck as Edwin unbuttons his shirt.

DR. BRANTLEY

(teasing)

Not here with the clap again, are you? I've heard rumors you're seeing the lovely Louisa Amore.

EDWIN

Poppycock. She's obsessed with magic and comes in all of my shows.

Dr. Brantley places the stethoscope in the center of Edwin's chest.

DR. BRANTLEY

That's too bad. I'd like to show her a trick or two.

Dr. Brantley moves the stethoscope to Edwin's back.

DR. BRANTLEY (CONT'D)

Take a deep breath. How long have you had this cough?

Edwin breaks into another racking COUGH.

EDWIN

Almost three weeks.

DR. BRANTLEY

Probably pneumonia. I'm advising sarsaparilla root and China tea.

EDWIN

Where am I going to get those?

Brantley removes his stethoscope and picks up a prescription pad from his desk.

DR. BRANTLEY

A midwife by the name of Margaret Reams can help you. Her husband travels to India and brings back exotic plants and teas for her patients.

Brantley scribbles an address, tears off the top sheet, and hands it to Edwin.

EDWIN

What if this witch's brew doesn't work?

Edwin stuffs the prescription into his pocket.

DR. BRANTLEY

I suppose we can give bleeding a go.

DR. BRANTLEY (CONT'D)

Many of my patients have benefitted
from a leech treatment.

Edwin breaks into another bout of COUGHING as he stands and buttons his shirt.

EDWIN

Oh bloody hell, let's hope it
doesn't come to that.

Edwin puts on his coat and top hat. Dr. Brantley opens his office door for him.

DR. BRANTLEY

You should be feeling better in a
couple of days. Give my regards to
Miss Amore.

INT. EGYPTIAN HALL THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Stage props and wooden scenery lean up against the wall.

A six-piece orchestra PLAYS an uplifting WALTZ.

Edwin, dressed in a Victorian black suit with a red silk handkerchief, sips hot tea.

Six DANCERS (20's) from the chorus of fairies burlesque troop that performs after Edwin's show sit in the front row, gossiping and GIGGLING.

Edwin eyes LOUISA AMORE (30's) a busty Italian beauty wrapped in a tight green satin petticoat and a matching hat adorned with peacock feathers.

INT. EGYPTIAN HALL THEATER - NIGHT

A three by six-foot wooden table sits center stage in front of the closed red velvet curtains.

A sparse CROWD CLAPS as Douglas steps on stage dressed in his best black suit, holding a deck of cards in his right hand.

DOUGLAS

Ladies and gentlemen welcome to the
Egyptian Hall, England's Home of
Mystery. My name is Douglas
Harris. I need a volunteer for my
first trick.

One of the dancers, MINNIE MARSHALL (20's), petite and curious, raises her hand.

Her angelic face framed with dark curls breaks into a smile when Douglas chooses her.

She's dressed provocatively in a short white ruffled petticoat and black lace-up boots.

Douglas fans out the deck of cards when she arrives on stage.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
What's your name, dear?

MINNIE
Minnie Marshall.

DOUGLAS
Minnie, pick a card and show it to the audience, please. Don't let me see it.

Minnie selects the nine of clubs card and flashes the card to the small crowd.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Now, return it to the deck face down.

Douglas reshuffles the deck as he talks.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
I will now make Miss Marshall's card rise mysteriously from the deck.

The violin player provides a suspenseful TRILL.

Douglas places his index finger on top of the deck and slowly pulls up Minnie's nine of clubs card.

The audience APPLAUDS as Douglas kisses Minnie's hand and sends her back to the front row.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Who thinks I can make Miss Marshall's card float and spin?

Douglas places Minnie's card on the table. He lifts his right hand away from his body, and the card appears to levitate in mid-air.

Douglas then sets the card in motion in a furious centrifugal spin to more APPLAUSE.

Douglas bows and runs off the stage as the curtains close.

The orchestra PLAYS a jaunty SONG that signals Edwin's show.

Edwin bounds on stage to enthusiastic APPLAUSE as the curtains open.

EDWIN

Some people say I'm getting old,
and my act has gone to the dogs,
but I say that's for the birds.

Edwin flips his wrist, and a gilded birdcage lowers from the ceiling onto the table.

Edwin opens the door and waves his hand inside.

Edwin produces a white feather from his suit lapel pocket and a match from inside his jacket.

He touches the match to the feather, igniting it, and a white dove appears.

He places the fluttering dove inside the cage to enthusiastic APPLAUSE from the audience.

Edwin removes his red handkerchief and touches it to his nose. A loud SNEEZE follows as the handkerchief transforms into a scarlet dove.

Edwin adds the red dove to the cage and lights a second match.

A second white dove appears in his right hand and a speckled brown egg in his left hand. Another white dove materializes in his left hand as the eggshell falls to the floor.

Edwin adds the last two white doves to the birdcage and removes his cape, draping it over the cage.

The orchestra VIOLINIST plays a suspenseful TRILL.

With a flourish of his hands, Edwin removes the cape to reveal Douglas kneeling on the table, dressed in a white suit with a red silk handkerchief in his lapel pocket.

Douglas jumps down from the table to thunderous APPLAUSE from the audience and makes a quick exit off the stage.

Douglas returns to the stage, rolling a six-foot-tall ornate carved wooden cabinet with a dial and a floating needle on the front.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

I require one person from the audience brave enough to step inside my time travel box.

Louisa raises her hand enthusiastically.

Edwin descends the stairs to the front row. He takes Louisa's gloved hand and escorts her to the stage.

Louisa steps inside the wooden box lined with blue velvet.

Edwin leans into her body, his nose almost touching her left ear.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

Where would you like to go tonight, my darling?

Louisa cocks her head and flutters her spiderweb eyelashes before answering.

LOUISA

Brighton beach. I'm dying to see the sun after all this terrible rain.

Edwin closes the door to the box and turns the dial on the front. Two turns to the right, and one turn to the left.

The floating needle flutters, and the dial glows.

EDWIN

Have a wonderful day at the beach!

Edwin opens the cabinet a second time to prove it is empty.

The orchestra plays a dramatic rendition of *Beethoven's Symphony No. 5* as Edwin opens the box a third time.

Louisa steps out dressed in a red and white pinstripe sleeveless swim dress as a white SEAGULL flies out of the box and soars to the back of the theater.

Edwin, Louisa, and Douglas join hands and take a bow to enthusiastic APPLAUSE as the curtains close.

INT. EGYPTIAN HALL THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

A narrow passage stacked with set pieces and scenery.

A STAGE CREW of five burly MEN set up a platform for the burlesque show and lower a trapeze from the ceiling.

As the burlesque dancers stream past him, Edwin staggers towards his dressing room, consumed by a racking COUGH.

Louisa has changed into a glittering green and gold mermaid costume and tests the trapeze as Minnie approaches her.

MINNIE

Did Edwin buy that swimsuit for you
in Paris?

Louisa arches her eyebrows and gives Minnie an amused smile.

LOUISA

A girl never kisses and tells.
When are you going to let poor
Douglas take you out?

Minnie rolls her eyes.

MINNIE

He smells like cow poop, he's got
no money, and he's attached to a
bloody yo-yo.

Minnie shuts up when she sees Douglas approaching, carrying a set-piece.

Douglas gives Minnie a sweet smile.

DOUGLAS

Great job tonight with the card
trick, Minnie. You might be ready
for the magician's assistant.

Minnie GIGGLES. Louisa raises her eyebrows and gives Minnie a coy smile.

INT. EGYPTIAN HALL THEATER - EDWIN'S DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Face powder and black eyeliner sit on a battered wooden dresser with a mirror in a small messy room.

A bookcase holds Arthur Waite's book "The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts," red and blue playing cards, card fanning powder, magnets, a roll of invisible thread, metal coin shells, and magician's wax.

Edwin removes his cape as Douglas enters the room.

EDWIN

Sir, we should get you home.

Edwin reaches for a leather-bound journal on the bookshelf.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

I have something for you, my boy.

Douglas opens the journal to the first page with a table of contents outlining Edwin's card tricks and illusions.

DOUGLAS

Sir, this is amazing.

EDWIN

I've been compiling it for some time. It's yours to keep.

Edwin doubles over, COUGHING almost uncontrollably. Edwin steadies him.

DOUGLAS

Let me walk you to the carriage, sir.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LONDON - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Mostly empty cobblestone streets dimly lit with gas lanterns.

Douglas guides the carriage slowly through thick fog.

INT. EDWIN'S CARRIAGE (MOVING) - NIGHT

A covered black two-person carriage with a leather bench and a gas lantern mounted next to the driver's seat.

Edwin pulls a silver flask from inside in his coat for a slug of whiskey.

EXT. EDWIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A wrought-iron gate surrounds a working-class two-story red brick row home with a shared chimney.

An exterior mounted gas lantern provides dim light.

Douglas helps Edwin out of the carriage to his front door.

DOUGLAS

Let me see you inside, sir. I can make you a cup of tea.

EDWIN

Leave your coat and boots in the passage. I don't want mud tracked everywhere.

INT. EDWIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A short hallway looks into a neglected dusty parlor with a fireplace and two worn stuffed chairs.

Edwin lights the gas lantern in the hallway and hangs his coat on a wooden coat rack as Douglas pulls off his boots.

INT. EDWIN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

A copper tea kettle sits on a black cast-iron stove with a protruding lower drawer for coal.

Metals pots and pans hang from a wooden shelf over a small sink with a water hand pump.

An oil lamp and a framed picture of a young WOMAN (20's) with raven black hair, a narrow face, and pale blue eyes sit on the shelf.

Douglas places the porcelain tea caddy and bread on the table.

Edwin pulls two cups and a jar of marmalade from a small wooden cabinet that serves as a pantry as Douglas scoops coal into the oven and fills the tea kettle.

Douglas joins Edwin at the table, who saws off thick slices of the bread.

EDWIN

One slice or two?

DOUGLAS

One's fine, sir. You'll need it for your breakfast tomorrow.

Douglas gestures to the picture.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

Is that your wife?

Edwin nods with a faint smile.

EDWIN

Ah yes, my sweet Beatrice. She helped me build the time travel illusion box...before I lost her and the baby.

DOUGLAS

I'm sorry, sir.

A low WHISTLE from the tea kettle brings Douglas to the stove.

EDWIN

Beatrice's father was a scientist at King's College in London. He was a physicist interested in time travel. He thought we lived many continuous lives, but we're not aware of it.

Douglas adds sarsaparilla tea and hot water to the cups. Edwin brings the steaming tea to his mouth and inhales the vapor.

DOUGLAS

So, when you die, your spirit moves into a new body, but it's still you?

EDWIN

Yes, but Beatrice and her father were working a real-time-travel machine. They believed your entire life experience could be converted to an electrical signal and transferred to your younger or older self.

DOUGLAS

Good Lord, this sounds like Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.

Edwin smiles and takes a sip of hot tea.

EDWIN

So you've read it.

DOUGLAS

Last year for my English literature class.

EDWIN

I'd say Miss Shelley is a very bright, forward-thinking young woman. Reminds me of my darling Beatrice.

Douglas pushes back from the table and stands. He picks up the picture to study it closer.

DOUGLAS

Do you miss her?

EDWIN

Every day. Life hasn't been the same without her. Have you ever been in love, Douglas?

Douglas sets the picture back on the shelf and blushes a bit.

DOUGLAS

I like Miss Minnie, but...

Edwin slaps his thigh and CACKLES.

EDWIN

I knew it. Don't wait too long to make your intentions known. You can give her a better life once you are a full-fledged magician.

Douglas shakes his head.

DOUGLAS

I don't know, sir. I've got lots of responsibilities at my father's farm.

EDWIN

Poppycock. You're a born magician. When I'm gone, the position is yours.

Edwin raises his bushy eyebrows and smiles conspiratorially.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

You can whisk Miss Minnie away for a romantic weekend in Paris.

Douglas' cheeks color again.

DOUGLAS

I hope you're right, sir.

Edwin drains his tea and pushes back from the table.

EDWIN

Help me to my bed, boy. I'm knackered. If this witch's brew works, I'll be fit enough for Tuesday's show.

Douglas takes Edwin by the arm and leads him to a steep wooden staircase.

INT. BARN - DAY

Single story with a rough wood interior.

Stacked round hay bails fill the upper loft of the barn.

Three black and white Holstein dairy cows graze in the stalls. A metal plough sits in the corner.

Douglas sits on a wooden stool milking a cow.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Red brick with large wooden double doors.

Douglas exits carrying milk in a silver pail towards a small stone farmhouse.

INT. HARRIS FARMHOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

Douglas enters the kitchen and places the milk on the kitchen counter where his mother, MRS. HARRIS (30's), plump and sweet, kneads bread.

MRS. HARRIS

I'll need you to churn some butter
for me today.

DOUGLAS

Yes, mum.

Douglas fills a plate with eggs and bacon from a skillet on the stove.

Douglas joins his father, MR. HARRIS (30's), a stern dairy farmer, for breakfast.

MR. HARRIS

You were late last night.

DOUGLAS

Edwin's been ill. I helped him
settle in with some hot tea.

MR. HARRIS

Seems like old Clark has been
asking more and more of 'ya. I
need you here at the farm. If you
can't get your chores done,
there'll be no more of this magic
nonsense.

Mrs. Harris brings the coffee pot to the table and refills Mr. Harris' cup.

MRS. HARRIS

Hush, John. It's good for Douglas to go into the city from time to time. How else is he going to meet a nice girl?

Mrs. Harris winks at Douglas, who gives her a small smile.

Mr. Harris GRUNTS his disapproval and takes a sip of his coffee.

MR. HARRIS

There's plenty of girls at the church who would be happy to be married to a farmer with a good piece of land.

EXT. EDWIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Edwin ties up his HORSE outside the iron gate surrounding Edwin's row house.

He carries a jar of his mother's blackberry jam.

He finds a note pinned to the front door that reads "Don't knock, come inside."

INT. EDWIN'S PARLOR - DAY

Two shabby fabric chairs. A cup of tea and an envelope sit on a simple wood coffee table.

Edwin sits in a chair by the fireplace, his eyes closed, his wild grey hair matted to his sweaty forehead.

Douglas enters, placing the jar of jam on the table, and touches Edwin's arm.

Edwin opens his bloodshot eyes, COUGHING violently. Specks of blood collect on his handkerchief.

DOUGLAS

Sir, you're not well. Let me take you back to the doctor.

EDWIN

Take a seat, boy. We've business to discuss.

Edwin, with shaking hands, passes the envelope to Edwin.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

You'll find my will inside. I'm leaving everything to you.

(MORE)

EDWIN (CONT'D)

I've spoken to the owner of the Egyptian Hall and informed him you're taking over the show.

DOUGLAS

But sir, I'm not ready. Surely the doctor...

EDWIN

Nonsense. I'm dying, Douglas, and there's nothing to be done about it. You're ready. You've watched me perform every trick and illusion a thousand times. How do you feel about your knife throwing?

DOUGLAS

I've been practicing, but --

EDWIN

Good. We'll put your skills to the test. Tomorrow night's show is going to be a little different.

INT. EGYPTIAN HALL THEATER - NIGHT

Spectators fill every chair. The crowd quiets when Douglas steps on stage holding ten knives arranged in a wooden sheath.

DOUGLAS

Tonight, I debut one of the most dangerous and daring acts ever performed in the Egyptian Theater. I warn you. It's not for the faint of heart.

The crowd GASPS when Douglas opens the curtain.

Miss Minnie stands sideways against the knife board, her body arranged in a curved pose, a red rose in her mouth.

Some of the women in the crowd cover their eyes or turn away.

Douglas throws ten knives in quick succession in a circular pattern around Minnie's body.

The last knife skewers the rose, scattering petals to the floor.

The audience responds with boisterous CLAPPING.

Douglas takes a quick bow as the curtains close.

Edwin steps onto the stage, wearing a purple cape over his suit.

His face is solemn as he addresses the crowd.

EDWIN

My friends, tonight's show is very special because it is my last. I am proud to announce my brilliant assistant, Douglas Harris, will be the new head magician at the Egyptian Theater.

Douglas rejoins Edwin on stage for a handshake as the audience APPLAUDS enthusiastically.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

I've always closed my show with a bit of time travel, with the help of a beautiful woman.

Edwin winks at Louisa on the front row. Her eyes glisten with tears.

EDWIN (CONT'D)

Tonight, I will be the time traveler. I have worn a purple cape in honor of my beautiful wife, Beatrice, and my son, Henry, who were taken from me too soon.

The curtains open and reveal the time travel illusion cabinet.

Minnie appears with a bouquet of white roses for Edwin, who kisses her hand.

Douglas swings open the heavy cabinet door.

DOUGLAS

Where would you like to go tonight, Edwin?

EDWIN

Paris, my boy, where I proposed to my sweet Beatrice.

Edwin steps into the cabinet and waves goodbye to the crowd.

Douglas turns the dial three turns to the right and one to the left.

The floating needle flutters wildly, and the dial gives off an iridescent green glow.

The orchestra plays *Sweet Adeline* as the theater grows quiet with anticipation.

Douglas turns the dial back to the center and opens the cabinet door.

Minnie steps inside the empty cabinet and twirls.

Douglas turns to the crowd with a flourish of his hand.

DOUGLAS
Should we bring him back?

The crowd ROARS and CLAPS in approval.

Douglas turns the dial a second time and opens the cabinet.

A few white rose petals and a note lie on the floor.

Douglas's face pales as he picks up the paper with trembling hands and reads.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)
Our brains, imaginations, and souls
are not fettered by the limitations
of skin, blood, and bones. If you
can dream it, you can create it,
and you can set yourself free.

The audience, on their feet, CHEERS at Edwin's last trick.

Douglas, dumbfounded, looks at Minnie and shakes his head in amazement.

EXT. STREETS OF PARIS - DAY

A perfect, sunny spring day. Horse-drawn carriages pass Parisians and tourists promenading and window shopping.

A youthful Edwin(30's) with a full head of dark hair holds baby Henry (2) in his arms.

Edwin walks next to his joyful wife Beatrice (20's) who wears a gorgeous blue silk dress and matching hat. She carries a bouquet of white roses in her arms.

FADE OUT