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 races 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 part, or acts...

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

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

A LITTLE GIRL pershes 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 show you this object, and pledges to you its utter normality...

Bearbed 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...

Bearbed Man, FASCINATED, and 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. STAGE THEATRE, BACKSTAGE -- CONTINUOUS
-looks around, DISORIENTED, then darts for some stairs leagind 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, forgettig his audience. Entranced. Possessed.

INT. BENEATH THE STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Borden fumbles through the darkned 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 light 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 couldn't clap yet. Because making something disappear isn't enough... 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 fixes 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 someone head below the 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 Defenser 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.

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's 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 hall 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 with the others immates.

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, and 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 Wardens 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 court 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 warp 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 WALDER TALKS 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

Aniger, 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 he's never seen one before.

VOICE (O.S.)

Mr. Angier? Welcome to Colorado Springs.

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, hitchs 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

Quit 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, sit. 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 reigns 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 RADIATH
with BLUE EXPLOSIONS.

Angier stops 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 too young men at the start of a great career...

INT. THEATRE -- NIGHT

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

BORGEN (V.O.)
Two young man 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, adress 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 ROPE 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 gailors?

Both shakes their hands 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 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 produly.

INT. DRESSING ROOM -- NIGHT

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

BOR DEN
Milton's squandering their goodwill
or a bunch of tired second-hand tricks-

ANGIER
(amused)
Old favourites, please.

BOR DEN
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 be 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
They sells it to them for a small
fortune.

Cutter hands Angier some money.

CUTTER (CONT'D)
I supposse you have such a trick,
Mr.Borden?

ANGIER
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 illusions 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.  

BORDE (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 Lanford underwater.  

BORDE  
We've been practiced it-  

ANGIER (cutting in)  
He said no.  

Julia glances at Angier.  

CUTTER (to Borden)  
No more mistakes.  


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 aight 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, CONVENT 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 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 props. He taps on the top of the TABLE- a panel POPS open, revealing the FLATTENED BIRD CAGE.

Borden insefts 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
pets 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 min. 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 and a BARE TABLE. He WHIPS it up,
revealing a BOUQUET OF ROSES. So 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 HOBBLES 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 an 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 yo get all of-

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

SARAH
I need talk to you.

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

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 sim's 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 voils-

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

BORDEN (CONT'D)
The bullet's not even in the gun when the charge is fired.

Sarah looks at 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, WARHOUSE -- DAY

A POLICEMAN opens the door for the Judge and Cutter.

POLICEMAN
(pointing)
It's all laid out down the end, you 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 crates. 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 Caldlo.  
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 get 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, you 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 particular awful significance...

Julia stands next to the tank. Milton adresses 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 up 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.


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 moes 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 GRAPS his axe and SPRINt 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- FULL 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 Julias cheeks and forehead. Borden looks on, shen.

BORDEN (V.O.)
How often I've fought with my self over that night .. one half of me swearing bling 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 be 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 dairy.

BORDEN
"How can be not know?!
(starts lauhing)
Because, Angier, life is complicated, people are complicated, knots are complicated-

PRISONER (O.S.)
Shit 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 dead.

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 SPRING -- 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 here and have 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 noit 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 dairy. 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 dairy you stole?

ANGIER
Maybe I bought it.

ALLEY
Magicians sell their secrets?

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

Alley considers this. Taps the cover of the notebook.

ALLEY
You're hoping to find a great secretin 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 ans 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 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 BULLE. Places it on the sink next to a FALSE MOUNSTAGE.

EXT. 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 BURLS 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 too-eager and too-drunk before settling on a MOUNSTACHED 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 looks 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 JUMPS to Borden's side, GRABBING his BLEEDING HAND. The DROWS 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 looses 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 know 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...
(throws 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 WENSCHOME, 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 from 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 had 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 het back to work.

Sarah looks at Borden. Reluctantly.

SARAH
Alfred, you have to face things. What tricks could you peform 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 pleases 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 beat not be intending to hurt this animal, Mr. Angier.

ANGIER
Of course not.

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

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 say that. Why sould I worry?
If your tricks don't get 'em in,
someone else's will. Maybe someone
willing to do a bullet catch or a
water scape.

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 a PATRONS runs from the box office to the street.
The marquee above the theatre reads: "THE GREAT DANTON PERFOMS
FEATS OF MISTERY AND IMAGINATION"

INT. THEATRE -- EVENING

Angier is perfoming 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 dows 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 it!

The dancers are wrapping up.

ANGIER
Wish us luc, 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 worth...

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


Borden smiles at Angier through his blood-spattered fake beard and retreats into the chaos surrounding the Elefant 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 arms.

CUTTER
Mr. Merrit-

MERRIT
It's done, John. I've hired a comedian. You know I hate comedians, which should indicate the may 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.
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 at aisle—

Borden is sitting there, 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 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 want, Professor?

BORDEN
Paper and pencil. Please.

INT. PRISON LIBRARY, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY

Te library is long and titled, 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 Sullen Gaurd sits smoking, craning his nek 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 you 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 ADVERTISSIMENT: "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 hubs 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
Researching. 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 hopig you'll let things life. 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 perfoming 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 a 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 CLOSES 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 seep 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 is 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 a 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 his performance 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 a stage.

ANGIER
He doesn't use a double-

CUTTER
    (impacient)
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)
Ang 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

The lab is illuminated by thirty fot 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 band 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 as Angier's hand.

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

ANGIER (CONT'D)
What's conducting the electricity?

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

Tesla release Angier's hand. The bulb goes out. Alley takes it from the 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 decl 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 a 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 these 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 "retirement".
   (looking 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 a 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 saving
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 an 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 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. Sunddely Root WRAPS this 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 up his hat off 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.

EXT. NORTH HILL -- DAY

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

Borden stops abruptly. Crouches to his daugther.

BORDEN
Would you like to see a magic trick?

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

He stands, 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.

BORDEX
You caught me in the wrong mood.

SARAH
But you want through all the-

BORDEX
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 is 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.

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

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 matterss.

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 becoming obsessed, Robert.

CUTTER (O.S.)
Ready to meet yourself, Mr. Robert.

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 know 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 Cassar. 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.
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 is sold.

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)
Congratulation, all.

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

ANGIER
I suppose I should get more 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)
It is 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
(frusted)
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 had bought you, Mr. Angier.

Tesla RISES. Leads Angier to a back corner at 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 the 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 hasmark 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 tripped FLASHES whit's hot. BOLTS shooting out of it, wrapping themselves around the legs of the tripod. The CHARGE reaches a FREEZY 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, locking 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 CONCENTRARION. 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 do.

OLIVIA
My name is 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 DANSON BREAKS RECORD WITH HIS ASTONISHING NEW TRICK"

OLIVIA
No. I'm here to give your show what is 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. Chanes 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 life 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.
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 martinee, 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 perfoming 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 the point?

CUTTER
My point, Robert, is that you've climbed too high to get away with any kind of professional embarrassament. 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 dairy.

    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 Transformed Man illusion. Now, I'm noit 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?

BORDE
(nodding gravely)
Weel, he was the secret, you see. And the more successful I became, the more outrageous his demands became. He practically backrupted 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.

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 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

BORDE 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 choked 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 PANTAGE- 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 and 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

Sit, 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 turns 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.

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

INT. APARTAMENT -- EVENING

Olivia enters in to the darkness 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 thing 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 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 do 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 had 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.


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 unshering them away as Fallon and Borden follow him through the door.

The bodyguard hold the door to a carriage open and Fallon steps up. Borden stops at the 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 crowd 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 disappear 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 save me the trouble to making you an air hole!

Angie picks up the hammer and continues NAILING.

EXT. HIGHGATE CEMETARY -- MORNING

Borden picks up 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.
I'm impressed.

Why's that?

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

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

Which is?

Your secret.

Borden tries to gauge Angier's expression.

My secret?

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

You have my notebook.

Useless without the keyword.

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

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.

I want the method not the keyword— I don't even know if the secret is in you 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

Angier plucks the folded paper from Borden's hand.

ANGIER
How fast can you gid?

Angier movies away through the headstone, 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. Restraining 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 what?!

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 starts 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 come 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 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
(quietly)
It does.

OLIVIA
Then let people know. You can be so much more then 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 watching 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 you 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 kow 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.
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 dairy, not to my trick. 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...

INT. 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 them up here myself—

TESLA
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 your
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 build 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 frustated. Suddenly, the cat bursts free of Alley and ROCJETS 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 glads. 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 dark. 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 WORKSHOP -- 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 up 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 competitions 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 strech of industrial canal that snakes through the poorer neighborhoods of the city.

Borden wanders into a tunel. Another man is waiting for him -- Fallon.

Fallon hands Borden a folded piece of paper. He studies it.

BORDEN
More shopping. She doesn't 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.
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.

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.

Angier takes out his wallet and begins laying down bills.

Angier smiles up at him, absently and begins to leave.

Angier stops.

The manager smiles.

Angier follows the manager down a darkened hallway.

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 stops it and begins to read.

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 figure 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, 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 thing will only bring you misery.

Tesla folds himself into the coach, shutting the door as it moes 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 SCENEx-

ANGIER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But here, at the Turn, I must leave you, Borden...

The WHITS becomes handwriting an a page and we are-

INT. PRISON CELL -- DAY

Borden STARES at Angier's journal in disbelief.

ANGIER
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 CELL, 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 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
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 yo 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 turn 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 CREEKING...

PULL BACK past a hanging PAIR OF FEET, one shoe missing... wider shows up 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. ALBERT HALL -- 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 a 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.


EXT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- DAY

A long, expensive CARRIEGE creeps out 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 auditoruim 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
(down 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 head 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...

Anckerman 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
(smiles)
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 unhuman 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
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
irrevocable damaged by seeing a man
drown should leave now, for when I
tell you that the young lady who
taught performing it, you will
understand the seriousness of the
danger 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 drifts over the audience.

Borden inches forward 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 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 wresting 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 in 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 stagehand 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, flasing his white eyes.

   CUTTER
   It's Cutter.

   BLIND STAGEHAND
   What do you want?

   CUTTER
   I'm looking for Angier.

   ANGIER
   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 howler 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 Perform 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 this 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 gas 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 gares 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 -- CONTINUOUS

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 the tank, ANGIER IS DROWNING. His rolling EYES fixed on Borden, he POUNDS desperetely on the thick glass, SCREAMING BUBBLES...

Borden, HORROFIED, tries forcing the lif ot 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 gournd.

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. MORQUE -- EVENING

A MORTICIAN pulls back a sheet draped over a CORPSE.

Angier's lifeless eyes stare up at us. Cutter looks at Angier, the 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. Angier'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 time, 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.
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 waling beside a man on 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 gaze, 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 SHOULD ER. 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 know, 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 peices 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.

BOR DEN (CONT'D)
You think this place can hold me, Angier?

Angier continues walking Jess away. Shaking this head.

BOR DEN (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 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.

CAPTAIN
Dead 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
I magician never reveals his secrets.

The Housekeeper appears with Jess at her side.

HOUSEKEEPER
Go on, child.

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 lookd 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 WHICH, lowering the crate into the HOLE. Angier indicates a pile of bricks and a bag of sand.

CUTTER
I'm bringing this over after we're done.

ANGIER
Cautions 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 lip 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.

INT. 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 by 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 bather in the light of the lantern. He turns to the nearest glass box and smoothes 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 responses.

INT. DEATH CHAMBER, NEWGATE PRISON -- DAY
They 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)
Abacadabra.

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 cane 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
   You were Fallon. The whole time...

Fallon/Borden's face disappears as Cutter seals his 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 come 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 holds 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 placemen of the chisel against his own mutilated fingers, adjust the chisel's position, then picks up the hammer.

BORDE (V.O.)
Nothing easy about two men sharing one life.

The second brother SWIGS from a gin bottle, then BITES down 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?

BORDE
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.

BORDE (CONT'D)
Sacrifice, Robert- that's the price of a good trick.

Borden looks down at Angier with contempt.

BORDE (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 wak that Borden has to stoop to hear him.

ANGIER
(very quiet)
I've made sacrifices.

BORDE
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. BOTLS 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 (V.O.)
    Yes it did.

Angier turns...

ANOTHER ANGIER is standing on the chalk hashmark, STEAM rising off his shoulders.

The first Angier lunges 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 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 door 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.

The blind stagehand 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 faced.

Angier's body TOPPLIES over, KNOCKING over the lantern. Borden steps back as the oil spreads, flamming, fro 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 far the canary.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- NIGHT

The burning lamp oil 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.

Angier's eyes move around, looking at the shapes around him increasing 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 hand 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 (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 STRECHING INTO THE CAVERNOUS CELLAR.

    CUTTER (CONT’D)
    ...because you don’t really want to know...

FLOATING IN BACH AND EVERY TANK, DRESSED IN ROTTING STAGE CLOTHES, IS YET ANOTHER ROBERT ANGIER.

INT. ABANDONED THEATRE -- DAY

Cutter spreads MORTAT 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 harts, 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.