

The Greatest Illusion

by

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Fade in:

INT-THEATRE-NIGHT

A young man, ALFRED, is standing backstage at a small local theatre. He paces around nervously behind the closed curtains, continually straightening his tuxedo. Another man, ROGER, enters with a glass of water in his hands. He approaches Alfred and gives him the glass.

ROGER

Here, take some.

Alfred grabs the glass with his hand and, after being unable to keep it from shaking, grips it with the other. He takes a sip and gives it back.

ALFRED

Are you sure it's time? I can't hear anyone.

ROGER

Of course you can. Just listen.

They both pause and stand silently, listening for the audience. No noise can be heard. Nonetheless Alfred smiles and nods as he begins to calm down.

ROGER (CONT'D)

Can't you hear it?

ALFRED

Yeah I guess so.

Alfred continues to breathe heavily in order to calm down. Soon, though, anxiety grabs hold of him again.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

But maybe we should wait a few minutes, see if anyone else shows up.

ROGER

I just checked it out, it's almost a full house.

ALFRED

Are you sure?

ROGER

(smiling)

Yes. What's wrong with you tonight?

ALFRED

It's just-it's my first show. I want people to be there. I've worked hard for this.

ROGER

Don't worry, they're there. Believe me, you'll be surprised.

Alfred nods gratefully, but he is soon overcome with anxiety as he begins to hypoventilate.

ALFRED

Maybe I'll just take a peek.

He begins to walk towards the curtain and just as he's about to grip the edge Roger grabs him and pulls him back.

ROGER

What are you doing?! No performer does that! Please, just trust me on this one.

He breaks out of his nervous trance.

ALFRED

You're right. Of course you're right. It's a full house. I'm just a bit nervous.

ROGER

I know you are. I can feel it too.

ALFRED

What should I do?

ROGER

You should probably get out there before they all leave.

ALFRED

Right...
(takes a deep breath)
Let's do this.

Roger grabs the radio (walkie talkie) from his side and puts it to his mouth.

ROGER

Alright, we're ready. Pull the curtains.

OPERATOR

(on radio)

Roger that.

The curtains begin to open slowly.

ALFRED

Wish me luck.

He begins to walk into the light of the stage.

ROGER

You don't need luck; you're a magician.

A huge applause erupts as Alfred enters the stage. The spotlight catches him, blinding him instantly. He smiles and bows to his audience.

ALFRED

Thank you! Yes, thank you!

His eyes soon adjust to the light and he looks over to his audience, but it's too dark to see anything. They soon calm, allowing him to address himself.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I would like to welcome you to the first ever "Alfred Cutter Show." Tonight you will be entertained by my best tricks and illusions, those that will leave you with wonder and mystery as you exit the theatre. For my first act I will need a volunteer.

He looks around but it's still too dark to see anyone.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(to the Operator)

Actually, could we bring the house lights up a bit?

As is commanded, the lights around the theatre begin to grow, and lo and behold, a hundred seats lay in front of him, but none of them are filled. Still, he takes no notice of this and points to an empty seat in the front row.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

You, my dear, please join me.

He watches the invisible girl walk up to the stage.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

What's your name?

No reply.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

She's just a little shy. Here, whisper it into my ear.

He leans in and nods.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Ah, Taylor, welcome to the show.

At this moment the camera is on the left of Alfred with what should be Taylor in front of him. Alfred brings out a knife from his pocket, and as he does this the camera tracks to the right behind Alfred so that she is covered up. It continues moving right and reveals Taylor in bodily form. This shot shows Alfred's perspective on the event.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Right, now Taylor, I'm going to throw this into the air and catch it on my finger, and I would like you to choose on which end for me to do it.

TAYLOR

Ummm...the handle.

He throws the knife, and as it spins down he places his finger into its path, balancing it at the handle. A mild applause can be heard.

ALFRED

Other way this time.

Again the knife is thrown, but this time he catches it on the blade tip to mild gasps from Taylor and the audience. A louder applause can be heard.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Thank you, thank you. I appreciate your applause, but that wasn't the trick, no. That was just a distraction. What time is it Taylor?

She looks to her watch but it isn't there. Alfred brings it out from his pocket to a huge applause. He smiles and gives the watch back.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Here you go, my dear. Give it up for Taylor everybody!

She begins to walk off stage and the audience continues to clap. Then, all of a sudden, a different noise is heard, the noise of the entrance door being opened. The applause fades away unnaturally as five young men enter the room and begin walking down the aisle. Alfred suddenly realizes that they are the only ones in the room. He freezes as he stares at them, not knowing what is happening. He rubs his eyes, hoping that it will go back to normal, but with no success. The men are now at the front row and they look towards Alfred. He stares at them for a while, but soon manages to stumble out a question.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

C-can I help you?

MAN #1

Sorry we're late, but we've come to see the show if that's alright with you.

Alfred is still quite shocked but manages an answer.

ALFRED

R-right- yes of course. Have a seat.

As the young men take their seats Alfred looks towards Roger in hopes of an explanation. Instead he just gives him a "thumbs up" and mouths "c'mon, you can do it!" He looks back to his audience and tries to put himself together. His eyes closed, he takes a deep breath and continues with the show, still dazed with confusion.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Right, where was I? Oh yes, for my next trick I will try and answer a timeless question.

Roger rolls a table over to Alfred.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

The question of which came first, the egg...

He places an egg from his pocket onto the table. He then places a cloth over it and pulls it away.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

...or the chicken.

The table reveals a fully grown chicken with no egg in sight. The men clap and are pleasantly surprised.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Or maybe it was the other way round. The chicken...

He places the cloth over the chicken and pulls it off again, revealing the egg.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

...or the egg.

The audience claps again and Alfred puts the egg back in his pocket. He smiles towards his audience but then he jerks backwards suddenly and then freezes. The audience quickly hushes.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(shocked)

I think it's hatching.

He looks into his pocket and his face turns confused.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(confused)

Ummm... I think I know what came first.

He places his hands into his pocket and pulls out a baby bearded dragon.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

The lizard.

The audience understands the joke and laughs while applauding. Roger enters the stage and collects the lizard and the table. Alfred smiles in appreciation but is a bit disappointed as to the scale of applause. He still doesn't understand what's going on, but he knows that the show must go on. Just as he's thinking this the entrance door opens again, revealing a young family who walks to the front and sits down. Alfred smiles again and welcomes them, happy to see more people coming to the show. At the same time one of the men from before grabs his cellphone and texts one of his friends. It says: "come down 2 hallmark theatre quick. This guy is good." At this point music begins to fade in and there is a montage of sorts, where Alfred continues doing different tricks and illusions. As this occurs more and more people show up, some that were texted by the men before and some who came on a whim. Alfred continues to perform and he begins to enjoy what he's doing, even though he is still confused as to what's happening. The music ends to a massive applause from a theatre that's almost half full. He smiles appreciatively and calms them down.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Thank you, thank you! You guys have been great and it's been a real privilege to perform for you tonight. And because you've been so great, for my last trick of the night I will attempt, for the first time ever, levitation. I will need a volunteer to help me with this one.

He looks to the group of guys who arrived first and calls up the one who spoke earlier. As he begins to come up Alfred walks towards Roger.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

(to Roger)

What happened earlier?

ROGER

(smiling)

It looks like you're a better illusionist than you think.

ALFRED

What? You mean I...?

ROGER

Yes.

ALFRED

Why would I do such a thing?

ROGER

Because if you didn't you wouldn't have done the show, and if you didn't do the show those people wouldn't be there right now.

Alfred smiles but then a question quickly burns in him.

ALFRED

Wait, how do you know all this?

Roger quickly changes the subject.

ROGER

Quick, take these. He's waiting for you.

ALFRED

Right. Pass them over.

He grabs two chairs from Roger and walks back on stage. He places them five feet apart, facing each other, and then walks over to the volunteer.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

And your name?

MAN #1

James.

ALFRED

Now James, I'm going to lie down on the end of these chairs, and when I say so, I want you to pull them apart. Is that okay?

JAMES

Yeah, sure.

Alfred lies on the chairs and concentrates for a few seconds.

ALFRED

Right, James, could you remove the chair by my feet?

He does it but his feet remain in the same place. The boy gasps.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

And now the head.

He pulls that away to but still Alfred remains. Shocked, James runs his hands around his body to look for a line but there's none there. Alfred stays in the position for a few seconds. Silence hits the room as the audience remains in shock.

ALFRED (CONT'D)

Could you put the chairs back now
please?

James puts the chairs back and Alfred gets up. The silence soon turns into thunderous applause from the audience below. They stand up in amazement and continue giving a standing ovation. Alfred smiles as he sees his feat and the reaction from the audience. He looks towards Roger who is also smiling and clapping. At this point Alfred is at the right of the camera with Roger at the left. The camera then moves to the right so that Alfred covers the screen, and then continues to show Roger no longer there, but just another one of his illusions. Still, he takes no notice of this and continues to smile and bow to the audience. The lights then fade as the show ends. Alfred walks offstage.

Fade out.