

THE MAGICIAN

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THE MAGICIAN CALLS UPON
THE SPIRITS OF THE OTHER WORLD
TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS
\$2 FOR YES, \$1 FOR NO

THE MAGICIAN PRESENTS
ORMANDO, THE LONELIEST MONKEY
IN THE TINIEST CAGE
HE LICKS HIS OWN TEARS

THE MAGICIAN REQUIRES
YOUR DEVOUT ATTENTION
AND UNGUARDED SENSE OF WONDER
LEAVE WALLETS AT THE DOOR

Are there any hungry boys in the audience? The Magician asked. Many boys raised their hands.

I want the hungriest boys, The Magician said. Who among you are the hungriest?

Boys fought and pushed with thin arms until just three were onstage.

I haven't eaten in days, the first said.

I eat my own fingernails, the second said, and my sister's, too.

The third said, it's lucky that I have no food to eat because my teeth are too soft and rotten to chew it.

You win, The Magician said. Now I wonder if anyone sees that bit of black bread on that high shelf?

The boys ran for the bread. The audience cheered. When they reached it, a trapdoor opened like a gaping mouth beneath them and they all fell through. The audience laughed and laughed.

Serves you right! The Magician said, for trying to steal my bread.

Behind this mirror, The Magician said, stands either a beautiful girl or my wife.

Laughter!

That's not funny, said a young woman with a hooked nose and a weak chin.

I like a girl with spirit and a great rack, The Magician said. He gave her his hand and she stepped onstage. She tried to look behind the mirror.

That's not polite, dear, The Magician said, putting his hand on her waist.

She pushed it away. How am I supposed to see who's back there?

Let's have a chat first, The Magician said, taking her wrist and rubbing her rump.

She tried to wrench her arm free. Let go of me, she said, or I'll kick your mirror down.

She kicked it, and it cracked into many pieces.

You awful, ugly thing, The Magician said. You are very much like my wife.

He slapped her flat bottom.

Laughter!

In these lean, postwar times, The Magician said, we must sustain ourselves with whatever we have on hand. A volunteer?

A woman shoved her boy onstage. He tripped on the broken sole of his shoe. He's ungrateful, his mother said.

The Magician directed the boy to sit on a bench and showed him the swing of his pocket watch. He turned to the audience. Hypnosis! he said.

Soon the boy was cutting the sole of his shoe with a fork and knife. He dressed the pieces with oil and vinegar, salt and pepper. Delicately, he savored every bite that entered his mouth, chewing each one almost endlessly.

Delicious, he said. The best roast beef I've ever had. Better even than my mother's.

A miracle, his mother said tearfully.

A line of people formed to the back of the theater.

THE MAGICIAN PRESENTS
POPO, THE OLDEST MAN ALIVE
WEARING THE OLDEST UNDERWEAR
APPROACH AT YOUR OWN RISK

THE MAGICIAN PRESENTS
THE AMAZING STORGA
THE HORSE THAT HAS NOT EATEN IN WEEKS
LIVE SHOWINGS TODAY ONLY

THE MAGICIAN PRESENTS
MAGIC BEANS BY THE DOZEN
RESULTS GUARANTEED
CASH ONLY, NO REFUNDS

He took off his top hat and displayed it, inside out, to the audience. He reached in with his arm, up to the elbow and pulled out a carrot, tossed it backstage. He reached in again, up to the elbow, to the shoulder, and wrestled out a lean white rabbit by its ears and held it over his head.

Applause!

The rabbit squirmed and kicked its long feet.

What are you going to do with that rabbit? A husky woman asked.

I don't know yet, The Magician said. Are you making an offer?

I'll skin it and fry it, she said, if I can have half.

Let's make a deal, The Magician said. I'll take it all but you can have the hat.

And what will I do with the hat? the woman shrieked.

Endless rabbits, The Magician explained. He dropped the rabbit back into the hat. It disappeared into the black.

No deal, the woman said.

Even the most dirty and destitute among you deserve love, The Magician said.

The audience was incredulous. They wanted to be convinced.

Take, for example, this man, The Magician said, and presented them with the smelliest, vilest creature possible, retrieved from a rescued garbage bag. His beard was wormy, his clothes fermented to his body. His rotten breath filled the theater. The clean poor swooned with disgust.

Even this man, The Magician said, has a contribution to make.

This man is just like you.

Kill him! a child cried out.

The stench—a woman sobbed.

The Magician led the silent, crusty man to sit in a chair center stage. The grime on the man's face, like heavy makeup, absorbed the spotlight. The Magician pulled quarters from the man's ear and spun them into a bowl: tin for maximum sound effect. They spilled like water from The Magician's hand. Applause!

As The Magician massaged quarters from the beggar's filthy ear, an old man gimped onstage.

What do you want, Old Man? Can you not see that I'm busy?

No, I can't, said the old man. He used his cane to feel his way

toward the spotlight. He followed the sound of clinking coins. Stay away from my money, Old Man.

He moved to the other ear, which released coins like a fountain. The old man, with his rigid gait, continued his approach. The Magician slid out his fancy curled shoe and tripped the old man, who fell on his hip, his cane launching into the air, pennies spilling from his pocket.

I'm blind! he said. I want you to heal me.

The Magician caught the cane and twirled it. His white teeth glinted in the light.

Do I look like a healer to you? He picked up the pennies and threw them into the crowd.

THE MAGICIAN PRESENTS
BOOFO THE GIANT
HIDE YOUR CHILDREN

The Magician pulled an invisible string and released a noose from the rafters, climbed an invisible stepstool and placed the rope around his neck.

Stop! yelled an old woman. What are you trying to do? You'll hurt yourself.

Just testing the rope, Mother, The Magician said. Would you like to test it in my stead?

The old woman waggled toward the stage, her thick hips shifting with difficulty.

Is that really your mother? murmurers in the crowd asked.

The Magician held both his hands out to the woman. She took them and stepped first onstage, then onto the unseeable platform beneath the noose. Her feet, beneath her long dress, were swollen around her slippers.

Who but a mother, The Magician asked, would be this stupid? Mother, he said: The noose. The old woman slipped it around her neck.

And now I present—The Magician swirled his cape—appearing for the first time in public since her tragic accident: Lucintha, the dog-faced girl.

He swirled his cape again and again. Whorls of sawdust cycloned at his feet. The audience looked, mesmerized by the whoosh and clap. His feet danced in the dust. The light onstage dimmed. They all squinted to see the movement.

The blind man said: but where is the girl? His voice was absorbed in the group's shallow breathing.

The Magician swirled his cape.

I paid my ticket, the blind man said. Where is the girl?

Shut up, Old Man, The Magician said. I'm working.

I want to see the girl, he said. I want to see her with my hands.

The Magician swirled his cape furiously and then drew it up, revealing behind him, clutching at his backside, a tiny girl with the head of a dog: long snout, big brown eyes, pointy ears. A German shepherd.

The audience gasped.

Is it a mask? they asked. A trick? An illusion?

No, the Magician said. It was an accident. It was an accident of birth.

The tiny girl cowered behind the cape. When the Magician coaxed her snout, she snapped at him with long white teeth and grimaced. She hid her face with her girl hands and whimpered.

Leave the girl alone, they said. What have you done to her? Small girls gathered in the pit. They reached out their hands to the tiny girl with the head of a dog. Come with us, they said. The Magician pushed her off his cape. The tiny girl slid across the stage. See what you've done? he said. You've made them think poorly of me, Dog Girl. You've made them misunderstand, Dog Brain. Now: show us all a happy dance.

The boos and shouts quieted as the tiny girl stood and tapped out a gleeful dance, arms and fingertips outstretched as her

heels and toes sang in speedy, sprightly snaps on the hollow wooden ground. There was no doubt, the way her fingers and wrists flicked to the music in her head, that she was a happy dog-child.