

ON HAVING GOOD FORTUNE AND OTHER WORTHWHILE THINGS

By Nick Kittilstved

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**ON HAVING GOOD FORTUNE
AND OTHER WORTHWHILE THINGS**

By Nicholas Kittilstved

SYNOPSIS: They've made friends, enemies...mostly enemies, and a whole lot of money by pretending to be fortune tellers – and now, a mysterious woman tells Edgar and Ethel that three events will come to pass in their future: One of them shall find love and be loved in return while the other shall love in vain, one shall betray the secret of their father's act, and one shall die. Stunned, Edgar and Ethel race to try to sabotage one another so that they may be the one who lives. But after conning people with fortune telling all these years, can they even trust the prophecy of this supposed fortune teller? Can they learn to change their swindling ways? And even if they did, could they survive long enough for any it to matter...

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 females, 4 males)

EDGAR (m).....	24; Brother of Ethel. Fake fortune teller. <i>(295 lines)</i>
ETHEL (f).....	28; Sister of Edgar. Fake fortune teller. <i>(232 lines)</i>
EDMOND (m).....	50 – 60; Father of Edgar and Ethel. The Invisible Man at the Circus. <i>(46 lines)</i>
CARABON THE MAGNIFICENT (m).....	25 – 30; Traveling fortune teller. Purple-garbed. Love interest of Ethel. <i>(48 lines)</i>
WILLA (f).....	24; Aspiring fortune teller. Love interest of Edgar. <i>(90 lines)</i>
OLD WOMAN (f).....	60+; Supposed fortune teller. <i>(62 lines)</i>
WOMAN (f).....	25+; Victim of Edgar and Ethel's scams. <i>(52 lines)</i>
PATRON (m).....	Patron at the circus. <i>(17 lines)</i>

DURATION: 60 minutes

SETTING

The play takes place in late 19th century New England. The entirety of the play occurs within several tents at the circus. Backdrop would be painted in the shape of a large red tent. Interchangeable for all scenes. Limited set changes between scenes.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

- SCENE 1: EDGAR AND ETHEL'S TENT
- SCENE 2: EDMOND'S TENT
- SCENE 3: EDGAR AND ETHEL'S TENT

INTERMISSION

ACT TWO

- SCENE 1: EDMOND'S TENT
- SCENE 2: EDGAR AND ETHEL'S TENT

PROPS

ACT ONE

SCENE 1:

- Crystal ball
- Wallet and money
- Slip of paper with address
- Purse
- Jewelry

SCENE 3:

- Crystal ball
- Tarot cards
- Rose
- A sign that reads: FORTUNE TELLER INTERVIEWS TODAY

ACT TWO

SCENE 1:

- Plates
- Silverware
- Food
- Tarot cards

SCENE 2:

- Crystal ball

COSTUMES

The circus is very bohemian, and the costuming will reflect that. The character's outfits should not be pristine or new. Edgar and Ethel dress like what they think gypsy mystics look like. Keep in mind that they have never actually met one, so this will be their closest approximation. Carabon should be dressed in a purple turban and purple cape. Outside of that, the more purple on his costume the better. He is very over-the-top. The other characters can be dressed in a more period fashion with tuxedos and dresses.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

On Having Good Fortune and Other Worthwhile Things had its world premiere at Liberty Lake Community Theater in Liberty Lake, WA in 2016. The original cast was directed by Mikayla Ludiker and included the following cast members:

ETHEL	Samantha Steyart
EDGAR	Nick Kittilstved
WILLA	Clara Gobin
CARABON	Kris Pockell
OLD WOMAN.....	Mary Jo Rudolf
EDMOND	James Sanders
WOMAN	Jennifer Ophardt

ACT ONE, SCENE 1
EDGAR AND ETHEL'S TENT

SETTING: *A carnival tent, outside of New York City.*

AT RISE: *EDGAR and ETHEL stand before a table. They are extravagantly dressed to look like mystics. Upon the table sits a large crystal ball. Into the tent walks a WOMAN.*

EDGAR: *(Using a fake English accent.)* Good evening, my lady. Thank you very much for coming.

ETHEL: *(Using a similar accent.)* Yes, thank you indeed. Now please have a seat.

WOMAN extends a gloved hand to EDGAR for a hand shake.

EDGAR: *(Withdraws his hand.)* The aura, madam, *(Waves his fingers in the air.)* mustn't be broken.

WOMAN: Sorry.

ETHEL: Apologies must be stifled if the aura is to remain intact.

WOMAN: Oh, dear. My apologies.

EDGAR: *(Holds up a finger in warning.)* Uh-uh. You needn't worry. Now please sit down. The future is ever so anxious to be known.

WOMAN sits down, looking abashed. EDGAR and ETHEL take the two seats opposite her.

ETHEL: *(Touching the crystal ball.)* Do you know what this is?

WOMAN: It is a crystal ball, of course.

EDGAR: Brilliant! And do you know what it does?

WOMAN: It shows you the future.

ETHEL: Splendid! You may have a bit of clairvoyance yourself.

WOMAN looks pleased with herself, unaware that she is being swindled.

EDGAR: I hope you are aware that the future is both a wonderful and terrible thing, and knowing it comes at a great price. Do you know what that price is, madam?

WOMAN: Fear?

EDGAR: Indeed. And twenty dollars.

WOMAN: Oh, of course! How foolish of me. (*She produces a wallet and pulls out two bills.*) Here you are.

ETHEL: Thank you, madam. Now that the spirits have been paid, we can begin—if you are ready.

WOMAN: Yes, please.

EDGAR: Good. (*He closes his eyes and begins moving his hands over the crystal ball. He does this for some time without a word.*)

WOMAN: Excuse me, but what good is the crystal ball if you've got your eyes closed? Aren't you supposed to gaze into it?

EDGAR: Pardon me? Are you trained in the mystic arts?

WOMAN: No, I simply wondered.

ETHEL: The crystal ball feeds energy into the reader and gives him or her the Sight. However, it cannot work if the aura is broken. It is imperative that you remain silent during the Reading unless first spoken to.

WOMAN nods in consent.

EDGAR: Good. Now we can continue. (*He places his hands back on the ball and closes his eyes.*) Now am I correct that you have a dog?

WOMAN: No.

EDGAR: A fish?

WOMAN: No.

EDGAR: A cat?

WOMAN: Yes!

EDGAR: Ah, I thought you might. I am correct that it is white?

WOMAN: No.

EDGAR: Black?

WOMAN: No.

EDGAR: Brown?

WOMAN: Right again! You take my breath away.

EDGAR: Yes, the Sight can be alarming to the unprepared.

WOMAN: Please, tell me what is to become of my darling Chestnut.

EDGAR: Sister, tell her what will become of her cat.

ETHEL: Of course, brother. (*She places her hands on the ball.*) Before I relate the grim fate that I see before me, I want to make absolutely

sure that I am speaking of your cat. Am I correct in saying that your cat's name is Chestnut?

WOMAN: It cannot be! However could you know such a thing?

ETHEL: I am correct then?

WOMAN: Yes, very much so. What is this grim fate that you spoke of? Is Chestnut going to be okay?

ETHEL: I am sorry to be the one to tell you this, but Chestnut is going to die.

WOMAN: (*Breaks down and begins to cry.*) No! It can't be true. Not my Chestnut. When? When will this evil thing happen?

ETHEL: I cannot say. But it will happen in the future. That is inevitable.

WOMAN: I can hardly believe it. How can my Chestnut die? It isn't fair.

ETHEL: No, no, it is not.

WOMAN: Please don't stop it there. What else do you see? Please, tell me. I must know.

ETHEL: What more of her future do you see, brother?

EDGAR: Indeed I see much. Tell me, my lady, does the word "sun" mean anything to you?

WOMAN: What? I don't understand the question.

EDGAR: It is a simple question, woman. Does the word "sun" mean anything to do you? Think.

WOMAN: Well, I do have a son. His name is David.

ETHEL: David?

WOMAN: Yes, David. That is his name. Do you know him?

ETHEL: Of course I don't. I have Seen.

EDGAR: Now please. Think harder. Does the word "sun" have any other significance to you?

WOMAN: Um... I'm not sure... uh... wait! The sky! There is a sun in the sky!

EDGAR: Yes. I believe that is it. These two things are no doubt closely related. That much is clear.

WOMAN: Oh, my. In what way?

EDGAR: That is unclear.

WOMAN: But you have to know more. Please.

EDGAR: All I can tell you is that at some point in the future, these two things will have some connection. That is clear.

WOMAN: What could that mean?

EDGAR: That is unclear. It could be that one day he will walk outside on a sunny day, or he may well be incinerated by the sun. I cannot say for sure.

WOMAN: Oh, dear. That is terrible. I hope it is the first one.

EDGAR: For your son's sake, ma'am, so do I.

WOMAN: I am almost afraid to ask, but is there anything else you can tell me?

ETHEL: You are a brave woman to continue after hearing such shocking news. Yes, there is one more thing that the future has allowed us to see. Are you sure you would like to hear it?

WOMAN: (*Apprehensively.*) Yes, I'm sure.

ETHEL: Very well. Tell me about your brother.

WOMAN: Brother? What brother? I don't have a brother.

ETHEL: Oh, dear. (*Turning to EDGAR.*) She doesn't even know.

WOMAN: What? What don't I know?

ETHEL: You do have a brother. The crystal ball told me that you were separated, but not that you were never even aware of his existence.

WOMAN: How can that be possible?

ETHEL: Your mother was unfaithful and gave up a bastard child. He now lives in poverty while your family lavishes in riches.

WOMAN: That is awful. How could my mother not have told me so? Do you know where he is? I have to see him.

ETHEL: I'm afraid that would be unwise. I have seen two visions of the future. In one vision, you go to see him, and he is trampled by a wild horse. (*WOMAN gasps.*) In the other, you send fifty dollars each month to this address (*Slides a slip of paper over.*), and your brother lives happily ever after.

WOMAN: (*Looks at the slip of paper.*) But this is only a few blocks from here. I must go see him.

EDGAR: No. We have already told you what would happen if you followed that path. You don't want that. Have you ever been responsible for a horse trampling?

WOMAN: Well yes, but—

ETHEL: Well, you don't want to be responsible for another. Just send the money, and your brother will get to live in peace. Isn't that what you want?

WOMAN: Yes, it is.

EDGAR: Good. That is all the future has to share with us for today.

ETHEL: I believe that will give you quite enough to be thinking about.

WOMAN: Yes. Indeed it does. *(She gets up and begins to leave.)*

EDGAR: Ma'am, I'm sorry. I have one more bit of unfortunate fortune telling to share with you.

WOMAN: Oh, yes? Whatever could it be?

EDGAR: I'm afraid that you will forget your purse in our tent.

WOMAN: Oh, dear. That is such an inconvenience. There is no way to keep it from happening?

EDGAR: I wish there was. The future is unfortunately rigid.

WOMAN: Oh, very well then. *(She walks out, leaving her purse by the entrance of the tent.)*

ETHEL: *(Speaking in her American accent.)* Rich people are so stupid. *(Picks up the wallet.)*

EDGAR: *(Speaking in his American accent as well.)* Yes, they are. Well done.

ETHEL: Anything worth keeping in the purse?

EDGAR: Jewelry. Guess she couldn't fit it all on and needed some spares.

EDGAR pulls out a necklace and a bracelet.

ETHEL: Works for me. I like jewelry.

EDGAR throws the necklace to ETHEL.

EDGAR: And I like money. *(He pulls several bills out of her purse.)*

ETHEL: You know we're splitting that?

EDGAR: Tell me how that's fair? You're not going to split the jewelry.

ETHEL: You're more than welcome to wear the bracelet.

EDGAR: I'm not going to wear women's jewelry.

ETHEL: Come on. I think you'd look nice.

EDGAR: Shut up. Here's your share *(Hands ETHEL a couple of the bills.)* You think she'll actually send the money?

ETHEL: Worked on the last four people, didn't it?

EDGAR: Better than I could have imagined. Remember the lady who kept sending the notes along with all the extra money?

ETHEL: Of course I do. *(Mimicking a sophisticated American accent.)*
"I felt compelled to send correspondence, since I was advised that

it was unwise to see you. I had no idea that I had a brother all this time. I was so broken-hearted to hear of your situation that I sent much more than was asked. Hopefully, this will help you get out of your unfortunate circumstances. I hope one day that we will meet, but until then, expect regular correspondence. Your sister, Margaret.”

EDGAR: I'll tell you what, we'll be living among the high class if we can swindle a few more like her.

ETHEL: You suppose we should call it quits for today?

EDGAR: Yeah. I think we've done an honest day's work.

They both laugh and begin walking toward the front of the tent when an OLDER WOMAN comes through the front of the tent and cuts them off.

EDGAR: Excuse us, we're—(*Realizes he is using his own accent and quickly switches to his fake English one.*) We were just going, I'm afraid. The future has exhausted itself for today.

OLD WOMAN: (*Speaks with an authoritative English accent.*) No, no. I think not. The future has much yet to say.

ETHEL: (*Also reverting to her English accent.*) I am sorry, ma'am. You will have to come back another time. We simply can do no further readings today.

OLD WOMAN: Perhaps you have misunderstood me. I do not wish to receive a reading, but to give one.

EDGAR: I am sorry, ma'am, we do not wish such a thing today.

OLD WOMAN: Afraid I would attempt to swindle you the way you swindled that poor woman?

ETHEL: I don't understand your meaning.

OLD WOMAN: (*Laughing.*) Don't you, now? Well I'm sure the proper authorities could refresh your memory.

She turns to leave the tent when Edgar catches her by the arm.

EDGAR: Wait. Please do sit down. We will accept your reading.

OLD WOMAN: There. I thought you could be sensible. (*They all take their seats.*) As I said before, I would like to give you two esteemed fortune tellers a reading of my own.

ETHEL: And what would be the purpose of this?

OLD WOMAN: We will leave that up for you to discern. For now, let us begin, shall we?

EDGAR: Go ahead.

OLD WOMAN: Oh, and there is no need to use those voices of yours any further.

The two nod in consent.

OLD WOMAN: You are Edgar, and you are Ethel, if I'm not mistaken.

ETHEL: *(Speaking with her American accent.)* That is correct. I'm Ethel.

EDGAR: *(Using his own voice as well.)* And I'm Edgar, her brother.

OLD WOMAN: Your parents must be ever so proud of you. Are they swindlers as well?

EDGAR: Actually, our dad is the—

OLD WOMAN: Invisible Man. Yes, I know.

ETHEL: Yeah, and he sells out—

OLD WOMAN: Fourteen shows a week. What of it?

ETHEL: We're saying that he makes honest money. He doesn't need to swindle anyone.

EDGAR: He's the biggest attraction here at the circus and has been for—

OLD WOMAN: Eight years. Yes.

ETHEL: How is it that you know all of these things?

OLD WOMAN: There is nothing I do not know. I can see the future.

EDGAR: But not everything is in the future. How do you know the things that are in the past?

OLD WOMAN: In the past, I saw the future that is now the past.

ETHEL: But what if you forget something that happened in the past? Your brain can't possibly remember everything at one time.

OLD WOMAN: If I forget something that happened in the past, I simply look into the future to a time when I have remembered it.

EDGAR: Is that how you intend to read our futures, by looking into the past from the future?

OLD WOMAN: Why would I look into the past from the future when I could simply look into the future before it has become the past?

EDGAR: Because the future is unreliable, but the past is undeniable.

OLD WOMAN: Very well. In the past, I gazed past the future to the ever-more-distant future and gazed back to the not-so-distant past and saw your future soon to become your past.

EDGAR: That is brilliant, ma'am, but if you are half as old as you are wise, then I doubt you shall live long enough to see our future become our past; and if you are really half as wise as you are old, then I cannot be sure of the reliability of your wisdom; and if you are equally as old as you are wise, then I fear you may be dead already. Any way I look at it, I cannot be certain of the information you are giving me. It would be unwise to accept the fortune telling of a wise old woman that does not have enough future left to look into the future so that her future self may look back to our past to tell us our future now. It would be foolish to accept the wisdom of a senseless old fool who foolishly offers wisdom though she does not have enough to equal half her years. And it would be altogether pointless to accept the soothsaying of a dead woman, wise or otherwise, because a dead woman's word is only as good as the woman it came from, and since the woman it came from isn't a woman at all but a corpse tainted by the tarnished lacquer of death, you have no woman to judge the word by and therefore it cannot be believed. What do you say, sister?

ETHEL: I say we hear her out.

EDGAR: What? Did you hear nothing I just said?

ETHEL: Well, you said that she seemed half as old as she was wise, and then I figured the rest was just you supporting that statement.

EDGAR: No. What I was saying was—

OLD WOMAN: Excuse me? May I interrupt?

EDGAR: You may or may not already know the answer to that, so I will leave it up to you.

OLD WOMAN: Indeed. While I appreciate your impressive powers of reasoning, I have looked to the future and looked back to moments from now and seen that you will inevitably give in and hear my fortune after all, so why not just skip to that moment now?

ETHEL: Yeah, Edgar. Let's do that. I need to get out of this tent and I just want to know if that is part of my future already or if I'll be stuck in this tent forever with you.

EDGAR: But my reasoning is sound. I simply—

ETHEL: Edgar!

EDGAR: Fine. Continue with your fortune, possibly credible old woman.

OLD WOMAN: Thank you. Now, I am going to tell you three truths, and I will speak each one only once, so I advise you listen carefully. My first truth is this: One of you will fall in love and be loved in return, while the other will love in vain.

ETHEL: Well, we know who that is.

EDGAR: What is that supposed to mean?

ETHEL: Of the two of us, who is someone more likely to fall in love with?

EDGAR: Even if someone could swallow his pride enough to fall in love with you, you wouldn't have the slightest clue how to love him back.

ETHEL: Oh, and you would?

EDGAR: I'm a very loving individual.

ETHEL: No, you're not. You're—

OLD WOMAN: Please, settle down. The second truth waits to be told.

EDGAR: Of course. I would *love* to hear it.

ETHEL: I would *love* to hear it even more, and I would *love* you for saying it.

EDGAR: I already *love* you, and I would even if you chose not to say it.

OLD WOMAN: Enough. Here is my second truth: One of you will reveal the long-kept secret of your father's act, causing him to shun you from the family.

EDGAR: That is definitely you. You have never been able to keep a secret in your life.

ETHEL: Oh, yeah? Well, I've kept the secret of the time I caught you trying on the bearded lady's dress, and it's been four years. What do you have to say about that?

EDGAR: I'd say that streak is over now. And I only tried it on because I was curious if a bearded woman's dress would fit a man better than a regular woman's.

ETHEL: They wear the same dresses, you idiot.

EDGAR: I know that now, thank you. At least you choosing to break your promise and embarrass me proved my point.

ETHEL: No way. That does not count as sharing your secret. She already knows. She has to. She has known everything else. Besides, she probably isn't even real.

EDGAR: Did she tell you that?

ETHEL: Tell me what?

EDGAR: That she isn't real? Did she tell you in confidence so you could have yet another secret to share with the world?

OLD WOMAN: For the record, I am real.

ETHEL: You can't be serious. When would she have had time to tell me that secret?

EDGAR: Who knows? She can see the future, she can see the past, and she apparently can't die. It is not unreasonable to assume she can communicate telepathically.

ETHEL: It is unreasonable to assume that I can communicate back.

EDGAR: A secret only has to go one way.

OLD WOMAN: (*Speaking over the top of them.*) The third truth is that one of you will die.

They both stop talking and stare unbelieving at the OLD WOMAN.

ETHEL and EDGAR: What?!

OLD WOMAN: I told you I would only say them once.

ETHEL: It wasn't a please-repeat-yourself "what." It was a what-the-hell-do-you-mean-one-of-us-is-going-to-die "what."

EDGAR: Yeah. We pull this scam on people all the time. Everyone dies. That is an easy prediction to make. Tell us when one of us will die.

ETHEL: Yeah, tell us when Edgar is going to die.

EDGAR: Exactly. Wait, what?

OLD WOMAN: I can't tell you when.

ETHEL: But you know.

OLD WOMAN: Of course I do.

EDGAR: Then tell us. Otherwise, you just look like a conniving fraud like us.

OLD WOMAN: Fine. All of these truths will come to pass soon.

EDGAR: Soon? Wow, that is sooner than I expected.

OLD WOMAN: Yes. Although I cannot say in what order these truths will come to pass.

ETHEL: I'm sorry, brother. To be denied the love of a woman, lose the respect of a father, and then die. That is a heavy burden to bear, but I will try and help you through it as best I can.

OLD WOMAN: I said that the events could come to pass in any order.

ETHEL: Sure, but you wouldn't have one of us die first. That would be terribly anticlimactic.

OLD WOMAN: Fine. The death will come last, but the other two shall remain unknown.

EDGAR: My sister is wrong about all the bad things happening to me, right?

OLD WOMAN: I cannot say.

EDGAR: You can't possibly make all three of those things happen to one of us while the other one lives happily ever after. It is heartless.

OLD WOMAN: It is not my doing. It is the doing of time and fate.

EDGAR: Call it whatever you want. I'm still blaming you if all that stuff happens to me.

ETHEL: Me too.

OLD WOMAN: Fine, fine, fine. They don't all happen to one of you. But that is the last truth I will tell here today.

ETHEL: Damn. Well, I'm okay losing dad. So, feel free to go have your heart broken and die whenever you feel like it. I'll make sure not to invite whoever she is to my wedding...or your funeral.

EDGAR: That's not fair. I wanted to lose dad.

ETHEL: Fine. You can...when you're dead. Until then, hang on to him real tight, all right?

EDGAR: Why are you assuming that if you are the one to fall in love, you will also be the one to live?

ETHEL: Because I've read books, Edgar. That's how they end.

EDGAR: This isn't a book.

ETHEL: Oh, really. Tell me if this sounds familiar: two people spend their lives doing bad things, thinking they can get away with it forever, until a mysterious woman comes along. She attempts to teach them a lesson by sharing with them their fortune, which has a certain dramatic irony because they have made all their money pretending to be fortune tellers. She tells them that several bad things will happen to one of the two and the other will live to correct her life and live happily ever after madly in love. Sound familiar?

EDGAR: Oh my god! That's a book. We're living a book. Whoever falls in love will live, but lose our father's love, and whoever doesn't will die.

OLD WOMAN: I just want you two to know that the way this plays out is hardly so clichéd.

ETHEL and EDGAR: *(Waving him off.)* Oh, please.

EDGAR: I'm not going to let you fall in love, and I certainly am not going to let you betray dad's secret.

ETHEL: How do you plan on doing that?

EDGAR: By betraying his secret first.

They both get up and rush out of the tent and off stage. The OLD WOMAN is left sitting there, confused.

OLD WOMAN: I didn't see that happening. Maybe I'm losing my touch.

Stage goes dark.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2*EDMOND'S TENT*

AT RISE: EDGAR and ETHEL burst into their father's tent several hours before his show is set to start. They are both out of breath. In the middle of the tent is a platform. There is a lone patron wandering around the tent who appears to be lost. They both run up to him. Both have reverted to their normal, American accents.

ETHEL: Are you here to see the Invisible Man?

PATRON: Yeah, it seems—

EDGAR: It's a great show.

PATRON: I have wanted—

ETHEL: Do you want to know how he does it?

PATRON: Does what, sorry?

EDGAR: How he disappears.

PATRON: Well, if I have a choice—

ETHEL: I could tell you.

EDGAR: I could tell you better and more completely. So well you could do it at home for your kids.

ETHEL: If he has kids. What if he is never going to find someone to start a family with and he comes to the circus to fit in amongst the other hopeless people?

PATRON: Actually—

EDGAR: I don't think that is the case at all. He is a great-looking guy.

PATRON: Oh, thank—

EDGAR: I bet he found the perfect woman a long time ago and had a large family. If he doesn't have kids now, it is only because they died in a house fire or something.

PATRON: I do have two kids, actually. I kind of feel like I should go home and check on them now, though.

ETHEL: Don't be ridiculous. You have to stay for the show. If there is a house fire, you wouldn't know the first thing about putting it out anyways. Better to let them burn and you not have to see it.

PATRON: Oh my god. That's horrible!

EDGAR: Not as horrible as seeing a man disappear and never knowing how he does it.

PATRON: On the contrary—

ETHEL: If I saw a man disappear and I didn't know how he did it, I would drive myself crazy thinking about it.

PATRON: I think you may have already.

ETHEL: Aw, you're funny. Let me tell you a secret.

PATRON: I—

EDGAR: No, let me tell you a secret. I think you're funny too...and handsome.

ETHEL: Edgar, you're just making him feel uncomfortable now.

EDGAR: No, I'm not.

PATRON: Actually—

EDGAR: It is better to be uncomfortable and complimented than to be unloved, childless, and unknowledgeable of cherished circus secrets.

PATRON: I really need to be going.

ETHEL: When the light flashes he—

EDGAR: Falls through the platform. You're welcome, sir.

ETHEL: How dare you? I was telling him first.

EDGAR: Well, I told him the secret. He never asked you to tell him in the first place.

ETHEL: He never asked you either.

EDGAR: But he wanted me to.

PATRON: No, I—

Their father, EDMOND, walks out into the center of the tent.

EDMOND: What is going on here?

PATRON: I think I might be kidnapped, and my children may or may not be trapped in a house fire.

ETHEL: Nonsense. I was just telling our newfriend here how you do your act.

EDMOND: You were what?

EDGAR: Actually, I told him how you do your act. Ethel really only summarized the buildup to it, and not very well at that. She wouldn't have convinced me to see you.

ETHEL: Well, you see, I really wanted to spoil your secret, but Edgar interrupted me.

PATRON: I really didn't want to hear it from either of—

EDMOND: I can't believe the two of you.

ETHEL: You mean you can't believe your precious daughter would do something like that? Disown me. It's all I deserve.

EDGAR: I don't think so. Disown me. I really deserve it. All Ethel deserves is a low-paying job at an unsuccessful advertising firm, since that is all she's good at. Well, that and being a daughter. Keep her around for that.

EDMOND starts to laugh.

EDGAR: Wait. What's funny?

ETHEL: Yeah. What? That quip of his wasn't that funny.

EDMOND: You two are great.

EDGAR: What? No. Ethel's great. Certainly not me. I'm terrible, the worst.

ETHEL: Worst? Please. I'd have a son-of-the-year trophy made for you if I had the slightest idea where they sell trophies.

EDMOND: You guys always knew how to make a great joke. I'm just surprised this gentleman seems so surprised. Now that we show how to do my trick at the end of the act, I figured word would have gotten around by now.

ETHEL: You show how to do what trick?

EDMOND: You forget the only trick that your father knows how to do? Ha ha. I love you two.

PATRON: I'm sorry. Can I please leave? I hear a screaming in my head that is probably not a premonition, but if there is a house fire, I'd sure like to be a part of it right now.

EDMOND: Sure. Hope to see you at the show.

PATRON runs from the tent.

EDMOND: Your new friend sure has a flare for the dramatic. He'd fit in nicely around here.

EDGAR: Never mind that. What did you mean when you said you show how the trick is done at the end of your act?

EDMOND: Don't pretend this is news. We've been doing this for weeks now.

ETHEL: So everyone who comes to your show walks out knowing how the trick is done?

EDMOND: That's the idea. Unless they aren't paying attention.

EDGAR: So we didn't betray your secret and you still love *both* of us.

EDMOND: Of course. You two are acting strangely tonight.

ETHEL: How does it make sense to tell every member of the audience how your only trick is done? Where is the mystery? What makes them want to come back?

EDMOND: The idea is to make them feel like a part of the circus instead of just being spectators and outsiders.

EDGAR: This was a real great time for you to start being so inviting.

ETHEL: Are you sure you don't love one of us a little less?

EDMOND: No. Don't be ridiculous. Anyway, I've got to get ready for my show. You two should stick around to see the new ending.

ETHEL: (*Sarcastically.*) Yeah, we'll be there. Sure.

EDGAR: (*Sarcastically.*) Can't wait.

EDMOND walks back out of the tent.

ETHEL: Well, that is just perfect. Dad still loves me.

EDGAR: Hey, you're not the only one who's upset. I wanted him to hate me just as much as you did.

ETHEL: So, what does this mean?

EDGAR: I think you know what it means.

ETHEL: You're right. I think we have to kill him.

EDGAR: What? No. It means that you should have listened to me when I said we shouldn't have listened to the supposed fortune teller.

ETHEL: But she knew all of that stuff about dad.

EDGAR: All that stuff is in his biography at the gift shop. I think she was swindling us.

ETHEL: Really? To what end?

EDGAR: I think she wants our job here at the circus. She sees how much money we're making and she wants it for herself.

ETHEL: Oh, my god. I think you're right. That makes perfect sense. What a greedy bastard. Well, I'm not going to let her take my money.

EDGAR: Don't worry. She won't be.

ETHEL: How do you know that? Are you a real fortune teller now?

EDGAR: No, but I am a pretty successful swindler, and if I'm not mistaking, you are as well.

ETHEL: What are you proposing?

EDGAR: That we swindle the swindler, of course.

ETHEL: So what, you want to steal her wallet or something? If that is the case, I say we just hit her over the head and take it. That doesn't require any planning.

EDGAR: No, I don't want her wallet. I mean, if we happen upon it along the way, I wouldn't give it back, but...that isn't the point. What we need to do is drive her out of town and make her look damn foolish along the way.

ETHEL: Ooh. Now that does sound like fun. What's the plan?

EDGAR: Well, the plan is...

The stage begins to go dark like the scene is going to end when EDGAR speaks again and the lights come back on.

EDGAR: Wait a second. How come I always get stuck making the plans?

ETHEL: Really? I just suggested killing our own father to fulfill some ridiculous prophecy by a bogus fortune teller and you want me in charge of making the plans?

EDGAR: Good point. Here's my plan...

Stage goes black.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

EDGAR AND ETHEL'S TENT

AT RISE: *The scene opens to find ETHEL and EDGAR sitting behind a desk with various fortune teller equipment before them: crystal ball, tarot cards, etc. They assume their English personas. Behind them a sign reads, "Fortune Teller Interviews Today."*

EDGAR: Send in the first interviewee.

CARABON walks in dressed in all purple with a purple turban. He sits down opposite EDGAR and ETHEL.

ETHEL: State your name.

CARABON: Carabon the Magnificent, my lady. I saw your photograph in the gift shop and I'm afraid it failed to do your beauty justice.

ETHEL blushes and averts her eyes.

EDGAR: Flattery will not win you this position. Only the gift of sight can do that.

CARABON: Carabon has sight for only one.

CARABON produces a rose from his sleeve and presents it to ETHEL.

ETHEL: That is ever so thoughtful, sir.

CARABON: Please call me Carabon. Or Magnificent. Whichever strikes your fancy, m'lady.

EDGAR: Enough. Would you mind providing us with a demonstration of your fortune telling abilities? We have a crystal ball if you require or tarot cards...

CARABON: I won't be needing either. Carabon requires only my lady's hand.

ETHEL: Carabon the Magnificent, you take my breath away, but we have only just met. I couldn't possibly...

CARABON: For a palm reading.

ETHEL: (*Embarrassed.*) Oh, of course.

CARABON: Thank you.

He takes her hand, and ETHEL starts to blush again. He runs his fingers across her palm.

CARABON: Carabon the Magnificent does not believe in reading the lines in one's palm. Instead, I draw your aura from your fingertips. We each hold the secrets of an eternity in our touch. I can unlock these secrets for you. I can feel your future pulsing in your veins and crawling upon your skin. Do you want to know what I see?

ETHEL: Oh, god, yes.

CARABON: I see a magnificent man wrapped in a magnificent cloak of purple upon a hill bathed in the magnificent rays of the morning sun. A lady approaches—

ETHEL: Is she magnificent as well?

CARABON: I could not describe her as magnificent.

ETHEL: (*Sadly.*) Oh.

CARABON: Because magnificence cannot begin to comprehend her beauty.

ETHEL'S face brightens again. They are locked staring into each other's eyes. EDGAR is put off by the whole scene.

CARABON: Her beauty is beyond words. Even the sun must hide her jealousy as she approaches the man of purple magnificence. Their love is undeniable.

ETHEL: Are you that man of magnificence, Carabon the Magnificent?

CARABON: I am.

ETHEL: And am I the woman of indefinable beauty?

CARABON: It could not be another.

ETHEL: Then you are my true love?

CARABON: It is undeniable.

ETHEL: Then we must meet upon this hill you have seen.

CARABON: Carabon will be there awaiting my lady upon the light of the morning sun.

ETHEL: Until then, my love.

CARABON releases her hand and rushes out of the tent. EDGAR and ETHEL return to their normal personas.

EDGAR: What was that?

ETHEL: I'm winning the prophecy. That's what.

EDGAR: What are you talking about?

ETHEL: Uh, I'm falling in love and thus going to live.

EDGAR: You can't be serious. I thought we agreed the old woman was a fraud?

ETHEL: I had to deceive you. I can't die right now. I've got a lot of stuff going on.

EDGAR: I can't believe you would do this.

ETHEL: It isn't anything personal.

EDGAR: Really? Because you wanting me to die seems fairly personal.

ETHEL: I don't want you to die, necessarily. I would just prefer that if one of us has to, it would be you.

EDGAR: You are unbelievable. I hope he throws you off of that *magnificent* hill.

ETHEL: Come now, let's not let it come to this. A fair game is in both of our best interests. Don't be discouraged simply because I'm winning.

EDGAR: Let's get one thing straight. You are not winning. That purple sideshow may love you, but to fulfill that part of the prophecy, you have to love him back.

ETHEL: A minor inconvenience in an otherwise foolproof plan. How hard can loving someone be? I'll just bat my eyelashes, and call him sweet names, and that should do it.

EDGAR: That isn't love.

ETHEL: I see it as a grey area. I think the prophecy is just looking for the appropriate effort.

EDGAR: The prophecy will never consider that love. You can't con a prophecy.

ETHEL: I'm sorry. Did I miss the ceremony where you were appointed chief love counselor of all prophecies?

EDGAR: I'm just trying to help you, Ethel. Unlike you, I want you to live.

ETHEL: Well, I'm glad to tell you that wish will come true. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to try and go to sleep. I'm falling in love tomorrow. I hope I see you again, Edgar. But if I don't, well, bye.

ETHEL runs out of the tent.

EDGAR: What about the rest of the interviews?

EDGAR falls back into his seat and buries his head in his hands. WILLA walks in.

WILLA: Excuse me. My name is Willa. I'm here for the interview.

EDGAR: I'm sorry, but we are finished with interviews.

WILLA: Don't you want to at least see me read your future?

EDGAR: I already know my future. I'm going to die.

WILLA: That's not what I see.

EDGAR: Is that so? And what do you see?

WILLA: No, actually. I see your father, and he appears to be angry with you.

EDGAR: (*Perking his head up.*) What did you say?

WILLA: I see your father, and he is angry with you.

EDGAR: Does he look like he loves me?

WILLA: I don't think so. I'm sorry.

EDGAR: Sorry? This is great news!

WILLA: What? You want your father to hate you?

EDGAR: Absolutely I do. My name is Edgar. Please sit down. Now tell me, you aren't trying to fool me, are you?

WILLA: Wouldn't you know if I was?

EDGAR: Uh...of course I would. It was a test. Can you start immediately?

WILLA: Yes, of course.

EDGAR: Good. Now, can you do an English accent?

WILLA: I'm sorry?

EDGAR: An English accent. Can you do one?

WILLA: Um...I suppose, but why would I need to do that?

EDGAR: People won't take you seriously otherwise. For some reason, there is a misconception that Americans make bad fortune tellers. I don't know where it comes from, but it is the world we live in. Blame Shakespeare.

WILLA: Why, was he a fortune teller?

EDGAR: No, but he popularized the English accent. No one would have given an Englishman a second thought before. He legitimized an entire population and made our jobs more difficult in the process.

WILLA: Oh, okay. You're the boss.

EDGAR: You're right. I am. Now, I have a rather complicated matter I will need your help in dealing with.

WILLA: And what would that be?

EDGAR: My sister is trying to kill me.

WILLA: Dear! That is dreadful. Why would she want to kill you?

EDGAR: It isn't so much that she wants to kill me as that she wants to ensure that I die.

WILLA: Ensure you die how?

EDGAR: My sister and I have found ourselves at the center of a dire but vague prophecy.

WILLA: What does the prophecy state?

EDGAR: There are several moving parts, and it may be entirely beyond your comprehension, but I will try and explain it as clearly as I can. The prophecy states that one of us will love but be unloved and one of us will love and be loved in return. It goes on to state that one of us will betray our father's secret and he will shun that one forever. Finally, it states that one of us will die while the other lives happily ever after.

WILLA: A Trichotomous Death Prophecy. That is nasty business.

EDGAR: You are familiar with prophetic classification?

WILLA: Absolutely. I spent a year in the Himalayan Mountains studying Tibetan Cataclysm Prophecy. And I am the foremost expert on Theodiscordal Prophecies.

EDGAR: Then you must be familiar with Prophecies of Fortuitous Enamoration.

WILLA: You mean a prophecy where two people are brought together, seemingly by chance, so that they may fall hopelessly in love? Indeed I have. What would you be insinuating?

EDGAR: Only that you and I are going to get along magnificently.

WILLA: I prophesize that we shall. Now what are we going to do about your Trichotomous Death Prophecy? Have any of the individual prophecies [*pronounced profess-eye*] come to pass yet?

EDGAR: Seemingly, no. We both tried to betray what we thought was our father's deepest secret only to find that it was no longer a secret. We assumed that the one who lost the love of our father would be the one to live.

WILLA: Naturally.

EDGAR: My sister, Ethel, believes that she has found the man that she will fall in love with, but she does not understand love.

WILLA: And do you understand love, Edgar?

EDGAR: Of course I do. I must be the one to find true love before she does.

WILLA: I think your chances are fairly good.

EDGAR: The future we will have together.

WILLA: A future for us...together?

EDGAR: Sometimes I feel as if the Sight is a curse. To see our romance lying in the distant future just out of reach and not being able to grasp it. But now that you and I have come together, I see no reason to postpone our future any longer, and I have seen such a bright future for us.

WILLA: Do we have a family? And a big house?

EDGAR: No, I mean it is actually really bright. I think we are on a beach somewhere.

WILLA: That sounds dreadful. I hate beaches.

EDGAR: You're right. I hate sand, and I burn far too easily to spend much time on the beach.

WILLA: Are you sure you didn't see us growing old together in a dreary, rainy climate?

EDGAR: Absolutely. The future is changing all the time. I see our perfect, rain-soaked life together now.

WILLA: Wonderful. Are there puddles?

EDGAR: More than you can count. We accidentally walk through them, and you have to wash our clothes constantly.

WILLA: Do we have children?

EDGAR: We do. Four of them.

WILLA: And do they run through the puddles as well?

EDGAR: You know our children. They love to play and then track their dirty feet through our house.

WILLA: Oh, Robert, Jane, Frieda and Willoughby.

EDGAR: How did you know the names of our children?

WILLA: You forget, I can see the future too, darling.

EDGAR: Of course. How could I be so foolish?

WILLA: I think you are the wisest fool that's ever been.

EDGAR: Because I fell in love with you. Willa?

WILLA: Yes, my love.

EDGAR: I want you to meet my father.

WILLA: You do? Of course I want to meet your father. I wanted to ask, but I thought everything was moving too fast and that it might be too soon.

EDGAR: Too soon? Don't be silly. I have looked forward and seen our entire future together, and now looking back, it is as if I have known you for a lifetime.

WILLA: You take my breath away.

EDGAR: How did I know you were going to say that?

WILLA: Oh, you.

EDGAR: So, when do you want to meet him? How about tomorrow morning?

WILLA: I can't wait. What will we do until then?

EDGAR: I think you know.

WILLA: Oh, of course I do.

END OF ACT ONE

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