

YOUNG HARRY HOUDINI

## TITLES AND MUSIC

SUPER OVER BLACK: "London 1920"

FADE IN:

1 INT. THEATER STAGE - NIGHT 1

CLOSE ON: Two hands come INTO FRAME. Gentle, graceful movement. The hands are turned back and forth to reveal that they are empty.

CAMERA BEGINS PULLING BACK as suddenly, the right hand plucks half a deck of cards from thin air and fans it out. A second later, the left hand does the same thing. The two halves of the deck are brought together. The deck is shuffled.

CONTINUE PULLING BACK as the deck is transferred to one hand, the arm behind it, outstretched. Suddenly, the other hand reaches in and pulls the cards back along the arm.

CONTINUE PULLING BACK as the cards suddenly flip over, one after another, like dominoes.

CONTINUE PULLING BACK TO REVEAL: a dark-haired MAN, 46, standing on a theater stage. He is smiling smugly. As quick as a flash, the man drops his arm away. The cards are suspended in mid-air for a split-second before the other hand darts in and grabs them all.

CONTINUE PULLING BACK TO REVEAL: an abstract metal 5-point star. The Man turns TOWARD CAMERA and the star, and in the same motion, throws the deck of cards at the star. The cards scatter on impact, but we see that five cards now appear on the points of the star.

The Man walks quickly over to the 5-point star and picks off the cards. He holds them up.

MAN

In honor of His Royal Highness,  
The Prince of Wales... a royal  
flush!

An AUDIENCE ERUPTS in APPLAUSE as the Man takes his bows.

We see the entire stage now. Behind the Man, there is a large painted sign that reads: "HARRY HOUDINI!  
WORLD'S GREATEST ESCAPE ARTIST!"

INT. THEATER - ANOTHER ANGLE - NIGHT

WIDE: A crowded theater. The Audience is APPLAUDING and WHISTLING.

CLOSE ON: The Royal Box, decorated with red, white and blue bunting, as HRH PRINCE OF WALES, two Court Aides, and two Family Members APPLAUD enthusiastically.

CLOSE ON: a gentleman in the third row, white-haired, very distinguished. He is applauding enthusiastically. This is SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, 60.

INT. THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

Houdini bows gracefully and holds up his hands for silence. He has an air of magnetic self-confidence about him.

HOUDINI

Your Royal Highness, my Lords, ladies, and gentlemen! I thank you for your kindness and your generosity. This is my fifth trip to London and I am always touched by the reception you give me. This evening, in honor of His Royal Highness, I should like to present to you something never before seen in this part of the world! Something very dangerous! Your Royal Highness! My Lords, ladies, and gentlemen! I give you my greatest challenge...

He waves a hand grandly and the curtain rises to reveal:

HOUDINI

"The Chinese Water Torture Cell"!

Houdini immediately moves offstage.

We see the water torture cabinet: glass case, ten feet high and filled with water. Hanging beside it, suspended from above by chains, a set of heavy wooden shackles. TWO ASSISTANTS are preparing the Torture Cell.

One Assistant is on a ladder, pouring a final bucket of water into the cabinet.

WIDE: The Audience, as a MURMUR OF EXCITEMENT races through it.

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3

CLOSER ON: The Royal Box, as The Prince and his Aides begin to smile, intrigued.

CLOSER ON: Conan Doyle, as he leans forward, eager with anticipation.

The Two Assistants roll the cabinet forward, toward the front of the stage. They unlock the wooden shackles. \*

A moment later, Houdini returns to the stage, now dressed in a bathing costume. \*

HOUDINI

First, my feet are anchored in wooden shackles; then I will be hoisted up and lowered down into the water-filled chamber; finally, the wooden shackles will be secured to the top of the chamber, effectively locking me inside.

TWO LONDON BOBBIES come onto stage and inspect the padlocks fastening the wooden shackles.

HOUDINI

I have enlisted the services of these constables to insure that my shackles are genuine.

(to the Bobbies)

Gentlemen! What is your opinion?

BOBBY #1

As far as I can see, Mr. Houdini, they appear to be genuine.

HOUDINI

And secure?

BOBBY #2

Very secure, sir.

HOUDINI

Thank you, gentlemen.

One of the Assistants steps forward as the others raise Houdini into the air and swing the apparatus out over the cell. \*

ASSISTANT

Previously, Mr. Houdini has demonstrated the ability to hold his breath underwater for just over two minutes. \*

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Houdini is being lowered, upside down, towards the chamber.

ASSISTANT

In order to make sure that the trick doesn't continue longer than that time, we have secured the services of Dr. Norman Allworth, chief astronomer of the Greenwich Observatory, whose accuracy in matters of time is world-renowned.

AN ELDERLY GENTLEMAN carrying a stopwatch comes onto stage.

Houdini now is suspended over the top of the chamber.

ASSISTANT

Are you ready, Mr. Houdini?

A DRUMROLL.

Houdini hesitates a moment, building the drama, then he quickly waves a hand.

HOUDINI

(shouting)

Now!

Houdini takes a deep breath.

Dr. Allworth starts his stopwatch.

Houdini is quickly lowered into the chamber; other assistants lock the wooden shackles onto the top of the chamber.

The Audience watches with wonder.

Onstage, Houdini is now hanging upside-down in the water-filled chamber. A curtain is raised up around the entire device, obscuring it FROM VIEW.

Almost immediately, a MAN DRESSED IN ORNATE AND FLOWING CHINESE ROBES, his face covered by an Oriental mask, comes out onstage. He is carrying a broadaxe.

ASSISTANT

In the interests of safety, we are joined by Mr. Lin Pao, the gentleman who first introduced this illusion to Mr. Houdini.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED: (3)

3

ASSISTANT (CONT'D)

In the event that Mr. Houdini is unable to free himself in the allotted two minutes, Mr. Lin Pao, will use his broadaxe to smash open the chamber!

\*

The Audience strains forward in anticipation, anxiety.

DR. ALLWORTH

One minute!

\*

ASSISTANT

While the water torture escape has been performed in China for ten centuries, Mr. Houdini is the first occidental ever to attempt it!

DR. ALLWORTH

One minute, thirty seconds!

\*

ASSISTANT

This illusion has taken the lives of more than a dozen men! But I'm sure Mr. Houdini will be all right. Don't you think so, ladies and gentlemen?

The Audience APPLAUDS their agreement.

ASSISTANT

But just in case... Lin Pao, is your axe ready?

Lin Pao gestures that it is.

DR. ALLWORTH

Two minutes!

The Assistant looks towards the curtain, nervously.

The Audience is tense.

Conan Doyle leans forward, concerned, his brow knit.

DR. ALLWORTH

Two minutes... twenty seconds!

\*

There is a pause of silence as everyone looks at the curtain. The curtain doesn't move.

Seconds tick by as we see Doyle, Prince Edward and the Audience holding their breaths in horror.

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The Assistant runs towards the curtain.

DR. ALLWORTH  
Two minutes, thirty seconds!

\*  
\*

ASSISTANT  
Break the glass! Quickly!

SCREAMS from the Audience.

The Chinaman rushes forward and raises the broadaxe!

The Assistant pulls the curtain down! The chamber is empty! Houdini is gone!

There is a moment of stunned silence as the Audience stares, slack-jawed.

CLOSE ON: The Royal Box, as HRH and his aides exchange disbelieving glances.

Lin Pao moves toward center stage. Then he strips off the Oriental mask: It is Houdini!

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED: (4)

The Audience GASPS, then it erupts in THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE.

CLOSE ON: Conan Doyle, as he leaps to his feet, applauding wildly and shouting "Bravo! Bravo!"

The rest of the Audience follows.

Houdini moves to center stage and bows graciously, as the ovation continues.

4  
thru  
6

OMITTED

4  
thru  
6

7 INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

7

The crowd of reporters is more informal, milling about Houdini, congratulating him on the performance.

Conan Doyle approaches him, shaking his hand heartily.

DOYLE  
Masterful performance, Houdini,  
simply masterful!

HOUDINI  
Thank you, Arthur.

Doyle laughs.

HOUDINI  
(to the others)  
Gentlemen! I should like to  
present to you the greatest of all  
writers, creator of that famed  
sleuth, Sherlock Holmes... Sir  
Arthur Conan Doyle.

Members of the press begin to shout questions.

REPORTER #1  
Sir Arthur, when can we expect  
another Sherlock Holmes mystery to  
be published?

DOYLE  
Not in the foreseeable future,  
gentlemen.

(MORE)

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DOYLE (CONT'D)

I have decided to devote the next few years to research of the parapsychological, the mystical. I am taking great interest in those things that are not immediately understandable to us.

REPORTER #1

Exactly what do you mean when you say "things that are not immediately understandable to us"?

DOYLE

Well... for instance, Houdini here. Which one of us could claim to understand how he performs his astounding escapes?

Applause from the others in the room.

HOUDINI

You flatter me, Sir Arthur. I am just a humble illusionist.

DOYLE

(smiling)

An illusionist, perhaps! But in all these years, Houdini, I've never known you to be humble.

Houdini laughs heartily. The others join in.

HOUDINI

Quite right, Sir Arthur.

(to the press)

Gentlemen, you have an historic moment here: two men without a shred of humility between them. Is no one going to capture it on film?

The photographers step forward with Graflex cameras and begin to take pictures. Flash bulbs pop.

Houdini and Conan Doyle pose, smiling.

8 EXT. CLARIDGE'S HOTEL - NIGHT

8

ESTABLISH hotel. A Hansom cab pulls away from the front of the hotel.

INT. HOUDINI'S SUITE

DOYLE

It's impossible! Absolutely impossible!

Conan Doyle is seated on the sofa, shaking his head emphatically.

Houdini, in smoking jacket, is at the sideboard pouring tea.

DOYLE

Can't be done! I was sitting not 30 feet away! I saw you locked into that chamber! Upside down! Totally helpless!

HOUDINI

Totally.

DOYLE

And yet you escaped!

Houdini smiles and hands Conan Doyle a cup of tea.

HOUDINI

Simply a trick, Arthur.

Conan Doyle looks at Houdini a moment; then he begins shaking his head again.

DOYLE

Nonsense! Don't believe it. That was not simply a trick.

HOUDINI

It was.

DOYLE

Then how'd you do it?

HOUDINI

Now you know I can't tell you that.

DOYLE

Then I don't believe you. There must be more to it than simple trickery! There must be!

HOUDINI

What can I say to convince you?

DOYLE

You could tell the truth.

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9

HOUDINI  
Very well, if you insist...

DOYLE  
(beaming)  
At last!

HOUDINI  
The Chinese Water Torture... is an  
illusion. And nothing more!

DOYLE  
Blast you, Houdini, it was real!  
It had to be real!

HOUDINI  
Come now, Arthur, do you think I  
made myself dematerialize or  
something?

DOYLE  
I would believe that. Did you?

HOUDINI  
There is nothing mystical about  
what I do, Arthur! There is  
nothing mystical about me! I'm a  
man. Just like you!

DOYLE  
There is more. I'm convinced of  
it.

Conan Doyle stands up and walks over to a window.

HOUDINI  
Will you ever give up your belief  
in all this mystical hocus-pocus,  
Arthur?

He turns back to Houdini.

DOYLE  
Haven't you ever wondered about it  
yourself, Houdini? Wondered about  
the unexplainable, the fantastic,  
the truly magical? Haven't you  
ever had an experience that gave  
you pause for thought? A brush  
with the mystical?

Houdini starts to shake his head again, then stops,  
thinking.

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9

DOYLE

What is it? What are you thinking about?

Houdini gets up suddenly and goes over to the side-board.

DOYLE

Confound it, Houdini! What is it?

HOUDINI

Now that I think of it, there was something... something almost forty years ago.

DOYLE

What, Houdini? What is it? Tell me!

HOUDINI

Something, when I was a boy. It was, as you say... "a brush with the mystical." I've never told this to anyone, Arthur. And you must promise to let it go no further. If it ever got out, I'd have people banging my door down, asking me to contact their long-lost grandfathers or some such nonsense.!

DOYLE

I promise, upon my honor. Now tell me, what is it?

HOUDINI

It's the most fantastic story you'll ever hear...

Houdini smiles slyly.

DISSOLVE THRU TO:

10 EXT. APPLETON, WISCONSIN - DAY

10

WIDE: the main street of Appleton. A horse and buggy is approaching.

SUPER TITLE: "Appleton, Wisconsin - 1886"

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10 CONTINUED:

10

HOUDINI (V.O.)

Many years before I took the name Harry Houdini, I was Eric Weiss. I lived with my family in a small town in Wisconsin called Appleton...

There are pieces of paper stuck on the various storefronts all along the street.

CAMERA PANS with the horse and buggy to find two ten-year-old boys standing outside the saloon. One boy is plastering paste with a brush on the wall just outside the saloon door. The other boy sticks the poster on the wall.

Suddenly, a third boy comes running out of the saloon pursued by a burly saloonkeeper. The three boys run off. The saloonkeeper shakes his fist after them. He looks at the poster, then tears it off the wall. As he turns to go back into the saloon we see that another poster has been pasted to his back. It reads: "See Ehrich, Prince of the Air, defy death! Noon today! The Old Shanahan Place!"

A10 EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - DAY

A10

The three boys run up to an old house and pull open a boarded-over door. A board has been loosened to suggest that this is a regular meeting place. \*

HOUDINI (V.O.)

Even at a young age, I was on my way to becoming the greatest magician in the world, playing some of the grander houses in the area...

11 INT. ABANDONED HOUSE ATTIC - DAY

11

HOUDINI (V.O.)

... performing wondrous and mystifying feats of daring for the local citizenry.

The three boys enter and join nine other boys, gathered in a semi-circle around a make-shift curtain, clearly a tablecloth, strung between two wooden beams.

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CONTINUED:

Beside the curtain, painted on an old wooden gate is "Ehrich, Prince of the Air!"

HOUDINI (V.O.)

My brother Theo was my most able  
master of ceremonies.

CLOSE ON: drumsticks on a washtub that begin to BEAT  
OUT A DRUMROLL.

A fourteen-year-old BOY, dressed in loud and flashy  
clothing, steps out in front of the curtain.

THEO

Gentlemen! What you are about to  
witness is a feat of daredevilry  
never before seen in this part of  
the world! Those with weak hearts  
should take their leave now.

(dramatically)

I give you Eric... Prince of the  
Air!

The curtain drops to reveal a length of rope stretching  
between two wooden beams ten feet above the floor.

The boys look up.

A twelve-year-old boy, ERIC WEISS, wearing red long-  
johns, a towel-cape and a blindfold not yet covering  
his eyes, is standing on the beam at one end of the  
rope.

There is a smattering of applause.

Eric gives a "showman" wave to the audience. Then he  
pulls the blindfold over his eyes and begins to move  
tenuously out onto the rope, his arms out to the side  
for balance.

Suddenly, Eric takes a step and DROPS OUT OF FRAME.

The audience of twelve boys applauds.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

Much as they are today, my  
audiences in the beginning were  
very receptive...

ANGLE ON: Eric hanging from the rope, his legs and an  
arm wrapped around it. He lifts the corner of the  
blindfold and smiles sheepishly.

FLIP WIPE TO:

12 INT. ATTIC - DAY

12

Now there are only eight boys in the audience.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

... but difficult to keep entertained, so I found it best to vary my presentation from performance to performance.

CLOSE ON: a sign that reads: "The Amazing Ehrich!" \*

We hear the WASHTUB DRUM ROLL as Theo comes out in front of the makeshift curtain.

THEO

Gentlemen! What you are about to witness is a feat of magic never before seen in this part of the world!

(dramatically)

I give you... The Amazing Eric!

Eric steps in front of the curtain. He is wearing a brand-new but oversized frock coat and a battered top hat. One sleeve of the coat is bulging, clearly stuffed with something wondrous.

The audience applauds.

Eric, demonstrating some of the flair he will become famous for, shows the audience that he has nothing in his hands.

Then he reaches in up the bulging sleeve and pulls out a silk handkerchief. He looks at the audience with surprise: what is this?! He continues to pull: another handkerchief comes out attached to the previous one. He pulls and more come out, one by one.

Then, suddenly, the string of handkerchieves stops. It's become stuck on something. Eric yanks, but nothing. Then he yanks again, harder. We hear A RIP and Eric pulls the rest of the handkerchieves out. At the end, we see the tattered striped lining of the frock coat. Eric looks at it a moment, then holds it up in the air, smiling triumphantly, as if it were part of the trick. \*

The audience of eight boys applauds.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

Although the adulation of my audiences continued unabated, I found the usual tricks to be going stale...

FLIP WIPE TO:

13 INT. ATTIC - DAY

13

Now the audience consists of three boys.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

... so I embarked on that area of performance for which I would become famous.

CLOSE ON: a sign that reads: "Ehrich the Great!" \*

We hear the WASHTUB DRUM ROLL as Theo comes out in front of the makeshift curtain, now dressed in a dark suit with a bright red bowtie.

THEO

Gentlemen! What you are about to witness is a feat of amazement never before seen anywhere in the world.

(dramatically)

I give you... Eric the Great!

Theo pulls the curtain back to reveal Eric completely trussed up in rope, twine, and strips of cloth.

The audience applauds.

THEO

Within seconds, Eric the Great will free himself from these unbreakable bonds! Are you ready, Eric?

ERIC

Ready.

THEO

Then let the illusion begin!

Theo pulls the curtain closed and takes out a pocket watch from his vest to keep time.

We see the curtain move as Eric begins thrashing around behind it, trying to get out of the ropes.

THEO

Five seconds! Are you free, Eric?

ERIC (O.S.)

Almost! Five more seconds!

The curtain moves back and forth wildly as Eric continues to thrash around behind it, even more vigorously now.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED:

13

THEO

Ten seconds! Are you free, Eric?

ERIC (O.S.)

Just about got it!

Suddenly, he becomes tangled in the curtain and falls, bringing it down around him.

Theo winces.

The audience applauds.

14 INT. WEISS HOME - DAY

14

Eric's father, RABBI WEISS, is pacing. He is bearded and very stern-looking. He is looking at someone off-camera.

HIS MOTHER, a round-faced, sympathetic woman, is sitting in a chair.

RABBI WEISS

What am I to do with you children?  
What am I to do?

We see Theo sitting on the sofa, listening. As his father speaks, CAMERA PANS across to one of his four other brothers, whom we recognize from the audience at the attic.

RABBI WEISS

My best coat is torn! All your  
mother's handkerchieves are  
knotted together!

CAMERA CONTINUES TO PAN to another brother, also from the barn audience.

RABBI WEISS

An expensive tablecloth is ruined!  
And my youngest son is tied up  
like a package of meat!

CAMERA PANS to find Eric sitting on the sofa, still tied up.

RABBI WEISS

Theo, untie your brother, please.

The Weiss family is sitting around the dinner table. Everyone is passing the food around with gusto.

RABBI WEISS

Eric, why do you do these things? Why do you insist on pulling these crazy stunts?

ERIC

Because I'm in training, Papa. I'm going to be the greatest magician in the world.

RABBI WEISS

(to his wife)

Cecilia. Talk to your son.

ERIC

It's true, Papa! You'll see! I'm going to travel all over the world! Perform for Kings and Queens! I'm going to be a magician, Papa. I can feel it!

RABBI WEISS

Mr. O'Casey has been good enough to take you on as an apprentice. Take advantage of it. And forget about magic.

ERIC

But I can be rich and famous!

RABBI WEISS

A good locksmith, Mr. O'Casey tells me, can earn five or six hundred dollars a year!

ERIC

I could earn thousands!

RABBI WEISS

(to his wife)

Cecilia. Talk to your son.

ERIC

It's true, Papa! I heard The Great Merlin earns two thousand dollars a year!

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

15

RABBI WEISS

Merlin, indeed! Eric, I want you to be happy and have a good life. Don't rely on dreams. They have a nasty habit of not coming true. So no more talk about magic! Can we agree on that?

ERIC

Yes, Papa.

RABBI WEISS

(to Theo)

And that goes for you too! Agreed?

THEO

Yes, Papa.

RABBI WEISS

Good. Now let's eat.

16 EXT. HOUSE - DAY

16

CLOSE ON a toolbox being carried by someone. On the side of it is painted the sign: "Sean O'Casey -- Locksmith".

WIDEN TO FIND: SEAN O'CASEY walking up the sidewalk of a typical Appleton house.

Eric is walking behind him carrying another toolbox.

O'CASEY

You know, Eric, there's poetry in locks. Sheer, blissful poetry. In the way the key slides in and turns with a click. It's a wonderful sound, just wonderful.

Eric is nodding dutifully. He's heard it all before.

ERIC

Yes, Mr. O'Casey.

O'CASEY

Go ahead. Pick a lock. Any lock. And I'll show you the poetry. This is a blessed profession we're in, young Eric, just blessed.

ERIC

Yes, Mr. O'Casey.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

O'Casey is struggling trying to open the lock of an expensive-looking cabinet. He is not doing very well.

Eric is watching. O'Casey is sweating and grumbling quietly under his breath. Finally, he stands up.

O'CASEY

I'm going out to the water pump  
for a drink.

Mr. O'Casey lumbers out the door.

Eric looks at the lock. He picks up O'Casey's tool and sticks it in the mechanism. He wiggles it, then turns it once, then twice. He hears a CLICK. The cabinet opens. Eric's eyes open with wonder; he can't quite believe it himself.

Behind him, he hears O'Casey returning. He quickly closes the door and moves away from the cabinet.

O'CASEY

(wiping his brow)  
It sure is hot!

He kneels down to begin working on the lock.

O'CASEY

Now watch closely, Eric. This is a particularly difficult lock. Maybe the most difficult I've ever seen. Even with my skill and experience it'll probably take a good hour to get this cabinet open again. There's no substitute for experience, is there, Eric?

He sticks his tool into the lock and it opens instantly. O'Casey is startled.

ERIC

Yes, Mr. O'Casey.

EXT. SALOON - DAY

O'Casey and Eric approach.

O'CASEY

You wait here. I'll be out in a  
half-hour.

O'Casey goes in the saloon. Eric sits down on a bench near the door, takes out a paper lunch bag and prepares to eat. Before he can bite into his sandwich he hears:

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

18

THEO (O.S.)

Eric! Eric!

Theo runs up to him, out of breath.

THEO

Eric! You'll never guess who's here! Right here in Appleton!

ERIC

Who?

THEO

Guess.

ERIC

I don't want to guess, Theo. Who is it?

THEO

One hint: his first name is "The Great."

ERIC

The Great Merlin!? The Great Merlin is here in Appleton?

THEO

In person. At the hotel! He stopped off on his way to Chicago!

\*

ERIC

Well, what are we waiting for?

Eric throws his sandwich down and is about to run off, but he stops. He is torn: should he go see his idol, or stay with his responsibility to O'Casey and his father? He thinks a moment, then shakes his head and runs off. Theo follows closely behind.

19 INT. APPLETON HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

19

\*

Through a window, we see Eric and Theo run up and press their faces to the glass, then run off.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal MERLIN surrounded by a small crowd of ten people. He is doing some flashy card tricks.

Eric and Theo push their way to the front. Eric watches Merlin in wide-eyed wonderment as he continues his tricks.

The crowd has dispersed. Only Eric and Theo remain.

THEO

Come on, Eric. The show's over.  
Let's go.

Theo tries to pull his brother away, but Eric is not moving.

ERIC

Just a minute. Just a minute.

He continues staring at Merlin, who is packing up his material. Merlin looks up.

MERLIN

Good day to you, young man.

ERIC

Good day, sir.

MERLIN

Let me guess. You're a fellow  
magician. Am I right?

ERIC

Well, sort of...

MERLIN

Well, perhaps you could help me  
with something then.

Merlin makes a coin appear in his hand, then just as quickly makes it disappear.

Eric's eyes widen.

MERLIN

You didn't see me slip the coin  
behind my fingers, like this, did  
you?

Merlin turns his hand over to show Eric that the coin is held between his fingers. Eric is dumbfounded, wide-eyed.

MERLIN

... or flip it forward, like that!

He flips the coin back into his palm.

ERIC

No, sir.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

20

MERLIN

Excellent! Perhaps I haven't lost  
my touch after all.

Merlin takes Eric's hand and holds it with the empty  
palm up. He closes it into a fist. Then pats it.

MERLIN

We magicians must stick together,  
mustn't we?

He picks up his coat, winks and walks away.

Eric watches him leave with awe. Then he opens his  
hand to see the coin now in it!

21 EXT. WEISS HOME - DAY

21

Eric and Theo are walking around the back door of their  
house.

ERIC

He knew I was a fellow magician!  
He knew just by looking at me!  
Wait till I show this trick to  
Mama!

22 INT. WEISS HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

22

Eric and Theo come in.

ERIC

Mama! Mama!

Their Mother turns from the stove.

MOTHER

What is it, Eric?

THEO

Eric can make money appear out of  
thin air!

Their Mother smiles at their boyish exuberance.

MOTHER

Now, boys...

ERIC

I can, Mama, I can. Watch.

Eric holds his empty hand up for his Mother to see.  
Then he flips it and the coin appears.

(CONTINUED)

22

CONTINUED:

22

Mother Weiss is astonished.

MOTHER

How did you do that?

ERIC

Magic! And watch this, Mama!  
Watch what else I can do!

Eric performs palms the coin, making it disappear.  
Then he makes it reappear.

Mother Weiss gasps in delightful surprise.

Theo looks at his brother in wide-eyed astonishment.

THEO

When did you learn that trick?

ERIC

Just now. I just made it up.  
Petty good, huh?

He beams proudly and holds the coin up for his mother.

ERIC

For you, Mama.

MOTHER

Oh, that's wonderful, Eric.

RABBI WEISS

Wonderful, indeed!

They turn to see Rabbi Weiss standing in the doorway,  
looking annoyed.

RABBI WEISS

He'll have to make money appear  
out of thin air, because he'll  
never make it any other way!

MOTHER

Samuel, what is it? What's wrong?

RABBI WEISS

Your son has been fired from his  
job by Mr. O'Casey! He says he  
has no time for boys who run off!  
If Eric doesn't want to learn the  
trade, there are plenty of other  
boys in town who do!

ERIC

But Papa...

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

22

RABBI WEISS  
Go to your room, Eric!

Eric hangs his head and walks out of the room.

RABBI WEISS  
(calling after him)  
And tomorrow, you'll go to Mr.  
O'Casey and beg him to take you  
back!

Theo is trying to disappear into the background.

RABBI WEISS  
Theo.

THEO  
Yes, Papa.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: (2)

22

RABBI WEISS

Come here.

Theo approaches nervously. The Rabbi sits down. He puts a hand on Theo's shoulder.

RABBI WEISS

Talk to your brother. He'll listen to you. He thinks I'm punishing him, but I'm not. I only want what's best. He's too young to know what he wants. Mr. O'Casey says he has a real future as a locksmith, he's got natural talent. But magic, Theo... now you see it... now you don't.

23 EXT. WEISS HOME - NIGHT

23

ESTABLISH the house. One light is on in the second story.

A23 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A23

Eric and Theo are in their beds. Eric is staring up at the ceiling, lost in thought.

THEO

You know, Eric, I don't think Papa means to be mean. He just wants what's best... for all of us.

ERIC

I know that.

THEO

So maybe being a locksmith won't be so bad, after all.

ERIC

(slowly; evenly)

I can't be a locksmith, Theo. I'm a magician. It's out of my hands.

He reaches up and pulls the coin out of thin air. He stares at it, thoughtfully. It seems to glisten in the lantern light.

Theo looks over at his brother, knowing he isn't about to give up.

24 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

24

Moonlight streams in through the window, filling the room. CAMERA PANS across the window to find Theo asleep in his bed. PAN ACROSS TO Eric's bed: it is empty.

\*  
\*

Eric is by the dresser, quietly collecting some clothes out of a drawer and packing them into a satchel. He finishes, picks up the unlit oil lamp from atop the dresser and tiptoes out of the room past Theo.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

As the door CLOSES, Theo opens his eyes: he hasn't been asleep.

25 INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

25

Eric enters the kitchen, holding a lit oil lamp. He goes over to the ice box, puts the oil lamp on top, and opens the door:

He takes out some food and stuffs it into his satchel, then closes the door. He takes the oil lamp down and blows it out.

26 EXT. WEISS HOME - BACK DOOR - NIGHT

26

Eric comes out. The SCREEN DOOR SQUEAKS. Eric stops. He listens to see if he woke anyone up. Nothing. Then he closes the door slowly, quietly.

Eric turns to leave and walks directly into someone. He jumps!

It is Theo. He is dressed and smiling.

THEO

(whispering)

You didn't think I was going to let you leave without me, did you?

ERIC

(whispering)

Theo! You scared me to death! Don't do that anymore, okay?

THEO

(whispering)

Okay. Now let's get going. Before someone wakes up.

ERIC

(whispering)

You can't come with me.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

26 CONTINUED:

26

ERIC (CONT'D)

You've got to stay here and look after Mama and Papa. They need you. Now don't give me any trouble.

Eric turns and runs off. Theo watches him go.

27 EXT. STREETS OF APPLETON - NIGHT

27

Eric comes running up to the corner of building. He looks around the corner carefully. Someone is there; Eric jumps. It is Theo.

ERIC

Theo! I told you not to do that anymore!

THEO

Where are you going?

ERIC

To Chicago! The Great Merlin is there and I'm going to ask him to take me on as his apprentice. I don't want to leave Mama and Papa ... or you, but I can't become the greatest magician in the world if I stay here in Appleton! Now goodbye!

THEO

But you need me. Who's going to be your assistant?

ERIC

I'll hire someone! Now go home!

They hear SOMEONE COMING.

ERIC

Shh!

They run off down the street.

28 EXT. TRAIN YARD - NIGHT

28

\*

A freight train is pulling out slowly.

Eric and Theo are running along the train. Theo is running beside him.

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED:

28

THEO

What am I going to tell Papa?

ERIC

Tell him the truth. Tell him I  
ran away, but I'll be back.

THEO

When?

Eric jumps into an open freight car. Theo keeps running alongside.

(CONTINUED)

ERIC

In a year, Theo! One year! If I haven't succeeded by then, I'll come home! I'll beg Mr. O'Casey to take me back and I'll become the greatest locksmith in the world!

THEO

But Eric...

ERIC

I've got to try, Theo. If I don't, I'll never really know.

Theo begins to slow down.

THEO

'Bye, Eric.

Theo waves.

Eric hangs out of the freight car waving.

ERIC

'Bye, Theo! Kiss Mama and Papa goodbye for me! Tell them I love them!

Theo watches as the train disappears into the night. Its WHISTLE BLOWING plaintively in the distance.

29 EXT. FREIGHT CAR - NIGHT

29

Eric is still leaning out of the car, waving.

A29 INT. FREIGHT CAR - NIGHT

A29

He pulls himself in and sits down against the wall of the box car. His eyes begin to tear.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

... and so as the train carried me off into the night, I was at once filled with excitement and fear, uncertain of what adventures lay ahead. Yet, I knew I was following my destiny...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

30 INT. BOX CAR - DAY

30

Eric is asleep on the floor of the boxcar. The train has stopped. Sunlight filters in through the cracks in the side of the car. Six bales of hay are scattered around the interior of the car.

\*  
\*

We hear the SOUND OF VOICES outside.

SLATS

Come on, officer. Listen, I ain't no vagrant. I got a wife and a kid in Cleveland! Give me a break, will ya?

YARDBULL

Button it, bub!

Eric awakens. He looks around, startled. He looks out a crack in the side of the boxcar and sees:

A30 EXT. BOXCAR - DAY

A30

HIS POV: A SCRAWNY MAN, dressed in ragged clothing is being handcuffed to the rung of a ladder on the next car by a BRAWNY YARDBULL.

\*

SLATS

But you're makin' a mistake.

YARDBULL

That oughta hold you for awhile.

The Bull waves an axe handle in the Hobo's face.

YARDBULL

When I get back you're going to wish you'd picked another train to hop!

The Hobo looks at the axe handle, grimacing.

The Bull begins moving down the train. He approaches Eric's car and sticks his head in the doorway.

B30 INT. BOXCAR - DAY

B30

Eric ducks back behind a bale of hay.

\*

The Yardbull slams his axe handle on the floor.

YARDBULL

Alright, everybody out! Everybody out! Now! Let's go! Hear me?!

(CONTINUED)

B30 CONTINUED:

B30

Eric doesn't move. He doesn't move.

YARDBULL

If I have to come in there, you're  
going to get the beatin' of your  
life! Understand me?

The Bull leans into the boxcar, listening carefully,  
then grunts approvingly and continues on to the next  
car.

Eric lets his breath out, relieved.

31 EXT. BOXCAR - DAY

31

Eric peeks out the doorway.

HIS POV: The Yardbull is now three cars down, banging  
on the outside with his axe handle, yelling threats.

Eric looks over at the Hobo handcuffed to the ladder.

The Hobo sees Eric jump down from the boxcar.

SLATS

Hey, kid! If you know what's good  
for you, you'll high-tail it outa  
here before that Yardbull gets  
back.

Eric walks over to him.

SLATS

Didn't you hear me, kid? Get outa  
here! Scram!

Eric smiles. He takes the stiff piece of wire out of  
his pocket and climbs up on the ladder where the hand-  
cuffs are.

SLATS

What are you doing?

ERIC

(smiling slyly)  
You are about to witness a feat of  
escapism never before seen in this  
part of the world.

Eric puts the wire in the keyhole and twists it a few  
times. The Hobo watches, puzzled.

They hear in the distance:

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

31

YARDBULL

Hey you! Get away from there!

Eric and the Hobo look down the train to see the Yardbull running towards them.

SLATS

Whatever you're doing, you better hurry it up!

Eric turns back to the lock, and begins jiggling it furiously.

ERIC

It usually doesn't take this long.

The Yardbull is getting closer and closer.

CLOSE: Eric working away at the lock.

The Yardbull is almost on top of them!

Finally the handcuff comes free!

The Hobo grabs Eric off the ladder and they crawl under the freight car.

YARDBULL

Come back here, you two!

32 EXT. CORRIDOR OF STATIONARY CARS - DAY

32

Eric and the Hobo come out the other side of the car and run TOWARD CAMERA.

SLATS

Name's Slats Carson, what's yours?

ERIC

Eric Weiss.

SLATS

Pleased to meet you, Eric.  
Where's you learn to pick a lock like that?

ERIC

I'm a magician.

Slats turns to see the Yardbull coming under the freight car.

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED:

32

SLATS

Oh yeah? Can you make us disappear?

ERIC

(seeing the Yardbull)

Not yet. But I'm working on it.

They run PAST CAMERA.

33 EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

33

Eric and Slats come around the corner. Suddenly they slow down and begin walking as two police officers walk past them.

SLATS

Hello, officers.

The officers tip their hats.

ERIC

I thought Chicago would be bigger than this.

SLATS

It is.

ERIC

What?

SLATS

Chicago is bigger than this, kid!  
This is Kansas City!

Eric stops right IN FRONT OF CAMERA.

ERIC

(stunned)

Kansas City! But... I don't wanna be in Kansas city. I want to be in Chicago.

SLATS

You musta hopped the wrong train, kid. Now come on.

Eric looks back to see:

HIS POV: At a distance, we see the Yardbull run up to the two police officers at the end of the street. He points and talks to them (MOS) and the policemen start after Eric and Slats.

Eric and Slats come around the corner and run down the street. The two cops are right behind them.

Eric looks ahead to see:

A YOUNG WOMAN of 16 emerging from a clothing store carrying some packages. Before he can change direction, he runs so close to her that he knocks some of the parcels out of her hands.

Eric stops a few steps ahead and looks back at the damage.

Eric looks up to see the young woman, CALPERNIA, 16, a teenage vision of loveliness. He is smitten instantly.

Up ahead, Slats has stopped and is looking back at Eric.

SLATS

Eric! What are you doing? Let's go! They're almost on top of us!

Eric doesn't hear. He walks back and helps Calpernia with her parcels, smitten all the while.

ERIC

I'm terribly sorry. I hope you're alright.

CALPERNIA

I'm fine, thank you. Are you in a hurry?

Just then, Slats' hand COMES INTO FRAME and grabs Eric.

SLATS

He's in a hurry alright.

ERIC

(as he is led away)

'Bye.

CALPERNIA

'Bye.

Calpernia watches Eric and Slats run off. She turns and sees the police approaching. She gets an idea. She drops all of her parcels again, this time purposefully right in front of them.

CALPERNIA

Oh my! Aren't I the clumsy one?

The policemen stop and begin to help her pick up her parcels.

35 EXT. ANOTHER STREET - DAY

35

Eric and Slats are running TOWARDS CAMERA.

SLATS

You go to the right and I'll go to the left. That'll throw 'em.

ERIC

Good idea.

SLATS

Nice meetin' ya, Eric.

ERIC

Good luck, Slats.

Eric goes to CAMERA LEFT. Slats goes CAMERA RIGHT.

36 OMITTED

36

\*

37 EXT. ALLEY - DAY

37

A crate in the midst of some rubbish in an alley. Behind the crate there is a large, colorful poster. We can see only a small portion of it.

POLICEMAN

I think he went down here.

The policemen run by the crate. A moment later, Eric peeks out from inside. He sees that the coast is clear.

He climbs out of the crate and dusts himself off.

As the SHOT WIDENS: we see the poster behind him. It READS: "DR. GRIMALDI'S WORLD OF WONDERS AND MIRACLE MEDICINE SHOW! WITNESS FEATS NEVER BEFORE SEEN IN THIS PART OF THE WORLD!"

\*

Eric looks up at the poster, open-mouthed.

CLOSE ON: the poster as ORGAN GRINDER MUSIC BEGINS TO FADE IN.

38 EXT. KANSAS STREET - NIGHT

38

A TORCH IS BURNING IN ONE CORNER OF FRAME. The CALLIOPE MUSIC CONTINUES.

Suddenly, a MAN STANDS UP INTO FRAME. This is DR. TYBOLT GRIMALDI, 58, a distinguished-looking man with fiery eyes, wearing a frock coat, striped pants, and flowing cape.

Grimaldi speaks and carries himself in the grand, melodramatic tradition of the late 19th Century.

GRIMALDI

Friends! Neighbors! Citizens!  
Gather round and prepare to be  
astounded! Prepare to disbelieve  
your eyes! Prepare to have your  
lives changed forever! For we,  
together, are about to enter into  
a world of mystery and wonder! Of  
sorcery and legerdemain! And I,  
your humble servant, Dr. Tybolt  
Grimaldi, peerless mysteriarch of  
the plains, shall act as guide and  
interpretor!

The CAMERA CONTINUES PULLING BACK to reveal that Grimaldi is standing on a stage which is suspended from the side of a medicine wagon.

Behind him, we see proclamations painted on the side of the wagon, reading: "WIZARD OIL! WONDER OF THE AGES! MAGIC ELIXIR!" "PANACEATIC MIRACLE CURE!" "TYBOLT GRIMALDI! PEERLESS MYSTERIARCH!" "FEATS OF LEGERDEMAIN!" "WOMEN AND CHILDREN WELCOME!"

CAMERA CONTINUES TO CRANE BACK AND HIGH to reveal: A small crowd is gathered around a pair of gaily painted wagons in the middle of a Kansas street. Torches burn brightly to illuminate the scene.

A young boy about eight or nine is grinding away on the organ, making MUSIC.

GRIMALDI

And so, good citizens, without  
further ado! For the first time  
in North America! I present to  
you, "the Palingenesia"! The  
dismemberment and regeneration of  
the human form!

He pauses for an ovation. Nothing.

He gestures an ornate cabinet standing upright on stage.

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED:

38

GRIMALDI

You may think you see before you  
an ordinary wooden cabinet. But  
you are wrong!

He opens the cabinet to reveal that it is empty.

GRIMALDI

For this is no ordinary cabinet.  
This is a cabinet of death! A  
hellish trap of doom! Whose  
gaping jaws await only a tender  
morsel!

He steps back and parts the curtain to reveal: a young  
woman. We see that it is the same young woman with the  
packages, Calpernia. He leads her gently by the hand  
out onto the stage.

GRIMALDI

A dear, sweet, ingenuous child!  
Pulchritudinous and tender of age!  
Mine own granddaughter, the fair  
flower, Calpernia!

He pauses a moment, awaiting applause. Again, when  
none is forthcoming, he continues:

GRIMALDI

Questions? None! Excellent!  
(to Calpernia)  
Are you ready, dearest child?

CALPERNIA

Yes, Grandfather, I'm ready.

GRIMALDI

Then, brave child, step into the  
box.

Calpernia steps into the cabinet. Grimaldi closes it,  
completely hiding her from view.

He takes a blade from a table and holds it up.

GRIMALDI

And now! I shall thrust into the  
cabinet these blades, forged of  
the finest steel, their razor-  
sharp edges thirsting for blood  
and hungering for flesh!

Grimaldi puts the first blade into a slot one-quarter  
of the way down the cabinet. It goes in only part way  
and stops as if blocked by something.

(CONTINUED)

38 CONTINUED: (2)

38

Grimaldi pushes harder and shoves it all the way through until the other end comes out on the other side.

From inside the sabinet, we hear Calpernia YELP as if in pain.

CLOSE ON: the crowd. A woman standing in the front row, faints. A murmur of enthusiasm races through the others in the audience.

ON STAGE: Grimaldi beams.

GRIMALDI

Fear not, ladies and gentlemen!  
Despite her screams, she feels  
little or no pain!

He picks up another blade.

GRIMALDI

Parents, cover your children's  
eyes!

He shoves the blade through midway down the cabinet.

39 EXT. KANSAS STREET - BACK OF MEDICINE WAGON

39

Eric hurries into the lot. He rounds a corner of the medicine wagon, and bumps into someone standing in the shadows. Eric tumbles backward to the ground.

He looks up to see the figure step out of the shadows: it is an OLD INDIAN, dressed in fringed buckskin and war bonnet; fierce-looking, hawk-featured. His arms are folded across his chest; a cigar is clenched between his teeth. There is a Crystal Talisman on a cowhide strip around his neck that seems to GLOW UNNATURALLY; the Indian is stroking it with one hand.

Eric stands quickly and moves away.

ERIC

I'm sorry, I didn't see you...

The Indian watches Eric leave. Then, suddenly, he reaches out as if to grab something. A BURST OF FLAME appears in his hand. He slowly brings it up to the end of his cigar. Then, just as quickly, he "throws" the fire away. The flame vanishes in thin air.

The Indian steps back into the shadows again, puffing leisurely on his cigar.

40 EXT. WAGON - NIGHT

40

Grimaldi has cut the wooden box containing Calpernia into four sections and has spread them out on the stage. One of the sections sits on the table.

Eric pushes his way to the front of the crowd and up to the edge of the stage. He looks up and sees Grimaldi, strutting magnificently among the pieces.

GRIMALDI

Cleaved! Quartered! Hacked to pieces! And yet, good citizens, and yet... can this be true? She lives!

Grimaldi opens the door of the box on the table to reveal: Calpernia's head.

GRIMALDI

Are you alright, my dear Calpernia?

CALPERNIA

Yes, Grandfather. Although I must admit... I feel a little bit scattered.

GRIMALDI

"Scattered" you say?! Well, well, well, we shall rectify that immediately!

CLOSE ON: Eric, as he sees Calpernia. His eyes widen in recognition.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

Calpernia. Calpernia. Never had I heard such a beautiful name. I could hardly wait for this vision of loveliness to be reassembled.

Quickly, Grimaldi closes the box, then moves across the stage, reassembling Calpernia. With a final flourish, Grimaldi opens the front of the cabinet and helps Calpernia out.

Eric whistles and applauds loudly. The others in the crowd applaud lightly.

Calpernia curtsies and leaves the stage. Grimaldi bows grandly. Then he throws his hands up in the air: brightly colored streamers EXPLODE like fireworks from his hands up into the air and over the crowd.

GRIMALDI

I thank you... I thank you...

(CONTINUED)

40 CONTINUED:

40

CLOSE ON Eric as some of the streamers fall on him. He smiles with delight.

GRIMALDI

In return for the miracle you have witnessed this evening, I ask no recompense, merely your kind indulgence a moment longer as I introduce to you...

Behind him, the curtain at the back of the stage parts and out walks the Indian.

GRIMALDI

(gesturing to the Indian)

Chief Gray Wolf! Medicine Man of the legendary Minotuk Indian Tribe!

The Indian walks to the front of the stage, looking very fierce.

Eric watches the Indian, who seems to be looking right at him.

GRIMALDI

The noble gentleman you see here tonight is the creator of the most remarkable tonic the world has ever known!

Grimaldi grabs a bottle out of a carton and holds it up for the crowd to see.

GRIMALDI

I call your attention to the bottle which I hold in my hand! The Miracle of the Ages, ladies and gentlemen! The Panaceatic Wonder of the 19th Century! The Magic Elixir of the Minotuk. Positively guaranteed to cure ringworm! Vapors! Palsy! Sick Headache! Female Anxiety! Rheumatism! Boils! Malaria! Pimples! Blood Disorders! Gout! Constipation! And the Common Cold in only six days!

Eric leans forward, spellbound.

.. (CONTINUED)

40 CONTINUED: (2)

40

GRIMALDI

And what do we ask for this amazing potion? A king's ransom? Never! A Double Eagle? Don't make me laugh!

(he slaps the bottle)

Wizard Oil, the sovereign remedy of the Minotuk Indian, the purest, safest, most effective medicine known to the white man's world, can be yours, good citizens, for the meager sum of twenty-five cents! One quarter of a dollar! Now who among you, ladies and gentlemen, will be the first to buy a bottle! Step up! Step up!

DISSOLVE THROUGH TO:

41 EXT. VACANT LOT - NIGHT (LATER)

41

CLOSE ON: a bottle of Wizard Oil next to a metal cashbox. The bottle is half-full of the golden tonic. A hand reaches INTO FRAME and drops some bills and silver into the cashbox, closing the lid and locking it shut.

GRIMALDI (O.S.)

Five dollars! A good day's work indeed!

The hand picks up the bottle and raises it. CAMERA FOLLOWS the bottle as Grimaldi hoists it to his mouth and takes the last drink. He considers the empty bottle a moment.

GRIMALDI

Ahhhh! The Miracle of the Ages!

WIDE: Grimaldi is sitting beside the campfire at the back of the wagons. The Indian, now dressed in regular clothing, is stirring a cooking pot over the fire.

GRIMALDI

You know, John, this is grand stuff, but I do believe the only thing it cures is "thirst".

He tosses the bottle over his shoulder into some bushes.

VOICE (O.S.)

Oww!

-.,;

(CONTINUED)

41

CONTINUED:

41

GRIMALDI

Who goes there? Identify yourself  
immediately!

Grimaldi and the Indian look over to see: Eric steps  
out of the bushes, rubbing his head.

ERIC

Eric Weiss, sir.

GRIMALDI

Weiss? Weiss? Do I know you, Mr.  
Weiss?

ERIC

No, sir, Dr. Grimaldi.

GRIMALDI

Then why are you lurking in my  
bushes like a sneak thief?

ERIC

Well... I saw the show, sir,  
and... I thought... that you  
might, well, you might need  
someone to...

GRIMALDI

Spit it out, lad. I haven't got  
all night!

ERIC

I want a job, sir. With you. I  
want to join your world of  
wonders.

\*  
\*

Grimaldi looks at Eric a moment, who is still rubbing  
his head, then turns away.

GRIMALDI

Well, you could have saved  
yourself that bump on the noggin,  
Mr. Weiss. I've nothing  
available. Except for grinding  
the organ. Only pays a nickel.  
Not worth taking on a regular  
fellow...

ERIC

But I'm an aerialist, sir! I can  
walk a tightrope! Fifty feet in  
the air! Without even a net!

\*  
\*  
\*

Grimaldi looks straight up.

\*

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED: (2)

42

GRIMALDI

Wonderful! And invaluable in certain situations I'm sure! But do you have any idea how we'd get you fifty feet in the air?

Eric grimaces, realizing Grimaldi is right.

The Indian chuckles softly.

ERIC

I'm also a magician, sir! Watch closely!

Grimaldi and the Indian watch as Eric reaches up and, with a flourish, pulls a playing card out of thin air.

Eric beams, proudly.

Grimaldi nods, somewhat impressed.

GRIMALDI

Not bad, Mr. Weiss. Not bad at all. But I have plenty of those.

He takes a deck of cards and places it face down in the palm of one hand. He extends the arm, then very quickly pulls the deck out along the outstretched arm. Just as quickly he flips all the cards over. Then suddenly, he drops his arm and catches the entire deck in mid-air, with his other hand. The trick is performed in a matter of two or three seconds.

Eric blinks, wide-eyed, not quite sure of what he saw.

ERIC

Wow!

The Indian laughs quietly again.

GRIMALDI

Do you have any other talents worth mentioning, Mr. Weiss?

Eric thinks a moment.

ERIC

Well, I... I'm an escape artist! I can escape from anything!

GRIMALDI

Really? Anything, you say?

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED: (2A)

41

ERIC  
Yes sir, anything!

Grimaldi thinks a moment.

GRIMALDI  
(to the Indian)  
Hmmm. John, get us some rope.

The Indian gets up from the campfire and walks over to the wagon. He takes a coil of rope from the harness box.

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED: (3)

41

ERIC

That's Gray Wolf, Medicine Man of the Minotuk, isn't it? Creator of the most remarkable tonic the world has ever known.

GRIMALDI

You are a most observant fellow, Mr. Weiss. That is indeed Gray Wolf, but he prefers to be called by his Christian name, John Parker.

The Indian comes back and begins to wrap Eric in the rope.

GRIMALDI

John's a full-blooded Minotuk, Mr. Weiss. A fierce race of knot-tiers, the Minotuk! If you can get out of his bindings, you can call yourself an escape artist without pretense.

Eric looks up at the Indian and smiles as he wraps the rope around him.

ERIC

(to the Indian)

Hello, John Parker, I'm Eric Weiss.

The Indian nods, but doesn't reply. He continues tying Eric.

ERIC

(to Grimaldi)

Doesn't he speak English?

GRIMALDI

John is unfortunately mute, Mr. Weiss. He understands everything you say, but he is unable to reply.

The Indian ties a final knot, tugging it tight. Eric is now completely bound from the shoulders to the knees. The Indian returns to the cooking pot.

GRIMALDI

Very well. You may begin!

Eric begins to struggle, twisting and turning.

CALPERNIA (O.S.)

Is supper ready, Father?

CONTINUED: (4)

Eric stops struggling and turns to see Calpernia emerge from the "household" wagon. She is towel-drying her hair. Eric begins to smile.

Calpernia sees Eric, all tied up and looking slightly ridiculous.

CALPERNIA

Oh, hello again. What are you doing here?

Eric smiles and nods, bashfully.

ERIC

Hello.

GRIMALDI

Are you and Mr. Weiss acquainted, my dear?

CALPERNIA

We met this morning. In the city. He was in quite a hurry so we haven't been formally introduced.

She comes across and sits down beside the campfire.

GRIMALDI

Mr. Weiss! My granddaughter, the radiant blossom, Calpernia!

Eric bows politely, as best he can.

CALPERNIA

Pleased to meet you, Mr Weiss... Father? Why is Mr. Weiss tied up?

GRIMALDI

He is auditioning for a position as escape artist, my dear. Do you think a genuine escapist would be a worthy addition to our show?

CALPERNIA

I think it would be a wonderful addition.

Calpernia smiles encouragement at Eric.

GRIMALDI

Then continue, Mr. Weiss!

Eric throws himself into the escape. He writhes and twists furiously.

(CONTINUED)

41 CONTINUED: (5)

41

The Indian hands Grimaldi a plateful of food. Grimaldi hands it gallantly to Calpernia.

GRIMALDI

Boiled prairie hen, my dear?

Eric spins in a circle and topples to the ground, still writhing, furiously.

A plate of food COMES INTO FRAME beside Eric's head. He stops twisting and looks up: it is the Indian, holding the plate and a fork, ready to feed Eric.

ERIC

(smiling earnestly)

No, thank you, I'm not hungry.

The Indian smiles.

DISSOLVE TO:

42 SAME SCENE - LATER

42

CLOSE ON: the cooking pot, now empty. The Indian reaches down and lifts it from the fire. He walks across the camp.

CAMERA PANS with him to reveal: Calpernia and Grimaldi are sitting by the fire, relaxing after their meal. Grimaldi is smoking a pipe; Calpernia is mending one of Grimaldi's stage costumes.

Grimaldi stretches and yawns.

GRIMALDI

Dear me! Time for bed!

He stands and walks over to Eric who is on the other side of the fire. Eric is still twisting and rolling about on the ground.

GRIMALDI

Eric, my boy! You have made a valiant attempt, but perhaps you would be wise to consider another line of work.

ERIC

No, sir! I said I can do it, and I can. I'm Eric the Great!

GRIMALDI

You're Eric the Persistent, I'll give you that!

(MORE)

42 CONTINUED:

42

GRIMALDI

(sighing)

Very well, lad! Good luck to you!

He climbs into the wagon.

Calpernia comes over and kneels down beside Eric.

CALPERNIA

Are you sure I can't untie you?

ERIC

No, thank you, Miss Calpernia. I really can do this. I just... haven't done it in awhile.

CALPERNIA

Alright. But if you need anything, call me.

She reaches down and brushes a lock of his hair back from his eyes. Then she stands and walks to the wagon.

Eric watches her go, dreamy-eyed. He sighs deeply. Then he throws himself into the escape with a fury.

Suddenly, his baby finger pops out between two strands of rope. He smiles.

ERIC

Ah, now we're getting somewhere.

CUT TO:

43 INT. HOUSEHOLD WAGON - NIGHT

43

Grimaldi is in bed, asleep. Suddenly, thirty feet of rope drops onto the covers. He wakes with a start and looks around.

He sees Eric, sweating and dirt-covered, standing at the foot of the bed, breathing heavily.

ERIC

I told you I could do it.

GRIMALDI

(sleepily)

So you did. So you did. Well, then you have yourself a job. That kind of determination deserves a reward. Perhaps we'll have you do that trick in the show.

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED:

43

ERIC

Thank you, Dr. Grimaldi.

GRIMALDI

(beat)

But, Mr. Weiss?

ERIC

Yes, sir?

GRIMALDI

You're going to have to learn to do it a lot faster.

ERIC

Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

Eric beams, proudly.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

44 EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

44

The two wagons of the travelling carnival come down a country road. The Medicine Wagon is in the lead, with John Parker at the reins. Coming along behind it, the larger Household Wagon, with Grimaldi at the reins. Eric is beside him.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

And so it was that I found gainful employment with Grimaldi's World of Wonders and Miracle Medicine Show. I was to receive the princely sum of two percent of the gross receipts per week in compensation for an assortment of duties, all unspecified. The road west was interminable, the transportation uncomfortable, and the food at most times indigestible. But none of it mattered in the least, for at last I was in show business!

\*  
\*

45 EXT. HOUSEHOLD WAGON - DAY

45

GRIMALDI

I like to think that this is more than a mere exercise in commerce, young Eric. I like to think that we provide a service...

(MORE)

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)

... offering sturdy frontiersmen a brief respite from the mind-numbing dreariness of life on the Great Plains. A little laughter, some drama, and a good old-fashioned thrill or two.

ERIC

(smiling)

And then you sell them some wizard oil.

GRIMALDI

Absolutely! A respite from mind-numbing dreariness doesn't come cheaply!

ERIC

Twenty-five cents a bottle. One quarter of a dollar. Right?

GRIMALDI

(smiling warmly)

You know, Eric, you remind me of me at your age. Earnest, diligent, and exceedingly well-intentioned... but with just a touch of the scoundrel that leaves us unwilling to follow the common path. My own father, for example, wanted me to become a cooper... a barrel-maker! Can you imagine Tybolt Grimaldi making barrels?

Eric shakes his head "no."

GRIMALDI

Neither could I. Although with a little applied diligence I no doubt would have become the greatest barrel-maker in the world. But my heart just wasn't in it! And after all, that's what's important. What's in here.

(taps his chest)

Even with magic! Anyone can do tricks, Eric. It's merely a matter of buying the apparatus and learning the method. The real art comes from the magician who has spirit, who has vision... who has heart. Never forget that.

Eric is listening to Grimaldi with rapt attention. Grimaldi falls quiet for a moment as they ride along.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

Nobody had ever spoken to me like that before. I was stunned. It was so clear. So right. Here, at last, was someone who understood what I'd been dreaming about all my life... magic!

Grimaldi turns back to Eric.

GRIMALDI

Tell me, of all the callings in life, why have you chosen that of prestidigitator?

ERIC

What?

GRIMALDI

Why do you want to become a magician? To be famous? To make money?

ERIC

I'd like to be rich and famous, who wouldn't? But that's not all, there's something more.

GRIMALDI

And what would that be?

ERIC

The look of amazement on the faces in the audience after you do a trick. When their eyes widen, and their jaws drop and they look at you as if you're something special.

GRIMALDI

I know it well. What performer doesn't? Money has only the slightest importance in the face of all that amazement. But there is one more thing you must learn as a member of this august company.

ERIC

What's that?

GRIMALDI

How to handle a team of horses.

Grimaldi hands Eric the reins. Eric is a little flustered.

GRIMALDI

Just keep them pointed in the direction of Abilene. I'm going to lie down. All this talk of magic has exhausted me.

Grimaldi climbs back into the wagon, leaving Eric alone. Eric does his best to handle the reins.

Calpernia comes forward. She has an apple in her hand.

CALPERNIA

I brought you something to eat.

ERIC

Oh, thank you. That's very nice of you.

Eric takes the apple. They ride along for awhile. Calpernia is looking around, enjoying the countryside.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

She sat beside me. There was a strange stirring in my stomach. I assumed it was love, although at that time in my life I had nothing to compare it to.

Eric is sneaking looks at her; he is uncomfortable, not knowing what to say. He takes a bite from the apple.

CALPERNIA

It's a beautiful day, isn't it?

Eric smiles and nods, his mouth full of apple.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

I wanted to speak, to dazzle her with a torrent of impressive thoughts, but found myself struck dumb in her presence. I'd never in my life felt so tongue-tied. And so I uttered the only thing that came to mind.

ERIC

This is a very good apple.

Calpernia looks at Eric and smiles, then back at the countryside.

Eric rolls his eyes and grimaces at his dumb comment.

(CONTINUED)

45 CONTINUED: (4)

45

HOUDINI (V.O.)

I wanted to throw myself under the hooves of the horses, I was so embarrassed. And yet, I took consolation in the thought that our relationship could only improve.

CLOSE ON Eric looking ahead, sneaking occasional glances at Calpernia.

A45 EXT. ABILENE - DAY

A45

The medicine wagon is on an Abilene street. A dozen citizens including an ELDERLY DEPUTY SHERIFF are gathered around as Grimaldi does his stuff. The Indian is standing next to him, dressed in his medicine man regalia, and looking fierce.

A farmer in bib overalls is leaving the stage to a round of applause.

GRIMALDI

I thank you, sir, I thank you.

Grimaldi steps backward through the curtain behind him. He turns and pokes his head through.

B45 INT. WAGON

B45

Grimaldi's head comes through. Eric and Calpernia are waiting.

GRIMALDI

Are you both ready?

Eric and Calpernia both nod.

GRIMALDI

And you remember the routine?

Eric steps forward, closer to Grimaldi.

ERIC

(whispering; awkwardly)  
Does she really have to kiss me?

GRIMALDI

(whispering)  
There's no other way to secretly pass you the lock pick.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

B45 CONTINUED:

B45

GRIMALDI (CONT'D)

And I'm certainly not going to do it. Now relax. I shall make your introduction.

Grimaldi disappears through the curtain.

GRIMALDI (O.S.)

Ladies and gentlemen, good citizens of Abilene. I beg you draw closer. What you are about to see will astound and mystify you...

CALPERNIA

Haven't you ever been kissed by a girl before?

ERIC

Oh sure. Lots of times. I'm just a little out of practice, that's all...

Calpernia smiles at Eric's awkwardness.

CALPERNIA

(knowingly)

Well, I'll be gentle.

C45 EXT. WAGON - DAY

C45

Grimaldi is finishing his introduction.

GRIMALDI

... my latest discovery... the world's premier escapist... Ladies and gentlemen, I give you, Eric the Magnificent...

Eric steps out of the curtain. Calpernia steps out behind him.

ERIC

(whispering)

It's Eric the Great.

GRIMALDI

(whispering)

You used to be "great," now you're "magnificent."

(to the crowd)

Eric will be ably assisted by the fair beauty, and my own granddaughter, Calpernia.

(CONTINUED)

C45 CONTINUED:

C45

A light SMATTERING OF APPLAUSE.

GRIMALDI

Please... save your applause for the end. Before you stands not merely a young boy, but rather a marvel of human engineering. There are no bonds, no chains, and no prison cells on this earth that can hold Eric the Magnificent. Would any among you have a pair of handcuffs by chance?

Grimaldi looks out into the crowd. He sees the Deputy standing among the onlookers.

GRIMALDI

Ah! I see a constable. You, deputy, will you honor us with your presence upon the stage.

The Deputy steps onto the stage.

GRIMALDI

(whispering to Eric)  
This'll be easy. Probably hasn't used his handcuffs in twenty years.

(to Deputy)

Would you, kind sir, as you would a felon, fasten your shackles upon this young man's wrists?

DEPUTY

Sure thing.

The Deputy puts his cuffs on Eric's outstretched hands.

GRIMALDI

And now, would you search him and make certain he has no unlocking devices on or about his person.

The Deputy searches Eric's pockets.

DEPUTY

Can I look in his mouth too?

GRIMALDI

You don't miss a trick, do you, sir?

Eric opens his mouth and the Deputy looks inside.

(CONTINUED)

C45 CONTINUED: (2)

C45

GRIMALDI

(to the crowd)

Ladies and gentlemen, you are most fortunate to have such a resourceful peace officer to protect you and your loved ones from criminals who would hide things in their mouths.

DEPUTY

(announcing)

Ain't got nothing on him!

GRIMALDI

Very good. Thank you, sir. Now Eric the Magnificent will turn around and in the twinkling of an eye be free himself from the deputy's iron shackles.

He turns away from the audience about to continue the escape. Calpernia moves towards him.

CALPERNIA

Good luck, Eric.

She kisses him.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

It was like brushing the lips of an angel. I was in ecstasy.

They separate. She smiles. Eric smiles, a little goofy.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

And then the incredible happened...

Eric gulps, bashfully. Then he realizes he's swallowed the lockpick. His eyes widen in shock. He looks back at Grimaldi. Grimaldi looks at him, questioningly.

GRIMALDI

(whispering)

What is it?

ERIC

(whispering)

I swallowed the lockpick.

Grimaldi's face registers horror.

(CONTINUED)

C45 CONTINUED: (3)

C45

GRIMALDI

(whispering)

Keep working. I'll think of something.

(to the crowd)

Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps I should inform you that Eric the Magnificent has recently recovered from a virulent case of... Rimsky-Korsokoff! A dread disease contracted while touring the Far East where as you know the Malagala serpent preys regularly upon small people...

ANGLE ON ERIC

With his back to the audience, Eric struggles to get out of the cuffs.

ERIC

(to himself)

I can't believe this is happening...

He looks over at the Indian. The Indian looks back and shrugs. Eric goes back to struggling with the handcuffs.

BACK TO GRIMALDI

GRIMALDI

... but it's nowhere near as deadly as the Walacanabe Bird... a single bite from which can paralyze a full-grown man for over 14 years... something I have witnessed with my own eyes... a terrible sight, I assure you...

ANGLE ON ERIC

He takes a deep breath, closes his eyes: it seems useless. Then, miraculously, without any effort, the handcuffs drop to the floor with a CLANG.

Eric looks over at the Indian and shrugs as if to say "I don't know how I did it!" The Indian nods approval.

Grimaldi stops when he hears the CLANG. He turns to see the handcuffs on the floor.

(CONTINUED)

C45 CONTINUED: (4)

C45

GRIMALDI

(beaming)

None of which is important of course... for Eric the Magnificent has liberated himself from the handcuffs despite his recent malady!

The Deputy picks up his handcuffs and looks at them: they're still locked!

DEPUTY

They're still locked! That's a pretty good trick!

GRIMALDI

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the world's greatest escape artist... Eric... the Magnificent.

Eric steps forward, holding his hands over his head to show he is free. The crowd APPLAUDS loudly. Calpernia smiles and applauds along with the others. Grimaldi joins Eric.

GRIMALDI

We thank you...

In synchronization, Eric and Grimaldi throw up their arms: long, brightly-colored streamers EXPLODE out of their hands into the air, and over the delighted crowd.

Grimaldi whispers to Eric through his smile.

GRIMALDI

How did you do that?

ERIC

(whispering)

I have no idea.

46 EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

46

ESTABLISHING SHOT: the wagons are pulled up beside a stream. A campfire is burning brightly.

47 EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

47

CLOSE ON: an envelope. It is addressed: "TO MR. THEO WEISS -- APPLETON, WISCONSIN." The envelope is turned over, and a hand puts two one dollar bills and a letter into it.

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED:

47

WIDE: Eric is sitting by the fire. He licks the flap and seals it.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

Although I missed my family desperately and kept up a regular correspondence, I was beginning to feel very much at home with the Grimaldi troupe.

He looks over at the household wagon and sees Calpernia walk up the steps and disappear inside.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

I'd already fallen completely in love with Calpernia...

Eric looks over to see Grimaldi nodding off to sleep in front of the fire.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

... and I felt as close to Dr. Grimaldi as I did to my own father...

Eric picks up Grimaldi's deck of cards and begins shuffling. He looks over to the edge of the camp.

HIS POV: John Parker is sitting on the backboard of the medicine wagon, smoking a cigar, and delicately putting the finishing touches on a wooden flute he's been carving. He blows it once to test it: it works.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

But John Parker was a different story. Him, I couldn't figure out. From the beginning I knew there was something strange about him. I was inexplicably drawn to him.

John Parker looks over at Eric.

Eric quickly busies himself shuffling the cards.

HOUDINI (V.O.)

And he knew it.

Grimaldi's head slumps forward and he wakes himself up with a start.

GRIMALDI

Well, well! Night has fallen! It's off to bed for the good doctor. We've got a long trip ahead of us.

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED: (2)

47

ERIC

Where are we going next?

GRIMALDI

We have a brief stop at a mining camp with the thoroughly charming name of Licksillet, and then on to the tiny community called Ellsworth.

ERIC

Tiny? Isn't there more money to be made in bigger towns like Topeka or Dodge City.

GRIMALDI

Very true, very true. But there is the small matter of a debt that must be settled in Ellsworth. Good night, Eric my boy.

Eric holds the deck of cards in an outstretched arm. He sights down his arm, squinting at the deck in his hand, concentrating hard. Then he carefully pulls the deck back along his arm.

ERIC

Good night, sir.

Grimaldi heads towards the household wagon.

Eric takes a deep breath, steadying himself; then he flicks his wrist. The first cards begin to turn over, like dominoes; then the rest of the cards fall from his arm, clattering softly to the ground. Eric grimaces, disappointed.

GRIMALDI

(without looking  
back)

Keep at it, my boy. You'll master it one day, I'm sure.

Grimaldi continues on toward the household wagon.

Eric smiles. He begins picking up the cards, reassembling the deck.

DISSOLVE TO:

48 EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

48

Eric is asleep. The fire is embers now. We hear the HAUNTING SOUND OF A FLUTE. Eric wakes up. He listens. The FLUTE SOUND comes again.

(CONTINUED)

48

CONTINUED:

48

Eric gets up and moves out of camp in the direction of the SOUND.

49

EXT. WOODED AREA - NIGHT

49

Eric makes his way through the brush. The SOUND is getting LOUDER.

Suddenly, the SOUND OF THE FLUTE STOPS.

50

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

50

In a clearing, he sees a campfire burning. There is no one there. Eric approaches.

(CONTINUED)

58 CONTINUED:

50

He sees the flute on the ground beside the fire. Next to it, on a y-shaped stick that's been propped up in the ground, he sees the Crystal Talisman that was around the Indian's neck.

Eric looks around.

ERIC

John?

No answer.

Eric reaches out for the crystal. Before he can take it, he hears a LOUD GROWL. He looks up in front of him to see:

A LARGE GRAY WOLF about 15 feet in front of him.

Eric begins slowly backing away as the WOLF continues to GROWL.

ERIC

Take it easy, wolf. I'm leaving.  
I'm leaving.

Eric turns to run but stops dead in his tracks.

HIS POV: a LARGE BROWN BEAR up on his hind legs about 20 feet away. It GROWLS.

ERIC

Oh boy.

He turns back to see if the wolf is still there. It is running towards him.

Suddenly, the Wolf leaps into the air straight at Eric (SLOW MOTION).

Eric immediately crouches and covers his head. A moment passes. Eric hears the wolf SNARLING VICIOUSLY and the bear GROWLING. He looks up to see:

The wolf is in front of the bear, lunging and GROWLING. The bear is swinging its paws. The wolf continues lunging, closer and closer. Finally, the bear drops down on all fours and scurries off into the darkness. The wolf gives a finally TRIUMPHANT GROWL and turns to Eric, who is still crouching on the ground.

They make eye contact. Eric isn't sure what the wolf is going to do. There is a moment between them, and then the wolf turns and disappears into the darkness.

(CONTINUED)

50 CONTINUED: (2)

50

Eric stands up, still shaken, breathing hard.

CLOSE ON: Eric trying to come to grips with what just happened.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

51 EXT. CAMPSITE - DAWN

51

Eric is asleep. He wakes up suddenly. He looks around and sees John Parker two feet away from him, making a new fire. The Crystal Talisman is hanging from his neck.

Parker looks at Eric, emotionless.

Eric stares back, then smiles.

ERIC

Good morning.

John Parker goes back to building the fire.

Grimaldi approaches.

GRIMALDI

Come on, Eric, time to get up!  
It's almost 6:30! We have a lot  
of work to do! I have a new trick  
to show you. It came to me in the  
night! Positively inspirational!

Eric scrambles to his feet.

GRIMALDI

But first nourishment! Go! Fetch  
some water, Eric! John, old  
fellow, let's get that breakfast  
started!

Eric grabs a pail off the household wagon and heads towards the river.

52 EXT. RIVER - DAY

52

Eric dips the pail into the water and fills it. He turns, about to go back to the camp, when he hears something. He stops and listens. Someone is CRYING.

He walks in the direction of the sound.

(CONTINUED)

52 CONTINUED:

52

Behind some bushes, he comes upon Calpernia, sitting on a rock, sobbing. She looks up.

Eric is a little awkward.

ERIC

I'm sorry.

Eric turns to leave.

CALPERNIA

Don't go.

Eric turns back.

Calpernia tries to smile.

CALPERNIA

You don't have to go.

ERIC

What's wrong, Calpernia? Is there anything I can do?

CALPERNIA

I don't think so. Unless you know a trick to get someone out of a marriage.

ERIC

What do you mean, a marriage? Whose marriage?

CALPERNIA

Mine, I'm afraid.

ERIC

You're getting married? When? To who?

CALPERNIA

To a young man in the town of Ellsworth.

ERIC

(disappointed)

Oh.

CALPERNIA

But I don't love him. I hardly even know him.

ERIC

You don't? Then why are you marrying him?

(CONTINUED)

52 CONTINUED: (2)

52

## CALPERNIA

A year ago, our wagons were destroyed in a fire while we were in Ellsworth. A man named Johnson offered to lend us the money to rebuild, but Grandfather didn't have anything to offer as collateral. The man's son had been trying to court me since we got to town... so I offered myself as collateral.

## ERIC

But... didn't Dr. Grimaldi object? \*

## CALPERNIA

Of course he did. He refused to even consider it, but I insisted. We needed the money, Eric. There was no other choice. Grandfather hoped to be able to repay the loan by the time we returned... but I fear he cannot. \*

CLOSE ON: Eric, as he thinks about what to do. \*

53 EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

53

Grimaldi is pacing back and forth in front of an ordinary-looking steamer trunk. The trunk is sitting on a small, raised platform, the bottom of which is covered with red, white and blue bunting. The trunk is bound with heavy leather straps and secured by three padlocks. \*

## GRIMALDI

I feel as badly about this as you, my boy. In fact, I have taken steps to rectify the situation. Over the year, I've managed to accumulate a sum which I hope Mr. Johnson, as a gentleman, will accept as a down payment.

Grimaldi glances at his pocket watch.

## ERIC

(muffled; from inside the trunk)

But what if he doesn't accept?

## GRIMALDI

We must continue to think positively of the situation, Eric.

(CONTINUED)

53 CONTINUED:

53

He leans down close to the trunk, raps on the lid with his walking stick.

GRIMALDI

Are you still in there, my boy?

54 INT. TRUNK - DAY

54

Eric is inside the trunk, prying at the bottom with his fingertips.

ERIC

The panel's stuck! I can't get it open.

55 EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

55

Grimaldi begins pacing back and forth in front of the trunk.

GRIMALDI

(thinking out loud)

I'm a reasonable man. Johnson is a reasonable man. We will be reasonable together.

Eric sticks his head out from under the drape at the bottom of the raise platform.

ERIC

But we don't have to go to Ellsworth. We could go somewhere else.

Grimaldi glances at his pocket watch.

GRIMALDI

A little slow, but not bad for your first time.

Eric scrambles out from under the platform and stands up.

ERIC

Dodge City, maybe. Or Coffeyville. Or Topeka! They'd never find us. We could go all the way to California.

Grimaldi leans down and opens the padlocks on the trunk.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

55

GRIMALDI

A fine idea, Eric. But they'd find us no matter where we went; we're not exactly travelling incognito.

\*

Grimaldi opens the lid and looks into the trunk.

GRIMALDI

Let's try it again, shall we? Only this time, kindly remember to shut the bottom panel after you leave.

ERIC

But she doesn't love him!

GRIMALDI

Eric, everything will be fine, believe me! I'm not exactly lacking in the powers of persuasion, now am I?

Eric thinks a moment, then nods his head in agreement.

ERIC

Yes, sir.

GRIMALDI

Good lad! Now what do you think of the trick?

ERIC

It's fine... but I think I know how to make it more exciting.

\*

HARD CUT TO:

56 EXT. CAMPSITE - ELSEWHERE - LATER

56

CLOSE ON: the trunk, suspended in mid-air from a tree branch. John Parker is holding the rope on the ground.

Grimaldi is looking up, smiling.

GRIMALDI

So far, so good.

CLOSE ON: the rope where it's attached to the trunk. It is beginning to fray and stretch.

Suddenly the rope breaks and the trunk hurtles to the ground and SMASHES into pieces.

(CONTINUED)

56 CONTINUED:

56

GRIMALDI  
(smiling)  
Excellent! Excellent!

Eric comes up beside Grimaldi.

ERIC  
How'd it look?

GRIMALDI  
Terrifying! Having the rope break  
is positively genius! You've  
taken a standard trick and turned  
it into something spectacular!

Grimaldi puts his arm around Eric's shoulder.

GRIMALDI  
Eric my boy, I think you've got a  
future in this business of ours.  
(to the Indian)  
John! You'd better get started on  
a new trunk! We'll debut this  
illusion at our very next stop!

57 EXT. MINING CAMP - DAY

57

WIDE: The side of a mountain. Suddenly, there are  
THREE LOUD EXPLOSIONS and the rock face of the moun-  
tain lifts into the air in a cloud of dust and a shower  
of rock and stone.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

PAN DOWN to find ten miners coming out from behind  
cover at the foot of the rock face, picking up their  
digging tools, and walking up toward the side of the  
blast. The cloud of dust settles down around them.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

CONTINUE PANNING DOWN to find the Lickskillet Mining  
Camp: tents, make-shift huts, a tent saloon and black-  
smith shop set on a narrow plain between the mountain  
and a steeply sloping drop-off.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

The Medicine wagon is pulled up near the edge of the  
camp. A group of fifteen miners is gathered around the  
stage.

\*  
\*  
\*

58 OMITTED

58

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59

59

pk

YOUNG HARRY HOUDINI - Rev. 12/12/86

63A.

60 EXT. STAGE - DAY

60

Grimaldi gestures over to the platform beside the wagon and near the edge of the drop: the trunk beneath a timber hoisting-frame. John Parker is standing next to it. \*

The MINERS turn towards the platform.

(CONTINUED)

GRIMALDI

Gentlemen, I present to you now, my newest discovery! An escape artist unparalleled in the history of magic. Please welcome "Eric, The Stupendous!"

The miners applaud and whoop as Eric steps up beside the trunk.

LARGE MINER

Hey! He's just a kid!

Grimaldi steps off the stage and moves towards Eric.

GRIMALDI

"A kid" you say? Young in years, perhaps, but ancient in experience! For no mere child could perform the feat you are about to witness! An escape he has brought all the way from his native... Bulgaria! Yes, from Bulgaria!

Eric screws up his face, amused.

GRIMALDI

I shall now converse with him in his native tongue! Noog vack igtoc sinsom, Eric?

ERIC

(whispering)

What?

GRIMALDI

(whispering)

Play along. It makes the trick more exotic.

Eric nods, catching on.

ERIC

Klarn!

GRIMALDI

Klarn. Yes, of course! Klarn!  
(turning to the audience)

He says "On with the trick!" If one of you gentlemen steps forward to examine the trunk, you will see that it is a sturdy enclosure.

(CONTINUED)

60 CONTINUED: (2)

The Large Miner steps forward.

LARGE MINER  
I'll do it.

The Miner picks up the trunk and lets it fall on the platform with a BANG.

LARGE MINER  
Seems okay to me.

The Large Miner laughs. So do the others.

LARGE MINER  
No one can get out of that!

GRIMALDI  
Ah, but you're wrong, good sir.  
Eric will escape in a flash!

LARGE MINER  
I got a 20 dollar gold piece says  
he can't!

A twinkle comes to Grimaldi's eye.

GRIMALDI  
A wagering man! Let me take this  
up with Eric!  
(to Eric)  
Iglatz glorbefaven?

ERIC  
(nodding)  
Flapgroden.

GRIMALDI  
He says "he accepts!" Prepare to  
be astounded, gentlemen!

Grimaldi opens the trunk and Eric climbs into it.  
Grimaldi is about to shut the trunk, but before he can,  
the Large Miner pushes him aside.

LARGE MINER  
You don't mind if I do that, do  
ya?

Grimaldi steps back. Eric is standing in the trunk,  
waiting to be locked inside.

GRIMALDI  
Why, of course. The padlocks are  
right there.

(CONTINUED)

60 CONTINUED: (3)

60

LARGE MINER

Don't need 'em.

(calling out)

Luke! Bring up that heavy chain!

Another miner steps up carrying a length of heavy-link chain. The other miners mutter enthusiastically.

GRIMALDI

What's this?

LARGE MINER

Just a little something to make sure this is on the square.

(to the others)

Coupla you fellers gimme a hand here.

Two more miners step up onto the platform.

Eric and Grimaldi exchange anxious glances.

LARGE MINER

'Okay, kid. Down ya go.

(gesturing)

Down! Down!

The Large Miner pushes Eric down into the trunk and slams the lid.

GRIMALDI

But sir, this is highly irregular...

The two miners shove Grimaldi back and lift the trunk off the platform. The Large Miner and the one called Luke begin wrapping the trunk with the heavy chain.

61 INT. TRUNK - DAY

61

We hear the SOUND OF CHAINS being wrapped around the trunk. Eric pries at the bottom of the trunk in a panic. But it won't open.

ERIC

Come on, come on, open.

62 EXT. UNDERSIDE OF TRUNK - DAY

62

CLOSE: the chain is cutting into the edge of the trunk, effectively jamming the panel shut.

EXT. PLATFORM - DAY

63

The Large Miner is padlocking the chain.

LARGE MINER

Alright, let's get some fellas on  
that rope and hoist it up!

Two miners grab the rope away from the Indian and begin  
pulling the trunk high into the air. \*

Calpernia hurries over beside Grimaldi.

CALPERNIA

Father, do something!! Quickly!

Grimaldi sees the trunk going higher and higher. He  
takes out a gold piece and steps forward, trying to  
maintain his calm.

GRIMALDI

You win, sir. Here is your  
money. I concede!

LARGE MINER

(shaking his head)

A bet's a bet. I wanna see if the  
kid can do it!

GRIMALDI

I urge you to reconsider, sir!

Grimaldi looks up and sees the trunk, now swinging out  
over the pit.

CALPERNIA

Stop! Put it down! Please! The  
rope won't hold him.

GRIMALDI

It's set to break! I insist you  
put it down this instant!

64 INT. TRUNK - DAY

64

Eric is inside the swinging trunk, bracing himself.

ERIC

I can't believe this is  
happening... I can't believe this  
is happening...

65 EXT. TRUNK - DAY

65

CLOSE ON: the rope, where it is tied to the trunk.  
The prepared area begins to fray.

66 EXT. PLATFORM - DAY

66

GRIMALDI

Gentlemen! Please! I'll give you  
a hundred dollars cash! Just let  
the trunk down now!

The Large Miner shouts up at the trunk.

LARGE MINER

Alright, kid, do your stuff!

(to Grimaldi)

How do you say "Are you out yet?"  
in that Bulgaria talk?

Grimaldi turns away, shaking his head helplessly.

66A INT. TRUNK - DAY

66A

Eric has his eyes closed tightly. The trunk slips a  
little.

ERIC

I can't believe this is  
happening...

67 EXT. TRUNK - DAY

67

CLOSE ON: the rope. It continues fraying, then SNAPS.

WIDE: The trunk plummets to the ground (SLOW MOTION).

68 EXT. PLATFORM - DAY

68

Calpernia screams. (SLO-MO)

Grimaldi gasps and then closes his eyes, painfully.  
(SLO-MO)

The miners watch, open-mouthed. (SLO-MO)

John Parker moves forward, staring in disbelief. (SLO-  
MO)

SLOW MOTION: The trunk slams into the ground hard. It  
bounces once, teeters for a moment on the edge of the  
precipice, then topples over and disappears down into  
it. \*

The miners rush forward to the edge of the pit.  
Several start to climb down the slope.

69 EXT. OPEN-PIT MINE - DAY

69

The trunk CRASHES end over end down the steep, rocky slope toward the bottom of the pit, SPLINTERING to pieces.

70 EXT. PLATFORM - DAY

70

Calpernia buries her head in Grimaldi's shoulder, sobbing.

Parker comes up behind Grimaldi and Calpernia. Suddenly, he sees something O.S.

Grimaldi is shaking his head, distraught.

GRIMALDI

This is all my fault. I should have never let him talk me into this.

He turns to Parker. He stops and follows the Indian's gaze. Grimaldi's eyes begin to widen in disbelief.

GRIMALDI

God in Heaven...

Calpernia looks up and gasps.

THEIR POV: Eric is standing on the stage of the Medicine Wagon. He looks puzzled. He is shaking his head, confused.

The Large Miner sees Eric.

LARGE MINER

(to the others)

Look! Lookit there! He done it! The kid done it!

The other miners cheer and start toward Eric.

The Large Miner takes his twenty dollar gold piece and claps it into Grimaldi's hand.

LARGE MINER

Here ya go, fair and square!  
Brother, that's the dangedest  
trick I ever seen!

The Large Miner joins the others, surging toward the stage.

(CONTINUED).

70 CONTINUED:

70

GRIMALDI

(to himself)

Trick? Brother, it's a miracle.

The miners lift Eric onto their shoulders and begin carrying him around the camp, cheering and laughing. Eric is beaming, though he still looks a little confused.

CLOSE ON: John Parker, as he begins to smile. He reaches down and begins rubbing the Crystal Talisman which is hanging around his neck.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

71  
thru  
74

OMITTED

71  
thru  
74

75 EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

75

The wagons are drawn up for the night in a clearing. The campfire is burning low.

Grimaldi is making an entry in his journal.

Calpernia is sewing a dress.

Eric is next to her, reading a book: "The Memoirs of Jean Eugene Robert-Houdin, King of Conjurers."

Parker is sitting across from them, repairing a harness.

ERIC

This Mr. Robert-Houdin says that what happens on stage isn't as important as what the audience thinks happened on stage.

GRIMALDI

(smiling)

A clever chap, Robert-Houdin! I have often said the very same thing myself.

ERIC

What do you think happened today, Dr. Grimaldi? How do you suppose I got out of that trunk?

(CONTINUED)

GRIMALDI

You mean you don't know?

ERIC

(shaking his head)

I remember feeling it begin to fall, and I shut my eyes tight and waited for it to hit the ground. The next thing I knew I was standing onstage.

GRIMALDI

Hmmm. I have heard that in situations charged with great jeopardy, ordinary persons can become somehow capable of amazing and later quite unexplainable feats of strength and agility.

CALPERNIA

Perhaps there was not enough oxygen in the trunk. This caused you to lose consciousness temporarily. And that's why you can't remember how you escaped.

Calpernia smiles; Eric nods thoughtfully.

ERIC

That could be it, alright. I lost consciousness.

Eric nods thoughtfully again.

GRIMALDI

(satisfied)

Well, there you are. Another mystery solved through the application of scientific deduction! I'm for bed.

Grimaldi stands and stretches. He starts toward the wagons.

GRIMALDI

A good night to one and all.

He leaves.

Calpernia and Eric are left alone for an awkward moment. They don't really know what to say to one another.

(CONTINUED)

CALPERNIA

I'm very glad you weren't hurt,  
Eric.

ERIC

Thanks... so am I.

CALPERNIA

Well... good night.

She kisses him on the cheek.

ERIC

Good night.

Eric watches Calpernia go into the Household Wagon.  
Then he returns to his book.

ERIC

(thinking aloud)  
Maybe they're right. I guess maybe  
I did pass out or something.

PARKER

That's not what happened at all.

Eric starts to reply:

ERIC

But how else could I have...

He stops suddenly. He turns and looks at Parker, his  
eyes widening.

ERIC

Excuse me... but did you say  
something?

Parker nods.

Eric sits bolt upright.

ERIC

You can speak! Say something  
else.

PARKER

What did you have in mind?

ERIC

You can speak! But... but, how?

(CONTINUED)

PARKER

(shrugging)

Same way as everybody does. No magic trick about it.

ERIC

Then why haven't you spoken before this?

PARKER

Didn't have anythin' important to say... until now.

ERIC

Do Calpernia and Dr. Grimaldi know about this?

PARKER

(shaking his head)

No. This has to be our secret. Just between you and me. Promise you won't tell. Or I won't tell you how ya got outa that trunk.

ERIC

(excitedly)

You know! How? How?

PARKER

First... promise.

ERIC

I promise, not a word. Now how'd I do it, John? How'd I get out?

John looks at Eric a moment, frowning. He shakes his head.

PARKER

Maybe I shouldn't.

Quickly, he gets up and walks over to the Medicine Wagon. He tosses the harness he was repairing onto the tailboard.

Eric hurries over beside him.

ERIC

Yes you should, John.

PARKER

(shaking his head)

I don't think you're ready to know. You're very young.

(CONTINUED)

ERIC

No, I'm not. I'm almost thirteen.  
Why, I'm practically a man!

The Indian looks at Eric a moment, thinking. Then, somewhat reluctantly, he nods his head.

PARKER

I suppose you are.

Eric beams. He sits up on the tailboard of the wagon, ready to listen. Parker leans back and takes out a cigar.

PARKER

Long before the white man came to this land, there was only the Indian. He found himself all alone with the wolf and the bear and the panther...

ERIC

The wolf and the bear? Say, was that...

PARKER

This isn't a long story, boy, but it requires tellin' straight through.

ERIC

Sorry.

Parker suddenly reaches out and "grabs" fire out of thin air and touches it to the end of his cigar. Eric's eyes widen.

PARKER

The Indian found that wherever he went, he was confronted by an enemy. He could not hunt or trap or fish or travel without fear. So he asked the Great Spirit for help.

Just as suddenly, Parker "throws" the fire away again.

Eric's eyes widen further.

PARKER

"You have given us much, Father," the Indian said to the great spirit, "but we cannot fish like the bear or hunt like the panther. Give us something so that we might survive among our enemies."

75 CONTINUED: (5)

75

ERIC

Magic?

PARKER

(overriding)

Not magic... the Power!

ERIC

(awestruck)

The Power.

PARKER

The Great Spirit considered this request, then decided that this was too awesome a thing to give ordinary human beings. "I will choose one among you," the Great Spirit said, "and I will teach it to him. He will be very special." So the Indian waited for the chosen one to be made known to them, but nothing happened. They decided that perhaps the Great Spirit had changed his mind, and that they were gonna live forever in ignorance and fear. Then one day, a young brave named Walking Dog found himself stranded on a precipice, face to face with a hungry panther. Walking Dog knew that he was about to die. He shut his eyes tight, calling out to the Great Spirit. And when the panther leaped, Walking Dog vanished. The panther sailed over the precipice to his own death. Moments later, Walking Dog reappeared.

ERIC

(awestruck)

Really? That really happened?

PARKER

(nodding)

The miracle was witnessed by Walking Dog's own father, War Cloud, who was the Medicine Man of the tribe. And that is how the chosen one became known to the Indian. That has been the way ever since. A chosen one is made known and he is given the chance to learn how to use the Power.

(CONTINUED)

ERIC

Gosh! Is that what happened to me, do you think? Did I vanish out of that trunk? Am I one of the chosen ones?

PARKER

(nodding)

I'm afraid so.

ERIC

(getting excited)

Does this mean I get the Power?

PARKER

You have it already. But you don't know how to use it.

ERIC

How can I learn to use it?

PARKER

To learn how to use the power, you must become a man of wisdom. You need a teacher. Someone who already has the Power. You must learn from a chosen one.

ERIC

John, are you a chosen one?

Parker doesn't answer. He picks up a bedroll from the wagon and unfolds it on the ground by the fire.

ERIC

John? Can you teach me how to use the Power? You said yourself I'm a chosen one! Aren't you supposed to teach me?

Eric hops down from the tailboard and goes over beside him.

PARKER

You may not be ready. You may be unworthy. And then the Great Spirit will blame me for wastin' a lot of his time.

ERIC

But I am ready, John! I know it!

PARKER

I may not be allowed to teach to a white man.

(CONTINUED)

75 CONTINUED: (7)

75

Parker stretches out on his bedroll and pulls a blanket up around his chin.

ERIC

Could you ask the Great Spirit about it? Maybe he'll make an exception in this case.

PARKER

You don't ask the Great Spirit anything. You wait for him to tell you. I'm gonna need a sign.

ERIC

What kind of sign?

Parker rolls over and closes his eyes.

PARKER

I won't know 'til I see it.

Eric is about to pursue this further, but he sees it's no use. He sits down beside the Indian. He thinks a moment, then he begins to smile. His eyes light up.

ERIC

(softly)

The Power.

DISSOLVE THROUGH TO:

76 OMITTED

76

77 EXT. MAIN STREET - ELLSWORTH - DAY

77

ESTABLISH street. PAN to find:

Grimaldi's wagons are drawn up in an alley.

A small crowd of 12 people is gathered at the foot of the stage:

Grimaldi is in the middle of his act. He opens the cabinet to reveal it is empty.

GRIMALDI

... this is no ordinary cabinet, ladies and gentlemen. This is a cabinet of death! A hellish trap of doom! Whose gaping jaws await only a tender morsel!

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED:

He steps back and parts the curtain to reveal Calpernia, leading her onstage.

GRIMALDI

A dear, sweet ingenuous child!  
 Mine own granddaughter...  
 (he notices  
 something)  
 ... Cal... pernia...

HIS POV: Five horsemen are lined up at the back of the crowd. The horsement start forward, parting the crowd as they do.

CALPERNIA

Who is it, Grandfather?

GRIMALDI

I'm afraid it's the Johnson clan,  
 my dearest.

The horsemen reach the foot of the stage. The eldest rider is ELMORE JOHNSON, in his 50's, father of the clan; the youngest is WESLEY, 19, the son promised to Calpernia.

ELMORE

Grimaldi, we've come for the girl.  
 Unless, by any chance, you have  
 the money you owe me.

GRIMALDI

Yes, well, I've managed to  
 accumulate a portion of the sum...  
 approximately 50 percent...

Wesley steps off his horse onto the stage.

WESLEY

He ain't got it, Pa! The gal's  
 mine!

Grimaldi steps forward.

GRIMALDI

Mr. Johnson, I beseech you, as a  
 reasonable man...

ELMORE

A bargain's a bargain, Grimaldi.  
 The deal was for all the money.

He whoops and grabs Calpernia around the waist, hugging her tight.

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED: (2)

77

WESLEY

She's real pretty, ain't she,  
boys?

The other Johnsons laugh, nod in agreement.

CALPERNIA

Get your hands off me!

GRIMALDI

Young man, unhand my daughter.

WESLEY

She may be your daughter, Doc, but  
she belongs to me now. Where's  
that preacher? Boys! Go fetch  
that preacher back here!

GRIMALDI

Sir! I demand that you...

Wesley shoves Grimaldi back a step and begins nuzzling  
on Calpernia's neck. She writhes and twists, trying to  
break free.

CALPERNIA

Let me go! Let me go!

Wesley only laughs, as his brothers shout encourage-  
ment.

ERIC (O.S.)

You heard the lady. Let her go.

Wesley looks around to see Eric standing behind him.

WESLEY

(laughing)  
And who are you, little fella?

ERIC

(grandly)  
I... am Eric the Great.

WESLEY

(laughing)  
Oh yeah? What makes you so great?

ERIC

This!

Eric throws his arms out in front of him. Suddenly,  
the brightly-colored streamers EXPLODE out of his  
sleeves, hitting Wesley.

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED: (3)

77

The streamers momentarily startle Wesley, who backs up and tumbles off the stage, landing on the ground with a thud.

Eric moves to the edge of the stage, defiantly.

Grimaldi takes Calpernia in his arms, protectively.

WESLEY

That's pretty good, kid. Now let me show you a trick.

Wesley gets to his feet and reaches for his gun.

ELMORE

Wes! Leave that be! No killin'!

Wesley looks at his father, then back at Eric. Grudgingly, he lets his gun fall back into his holster.

ERIC

Now, I think you better go. Before there's any more trouble here. \*

Wesley steps over to his horse. Suddenly, he grabs a bullwhip from the saddle horn and whirls around, smiling malevolently.

WESLEY

Too late, kid, you already got trouble.

Parker is staring very intensely at Wesley. Wesley draws the whip all the way back and then brings it forward sharply. But something's changed. He looks at his hand and the whip has become a stick!

Eric looks back at Parker.

Parker shrugs.

Eric smiles knowingly.

Wesley looks at the stick, bug-eyed. Suddenly, the stick changes into a rattlesnake! Wesley screams and drops the snake. He draws his pistol and FIRES it THREE TIMES into the snake.

Eric looks back at Parker and beams.

ELMORE

Wes! Put that away! Now!

WESLEY

But, Paw, it was a rattler!

77 CONTINUED: (4)

77

MARSHAL

Alright! Alright!. What's goin'  
on here?

The crowd parts the TOWN MARSHAL steps in.

MARSHAL

What's the ruckus here? Who's  
doing all that shooting? Wes,  
holster that sidearm!

WESLEY

(holstering his gun)  
This kid started it, Marshal. He  
attacked me for no reason! Then  
he... he... threw a rattlesnake at  
me.

MARSHAL

Rattlesnake?

WESLEY

(nodding)  
But I drilled it. Right over  
there.

The Marshal looks, then reaches down and picks some-  
thing up.

MARSHAL

You talkin' about this?

CLOSE ON: the bullwhip, riddled with holes.

Wesley looks round, frantically.

WESLEY

I tell ya, Marshal, there was a  
snake!

ELMORE

C'mon, Wes. Let's go. Mount up.

Wesley takes a last look around for the snake, then  
grabs the bullwhip from the Marshal and mounts his  
horse. He looks down at Eric.

WESLEY

This ain't over yet!  
(to Calpernia)  
You're still promised to me, girl!  
I'll be back!

The Johnsons ride out.

(CONTINUED)

77 CONTINUED: (5)

MARSHAL

Alright, folks, let's break this up. C'mon now, everybody go on back about your business.

The Crowd begins to move off.

The Marshal turns to Grimaldi and the others.

MARSHAL

You too, peddler.

Grimaldi sighs and shakes his head, sadly.

GRIMALDI

Alright, children, you heard the officer.

78 EXT. MEDICINE WAGON - LATER

78

Eric and Parker are taking the stage apart. We hear Grimaldi and Calpernia in the Household Wagon.

ERIC

That was pretty good. Best trick I ever saw.

PARKER

That wasn't a trick. That was the Power. There's a big difference, boy. Remember that always.

ERIC

But, say, if you can do things like that, how come you work in a medicine show?

PARKER

I like to eat. I like good cigars.

ERIC

The Great Merlin himself earns two thousand dollars a year! And he hasn't got half the stuff you've got!

PARKER

(shaking his head)  
It's best to keep the Power hidden and use it wisely. And if someone ever suspects you have the Power, deny it.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

78 CONTINUED:

78

PARKER (CONT'D)

Deny it until they believe you.  
Remember that always, too. That's,  
your second lesson.

Eric nods; then suddenly, he begins to realize that  
Parker is teaching him!

ERIC

(excitedly)

You're teaching me! You got the  
sign! You got the sign, didn't  
you?

PARKER

You stood up to those men, knowin'  
they might kill you. That took  
"courage." Courage is the first  
of human qualities because it  
guarantees all the others. I knew  
then that you were worthy.

ERIC

I told you I was!

- (gleefully)

Oh, boy! Just let those Johnsons  
try something now...

PARKER

No!

Eric stops.

PARKER

You have a lot to learn. For one  
thing, you must never use the  
Power for revenge! Otherwise, it  
will be taken from you.

Eric thinks for a moment, then he nods his head.

ERIC

Alright. I promise I won't use  
the power for revenge. Now, when  
do we start?

PARKER

At first light...

Eric yelps joyously and skips around the lot.

Parker watches him, then he sighs and shakes his head.

PARKER

(to himself)

~~Sometimes I think the Great Spirit~~  
is losin' his senses.

FADE IN:

79 EXT. ELLSWORTH, KANSAS - DAWN 79

CLOSE ON: the corner of a building. Eric peeks slowly around it to see the deserted main street of Ellsworth.

WIDE: Eric hurries around the corner and down the street.

80 EXT. PRAIRIE - DAWN 80

Eric is taking measured steps and counting aloud.

ERIC

.. four thousand nine hundred and  
ninety-eight... four thousand nine  
hundred and ninety-nine... five  
thousand!

\*  
\*  
\*

He takes his final step and looks up. He is standing in the middle of nowhere. He looks around. He is alone.

ERIC

I'm sure this is the place.

PARKER (O.S.)

This is the place alright.

Eric wheels around to see Parker standing behind him.

ERIC

Where'd you come from?

PARKER

I was here all the time. You just didn't see me.

ERIC

Will you teach me how to do that?  
Appear out of nowhere.

PARKER

Later.

ERIC

But I want to learn now.

PARKER

A man of wisdom is a man of  
patience. Now, we have a long way to  
travel and we'd better get started.

ERIC

(looking around)  
Where are we going?

80 CONTINUED:

80

PARKER

To the mountains. Over there.

Parker points to the pan-flat western horizon.

Eric looks at the horizon, then back at the Indian.

ERIC

There aren't any mountains over there, John.

PARKER

Close your eyes.

Eric closes his eyes.

PARKER

Now do you see the mountains?

ERIC

How can I...

PARKER

(interrupting)

A man of wisdom can see, even with his eyes shut. Now concentrate, boy. You have certain powers already. Use 'em. Clear your mind and concentrate!

Eric shrugs; then he takes a deep breath and squeezes his eyes tighter, concentrating. \*

PARKER

Now do you see 'em.

A80 ERIC'S POV: DARKNESS

A80 \*

Suddenly, the westerly horizon FADES IN.

ERIC (O.S.)

(excited)

I think I can see the horizon! \*

PARKER (O.S.)

A man of wisdom must be able to see beyond the horizon.

B80 Eric opens his eyes and looks over at Parker.

B80

ERIC

I'm trying, John.

(CONTINUED)

E80 CONTINUED:

B80

PARKER

(sighing)

I knew this was gonna be a waste  
of time. I'm leavin'.

ERIC

Wait! No! I can do it, John! I  
can!

Eric shuts his eyes, squeezing them tight, concen-  
trating as hard as he can.

C80 ERIC'S POV: DARKNESS. Then, the westerly horizon C80  
FADES IN. Suddenly, the POV begins to RISE HIGHER and  
HIGHER and HIGHER as if in a HELICOPTER.

ERIC (O.S.)

(excited)

It's working! It's really  
working!

MOTION SPEEDS UP as POV CONTINUES TO RISE to a very  
high altitude. The mountains rise INTO VIEW in the  
distance.

ERIC (O.S.)

John! The mountains! I can see  
them! This is wonderful!

(beat)

John?

We hear the SOUND OF THE WIND, WHISTLING AND HOWLING.

ERIC (O.S.)

(panicky)

John?!

D80 ERIC'S POV: as it SWINGS WILDLY to reveal nothing D80  
and the atmosphere, the clouds and the sky. It TILTS  
DOWN to reveal: the earth, miles below his feet.

ERIC (O.S.)

Oh my God!

Suddenly, the POV begins a RAPID, SPINNING DESCENT,  
totally out of control.

ERIC (O.S.)

John! Help me!

Nothing, but the WIND HOWLING, as the POV CONTINUES ITS  
DESCENT.

(CONTINUED)

D80 CONTINUED:

D80

ERIC (O.S.)

John! Please!

Suddenly, from close by:

PARKER (O.S.)

(reassuring)

Concentrate. Trust your  
imagination. You're not  
falling. You are not falling.

POV CONTINUES ITS SPINNING DESCENT.

PARKER (O.S.)

(impatient)

Why don't you ever listen to me,  
boy? Don't you wanna learn  
anythin'?

ERIC (O.S.)

I'm trying!

POV CONTINUES ITS DESCENT; the earth is coming up fast to meet it.

PARKER (O.S.)

I don't believe your heart is in  
this.

ERIC (O.S.)

(desperate)

Yes! Yes, it is! I'm not  
falling! I'm not falling!

POV CONTINUES ITS DESCENT; the ground is rising up, closer and closer and closer.

ERIC (O.S.)

I'm not falling!

POV -- DESCENT: Suddenly, we PULL OUT of the descent and LEVEL OUT fifty feet above the ground. POV becomes a BIRD'S EYE VIEW, racing across the countryside, following the contour of the land, on toward the horizon.

ERIC (O.S.)

(joyous)

John! I'm flying! I'm flying!  
This is the greatest trick ever!

(CONTINUED)

D80 CONTINUED: (2)

D80

PARKER (O.S.)  
 (nonchalant)  
 The Indians have been doin' it for  
 centuries.

BIRD'S EYE POV: the ground beneath becomes a blur.  
 The mountains are coming closer and closer.

ERIC (O.S.)  
 I feel so free! So powerful!  
 Like I can do anything!

PARKER (O.S.)  
 Imagination is the greatest power  
 a man of wisdom can possess, Eric.

BIRD'S EYE POV: racing between the snow-capped peaks  
 toward a thick cloud bank.

ERIC (O.S.)  
 (nervously)  
 Imagination! You mean, this...  
 isn't real?

CUT TO:

81 EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

81

Eric and Parker are still standing on the hillock.  
 Eric has his eyes closed tight.

PARKER  
 If you believe it's real, Eric,  
 then it's real.

Eric pauses a moment to think, then he begins to smile.

ERIC  
 I believe it.

CUT TO:

82 EXT. BIRD'S EYE POV - DAY

82

The POV DIVES straight into the cloud bank and the  
 SCREEN TURNS WHITE.

CUT TO:

83 EXT. CLOUDS - DAY

83

A rolling bank of clouds. The WIND HOWLS.

(CONTINUED)

53 CONTINUED:

83

Suddenly, Eric and the Indian step out of the cloud bank. Mist swirls up around their knees.

Eric looks around, amazed.

ERIC

Where are we?

PARKER

Where would you like us to be?

ERIC

Huh?

PARKER

We can be anywhere you choose.  
Where would you like us to be?

ERIC

(looking around)

I wouldn't mind someplace a little more familiar.

Suddenly, the WIND COMES UP, rising to hurricane force.

CLOSE ON: Eric, as he braces himself against the wind, closing his eyes and turning his head away. The WIND CONTINUES TO ROAR; CLOUDS SWEEP PAST.

ERIC

John! What's happening?!

The WIND REACHES A HOWLING CRESCENDO, then BEGINS TO DIE DOWN. The CLOUDS ARE BLOWN AWAY to reveal::

A83 WIDE: Eric and the Indian are standing on the main street of Ellsworth. The street is busy with traffic. A83

Eric takes a step back from the scene, startled.

ERIC

How'd we get back here?

PARKER

Don't ask me, you did it.

ERIC

I did?

(proudly)

Gosh, I'm getting good at this!

PARKER

You still have a great deal to learn, boy. First, I must teach you how to see.

(CONTINUED)

A83 CONTINUED:

A83

ERIC

I thought you already taught me  
how to see.

PARKER

I taught you how to see with your  
mind. Now I'll teach you how to  
see with your eyes.

ERIC

I can see with my eyes already.

PARKER

You look, but you don't see. I'll  
show you. Take a look around.

Eric surveys the scene in front of him: the main street of Ellsworth. People crossing back and forth; in and out of stores; the bank, the drug store, the carpentry, the library, the newspaper, dry goods store, clothing store, etc. Horses tethered to hitching posts. Buckboards parked in front of the livery.

PARKER

Do ya see it? Do ya see it all?

ERIC

I think so.

Parker snaps his fingers and the entire "town" scene behind them DISAPPEARS TO BLACK.

PARKER

Then show it to me.

ERIC

What do you mean?

PARKER

Show it to me. You have the  
power. Go ahead. Show me what  
you saw.

Eric looks at the black "palette" in front of them, thinking. He shrugs and snaps his fingers.

The STREET SCENE comes back. But there is no color, no people and no horse. Things have outlines, but some of the detail is missing. It seems flat, lifeless.

PARKER

That's all you saw?

Eric looks at the scene again.

(CONTINUED)

A83 CONTINUED: (2)

A83

ERIC

(embarrassed)

Uh... I guess I forgot the color.

Eric snaps his fingers and the COLOR FADES INTO THE STREET SCENE. But it's all wrong; various colors are out of place.

PARKER

(shaking his head)

That doesn't look right to me at all. I think you should try again.

Eric looks at Parker, then back at the scene. He frowns, thinking. Then he snaps his fingers. The right colors fade in.

ERIC

(beaming)

There. How's that?

Parker nods.

PARKER

But what about the people? And the horses?

ERIC

Oh yeah. I forgot about them.

PARKER

And the grass, and the sky, and the trees... and what about the details?

ERIC

Details?

PARKER

You're still looking, Eric, not seeing. Life is going on all around you. Notice it, savor it. Be a part of it. You can't use the Power until you can see. Now show me what you saw.

Eric looks at the scene with new determination. He closes his eyes, concentrating. Then, he opens them again.

ERIC

How about this?

Eric snaps his fingers.

A83 CONTINUED: (3)

A83

The SCENE FADES BACK IN to its former, full glory, details and all: now full of life.

Parker smiles and puts his arm around Eric. They begin walking down the street; through the scene they've been using as an example.

PARKER

Now you are beginning to see.

As they walk away, THICK CLOUDS OF MIST begin to roll in behind them, slowly obscuring the scene.

ERIC

I'm doing pretty good, huh?

PARKER

Not too bad for one so young and inexperienced.

Eric and the Indian are swallowed up in the SOLID WHITENESS of the mist.

PARKER (O.S.)

But you still have the most important lesson yet to learn.

ERIC (O.S.)

What's that?

B83 EXT. BARREN WASTELAND - DAY

B83

Eric and the Indian step out of the mist. Parker still has his arm over Eric's shoulder.

PARKER

How to choose the right path.

ERIC

(puzzled)

The right path?

The WIND comes up and stirs the mist, exposing black and jagged fingers of rock, bare and twisted trees.

PARKER

A man of wisdom knows what he wants and how to get it. He knows how to choose the right path.

ERIC

I don't understand.

PARKER

You want to be the greatest magician in the world, don't you?

ERIC

Yes...

PARKER

You want to be a rich and famous man, don't you?

ERIC

Well...

PARKER

Then use the Power to get what you want. Right now. Just snap your fingers and everything you want can be yours. That's the easy way.

ERIC

(wide-eyed)

Really!

VOICE

(behind him)

Don't listen to him, Eric.

Startled, Eric turns to see: Another John Parker standing behind him. Eric gasps in disbelief. He turns back to see: the first John Parker. Both images of Parker are identical.

PARKER #2

He's givin' you bad advice. A man of wisdom is patient and determined. He knows the easy path is not always the best way.

PARKER #1

(shaking his head)

No, Eric. Don't be fooled. This one is lyin' to you. He's teachin' you to become weak.

PARKER #2

Eric, a man of wisdom gives to the world as much as he takes.

PARKER #1

You have the power to be better than all the others! Stronger! Richer!

Eric looks quickly from one to the other, then back again, clearly confused.

(CONTINUED)

383 CONTINUED: (2)

383

ERIC

Who do I listen to? Which of you  
is telling me the truth? Which of  
you is... you?

PARKER #1

It's me, Eric.

Parker #1 slips the Crystal Talisman from around his  
neck and holds it out for Eric to take.

PARKER #1

(smiling)

Here. You've learned the final  
lesson. This is yours. The power  
belongs to you now.

Eric looks at the crystal a long moment, considering;  
then he looks at Parker #2.

ERIC

Don't you have anything to say?

PARKER #2

(shakes his head)

I'll only say this: don't listen  
to either of us, Eric. Listen  
only to your heart.

PARKER #1

(holding out the  
crystal)

Take the crystal, Eric. Everything  
you want can be yours.

Eric thinks a moment. He looks at the crystal again.  
It begins to GLOW, PULSATE. He reaches out, about to  
take it.

ERIC

No, I don't think so.

Instead, he snaps his fingers.

HARD CUT TO:

84 EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

84

CLOSE ON: Eric, his arm still outstretched. He looks  
around to see:

WIDE: He is standing on the small hillock in the  
middle of the prairie where he started. Both images of  
the Indian have vanished; he is all alone.

(CONTINUED)

84 CONTINUED:

84

He looks around quickly, startled.

ERIC

John? John?

All we hear is the WIND BLOWING.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

85 EXT. ELLSWORTH - VACANT LOT - DAY

85

Grimaldi and Calpernia are sitting on the back step of the household wagon. Calpernia is sobbing into her father's arms.

GRIMALDI

There, there, my child. Don't cry. Everything seems darkest before the dawn.

Grimaldi sees Eric approaching, looking tired from his long walk.

GRIMALDI

Look, here comes young Eric.

Calpernia straightens up and wipes away her tears.

ERIC

What's wrong? What's happened?

GRIMALDI

The Johnsons have sent word that they are coming for Calpernia. This time they're bringing a preacher.

Eric goes over and begins to unhook one of the horses from the medicine wagon.

GRIMALDI

Where are you going?

ERIC

To stop them.

CALPERNIA

It's no use, Eric. There's too many of them. You can't do anything! It's too dangerous!

(CONTINUED)

85 CONTINUED:

85

ERIC

I'll be fine. Don't worry about me.

He jumps on the horse. He's about to leave, then stops.

ERIC

Oh, by the way, do you know where John Parker is?

GRIMALDI

No. We haven't seen him all day.

ERIC

Well, when he comes back... don't tell him where I've gone.

Eric gallops away.

86 EXT. JOHNSON RANCH - DAY

86

In the DISTANCE: a large ranch house surrounded by acres of grazing land.

Eric rides INTO FRAME and dismounts. He tethers his horse to the corral fence.

ERIC

(yelling)

Johnsons! Johnsons!

PARKER

What were you plannin' to do?

Eric turns to see: John Parker sitting on the corral fence.

Eric looks down, sheepishly, as if he were caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

ERIC

(smiling sheepishly)

Oh, hi, John. What are you doing here?

87 EXT. PORCH - DAY

87

Wesley Johnson, his Father and Three Brothers, come out of the house. They look across the yard.

WESLEY

Who's that?

87 CONTINUED:

87

BROTHER #1

Looks like that kid from the side-show, Wes. The one that made a fool out of ya in town.

Wesley's face turns hard.

WESLEY

He made a big mistake comin' out here. He's on our land now. This time I'm gonna teach him a real lesson.

He looks over at his father. The old man nods.

88 ANGLE ON ERIC AND JOHN

88

as Parker climbs down from the fence and walks over beside Eric.

PARKER

I had a feeling you'd come out here today.

ERIC

Somebody's gotta stop them, John. That Wesley Johnson's got no right to take Calpernia's hand, debt or no debt!

PARKER

You can't use the power for revenge.

Eric looks back and sees the Johnsons mounting their horses.

ERIC

I wasn't going to use it against them, John! Honest! I was just going to try to reason with them. I would only use the power to defend myself. That would be okay, wouldn't it?

Parker considers a moment.

PARKER

Self-defense, huh? What did you have in mind?

Behind them, we can see Wesley and the others riding toward Eric and John.

(CONTINUED)

88 CONTINUED:

88

ERIC

Well, for example, I thought it would be okay if I did this.

Eric snaps his fingers.

89 ANGLE ON TWO OF THE RIDERS

89

as they are jerked suddenly off their horses. The two riders fall heavily to the ground.

90 ANGLE ON ERIC AND JOHN

90

as Parker shakes his head, firmly.

PARKER

No, you couldn't do that.

ERIC

Oh.

Behind them, we can see the three other riders almost on top of them now.

ERIC

Well, could I do this!

Eric snaps his fingers. He and Parker DISAPPEAR just as the riders reach them. The riders trample over the ground where they were standing and continue past.

A moment later, Eric and John REAPPEAR.

PARKER

(nods)

That might be permitted.

91 ANGLE ON THE JOHNSONS

91

as they rein in their horses and wheel around.

BROTHER #1

Say, that kid's fast! How'd he do that?

WESLEY

I don't know, but he ain't gonna do it again.

Wesley reaches into the rifle-boot and pulls out his Winchester.

(CONTINUED)

91 CONTINUED:

91

ELMORE

Wesley! Put that rifle away!

WESLEY

(sighting down  
the rifle)I'm only gonna slow 'im up some,  
Pa.

92 ANGLE ON ERIC AND JOHN

92

as Eric sees Wesley taking aim with the rifle.

ERIC

How about if I did this?Eric snaps his fingers.

93 ANGLE ON WESLEY

93

as he is about to fire. The Winchester suddenly begins  
to GLOW RED-HOT in his hands. He shouts in pain and  
drops the rifle to the ground.

WESLEY

Ow!

The Winchester EXPLODES with a BANG.

ELMORE

What's going on around here?

94 ANGLE ON ERIC AND JOHN

94

as John thinks a moment; then shakes his head.

PARKER

I'm afraid I'm gonna have to say  
no.

ERIC

Oh. Well, if I couldn't do that,  
then I know I couldn't do this!Eric snaps his fingers.95 OMITTED  
thru  
9995  
thru  
99

YOUNG HARRY HOUDINI - Rev. 12/12/86 100.

100 ANGLE ON RANCH HOUSE 100

as the house EXPLODES with a TREMENDOUS ROAR, scattering debris high into the air.

101 ANGLE ON THE JOHNSONS 101

as they watch completely dumbfounded as the debris from their house floats to the ground.

ELMORE

What in tarnation is going on around here!

102 ANGLE ON ERIC AND JOHN 102

PARKER

No, you definitely cannot do that! \*

Parker snaps his fingers.

103 ANGLE ON RANCH HOUSE 103

as the house is immediately SUCKED BACK TOGETHER, REVERSING THE EXPLOSION.

104 ANGLE ON THE JOHNSONS 104

as they watch, their eyes growing wider.

ELMORE

I don't know what's going on around here... and I don't care!

He wheels his horse and gallops off towards the horizon.

Wesley and his Brother watch their father ride off.

WESLEY

But... but what about that kid?  
And what about my gal?

BROTHER #1

That's your business, Wes.

Brother #1 turns and gallops away.

Wesley thinks about it a moment.

WESLEY

No thanks! He can have her.

Wesley reins his horse around and gallops off after his

as they watch the Johnsons riding away. Eric turns to Parker.

ERIC

(mock sincerity)

Well, I'm sure glad we had this conversation, John... because I certainly wouldn't want to abuse the power.

Parker smiles knowingly.

PARKER

You are showing definite signs of becoming a man of wisdom. \*

He smiles and extends his hand to Eric. \*

Eric takes it, and they shake hands warmly. \*

PARKER \*

And now I have something to give you.

Parker takes the Crystal Talisman from around his neck and puts it around Eric's.

Eric looks at the Crystal Talisman, wide-eyed.

ERIC

Does this mean I know how to use the Power now?

PARKER

This is just the first step in a life of many steps. Learning to use the Power is a lifelong process. I have taught you all I can. The rest is up to you.

Eric looks down at the crystal, hanging around his neck. He lifts it up, runs his fingers over it. It begins to GLOW.

ERIC

(filled with wonder)

I can't believe this is happening...

Suddenly, the word "happening" ECHOES THREE TIMES.

Something is wrong. The smile fades from Eric's face. He blinks, then shakes his head, as if trying to clear it.

(CONTINUED)

pk

YOUNG HARRY HOUDINI - Rev. 12/12/86

101A.

105 CONTINUED:

105

CAMERA MOVES IN to Eric quickly.

ERIC (V.O.)

I can't believe this is  
happening...

The word "happening" again ECHOES THREE TIMES.

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED:

105

Eric reaches up to his temple, then quickly shuts his eyes, as if hit by a sudden jolt of pain and we...

HARD CUT TO:

MONTAGE: A FAST, STYLIZED, FLASHBACK "REPRISE" OF ERIC'S EXPERIENCES:

SCENE 13 - INT. BARN - DAY

THEO

(dramatically)

What you are about to witness is a feat of amazement never before seen anywhere in the world. I give you... Eric the Great!

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 15 - INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

RABBI WEISS

Eric, why do you do these things?

ERIC

Because I'm training, Papa. I'm going to be the greatest magician in the world.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 20 - INT. RAILROAD HOTEL LOBBY - LATER (DAY)

MERLIN

... and then flip it forward to make it appear again. Like that!

He flips the coin back into his palm.

MERLIN

But then you knew that already, didn't you?

Merlin hands Eric the coin and smiles at his star-struck young student.

Eric takes it. He looks at it in awe.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 22 - INT. WEISS HOME - DAY

MOTHER

How did you do that?

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED: (2)

105

ERIC  
It's for you, Mama.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 23A - INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

ERIC  
(slowly; evenly)  
I can't be a locksmith, Theo. I'm  
a magician. It's out of my hands.

He reaches up and pulls the coin out of thin air. He  
stares at it thoughtfully.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 28 - EXT. TRAIN STATION - NIGHT

THEO  
But, Eric...

ERIC  
I've got to try, Theo. If I  
don't, I'll never really know.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 41 - EXT. VACANT LOT - NIGHT

ERIC  
I... I'm an escape artist! I can  
escape from anything!

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 42 - EXT. VACANT LOT - LATER (NIGHT)

GRIMALDI  
Do you think a genuine escape  
artist would be a worthy addition  
to our show?

CALPERNIA  
It would be a wonderful addition.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 47 - EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

John Parker turns and looks over at Eric.

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED: (2)

105

We hear the haunting SOUND OF A FLUTE.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 50 - EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

The wolf turns to Eric, who is still crouching on the ground.

They make eye contact. There is a moment between them, and then the wolf turns and disappears into the darkness.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 45B - EXT. ABILENE - DAY

Eric has the handcuffs on.

ERIC

I can't believe this is  
happening...

Suddenly, the handcuffs fall from his wrists and drop to the floor of the stage.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 63 - EXT. PLATFORM - DAY

Grimaldi sees the trunk going higher and higher. He takes out a gold piece and steps forward, trying to maintain his calm.

GRIMALDI

You win, sir. Here is your money!  
I concede!

LARGE MINER

(shaking his head)

A bet's a bet! I wanna see if  
this kid can do it!

CALPERNIA

Stop! Put it down! Please!

GRIMALDI

It's set to break!

HARD CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

105 CONTINUED: (4)

105

SCENE 64 - INT. TRUNK - DAY

ERIC

I can't believe this is  
happening...

HARD CUT BACK TO:

105A EXT. JOHNSON RANCH - DAY

105A

CLOSE ON ERIC: as his eyes open, filled with terror,  
and stare into CAMERA.

ERIC (V.O.)

I can't believe this is  
happening...

The word "happening" ECHOES.

HARD CUT TO:

SCENE 67 - EXT. TRUNK - DAY

The word "happening" CONTINUES TO ECHO faster and  
faster, building to a peak as the ROPE SNAPS. The ECHO  
STOPS.

SILENCE: The trunk appears to remain suspended in the  
air for a split second. We hear the SOUND OF THE WIND.  
Then the trunk begins to plummet toward the ground.

HARD CUT TO:

The trunk falling at CAMERA DIRECTLY UNDERNEATH (SLOW  
MOTION).

INTERCUT WITH:

HIGH ANGLE "TRUNK" POV on Eric at the Johnson ranch; he  
is looking up AT CAMERA as it plummets toward him in  
SLOW MOTION.

ERIC'S POV: Directly underneath. The trunk gets  
closer.

TRUNK POV: Plummeting towards Eric standing on the  
ground. Closer and closer.

ERIC'S POV: Directly underneath. The trunk gets  
closer and closer. Then SMASH: the trunk hits CAMERA.

106 INT. WAGON - DAY

106

CLOSE: Eric sits bolt-upright INTO FRAME. His face is drenched in sweat.

WIDE: Eric looks around. He sees that he is in the bed in the back of the Household Wagon.

He pauses, breathing heavily, collecting himself.

Calpernia comes in, followed by Grimaldi.

CALPERNIA

Eric, are you alright? We heard you cry out.

ERIC

I think so. What happened? How'd I get here?

GRIMALDI

You've been unconscious, my boy. For three days.

ERIC

Three days?

CALPERNIA

Since the accident.

ERIC

What accident?

GRIMALDI

The accident when you did the trunk trick. Don't you remember? You were in it when the rope broke!

ERIC

But... I got out of the trunk!

Calpernia and Grimaldi look at one another, smiling.

GRIMALDI

You didn't get out, but fortunately, you were thrown clear before the trunk smashed to bits at the bottom of the canyon. We found you halfway down. Some soft ground broke your fall. You've been unconscious since then.

John Parker steps into the mouth of the wagon.

ERIC

But what about the Johnsons?

(CONTINUED)

GRIMALDI

Very strange about the Johnsons.  
They left town about a week ago.  
Nobody really knows why. Very  
mysterious. They just up and  
left.

ERIC

Of course they did! Because John  
and I chased them off! Didn't we,  
John? Tell them how we chased  
them off!!

Parker just looks down at Eric.

Grimaldi and Calpernia look at one another: this is  
worse than they thought.

CALPERNIA

John can't speak, Eric. You know  
that.

ERIC

Yes, he can. He just doesn't  
speak because he doesn't have  
anything important to say!

GRIMALDI

John doesn't speak, Eric, because  
his tongue was cut out by scalp  
hunters when he was a boy.

Eric looks over at John.

John nods his head, and smiles warmly.

ERIC

You mean it didn't happen!?!...

GRIMALDI

You'd better rest, boy. You've  
had a nasty bump on the head.  
It's obviously confused you.

Eric lays back onto the bed.

ERIC

But... but it all seemed... so  
real. It all seemed so real.

CLOSE ON: Eric's face. His VOICE REVERBERATES OUT as  
PICTURE...

DISSOLVES THROUGH TO:

107 INT. CLARIDGE'S HOTEL - HOUDINI'S SUITE - NIGHT

107

CLOSE ON: Houdini's face. He is standing by the sideboard, holding his cup of tea.

Conan Doyle is still seated on the couch behind him, leaning forward eagerly.

HOUDINI

It all seemed too real.

Houdini takes a deep breath, coming out of his reverie, and then turns.

HOUDINI

Yes. Well. There you are. The closest I ever came to a mystical experience... and it was only an hallucination.

Houdini takes a last sip of tea.

HOUDINI

More tea, Arthur?

Conan Doyle shakes his head and sits back in the couch, somewhat deflated.

DOYLE

Your one mystical experience... and it was just a dream. The result of a nasty smack on the head.

HOUDINI

I'm afraid so.

DOYLE

But what became of the others? The Indian? The girl? Dr. Grimaldi?

HOUDINI

I continued with the show through the remainder of that summer, then parted company, in order to join my family in New York.

DOYLE

Never saw them again?

HOUDINI

Oh, we managed to remain in contact through the years, though not as closely as I would've hoped.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

Grimaldi passed away two years ago, God rest his soul, at the Steel Pier in Atlantic City where he was still performing "The Palingenesia," and peddling his Wizard Oil... twenty-five cents, one quarter of a dollar.

DOYLE

And the girl, Calpernia? What became of your great love?

HOUDINI

It faded and became great affection. A year after I left, she married a newspaper fellow from St. Louis and was, at last word, expecting her fourth child. My one consolation is that she named her eldest boy Eric.

DOYLE

And the Indian? What happened to him?

HOUDINI

I have absolutely no idea.

DOYLE

No idea?

HOUDINI

One morning, soon after I awoke from my strange dream, John Parker vanished. Went off to gather firewood and never returned. We searched and searched but couldn't find a trace of him. Grimaldi thought he'd gone back to his tribe.

DOYLE

What did you think?

HOUDINI

At the time, I thought he'd changed into a wolf again and disappeared into the wilderness. But now... I think he probably went back to his tribe.

Conan Doyle nods, disappointed at the utter reality of it all.

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED: (2)

107

The CLOCK on the mantelpiece STRIKES the hour: 5 a.m.

DOYLE

Dear me, look at that. Five a.m.  
We've talked the entire night  
away, Houdini! I'd better be off  
then.

He stands and gets ready to leave. Houdini helps him  
into his coat.

DOYLE

Well, old chap, many thanks for  
the evening's entertainment... all  
of it.

HOUDINI

The pleasure was all mine, Arthur.

DOYLE

You never cease to amaze me. I  
expect to see you again before you  
leave for the continent.

HOUDINI

Of course.

They walk to the door.

Doyle turns before exiting. They shake hands.

DOYLE

You know, Houdini, perhaps what  
you say about magic is true...  
perhaps some things are just  
tricks.

He leaves.

Houdini closes the door. He smiles very mischievously:  
a trickster to the end. He reaches into his shirt and  
pulls something out that is hanging around his neck.  
It is the Crystal Talisman that John Parker gave him.

HOUDINI

Perhaps some things just are,  
Arthur. Perhaps some things just  
are.

He holds up the Crystal Talisman and looks at it. It  
GLOWS, throwing a warm light on Houdini's face.

PICTURE FADES TO BLACK.

THE END