

Smoke and Mirrors

written by

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FADE IN:

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

ABBY, a performer in her late twenties, stands onstage in a sparkling bodysuit gesturing to MARK, her brother and magician in his early 30s who pulls a card from a deck.

MARK

This must be your card!

With a lack of applause, Abby's face cracks, realizing that Mark's trick is falling flat on its face. Mark glances over, trying not to break character but clearly begins to panic. He pulls another card.

MARK (CONT.)

Ah ha. Of course. THIS must be your card!

The audience remains silent. The audience member who pulled the card initially visibly cringes.

ABBY

Allow me...

Abby steps into the spotlight and snaps her fingers. In a flash, the right card appears. The audience applauds. Abby goes to bow as Mark elbows past to take his own prolonged bow.

MARK

That's my show everyone. Thank you all for coming. Tell your friends and have a great night.

Abby's glare could burn a hole in the back of his head.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Abby sits, defeated, in her dressing room with her makeup half off, glaring at the cork of the champagne on the table. As her stare intensifies, the cork begins to shake out of the bottle. As the cork pops out of the bottle, the door slams open. Abby jumps.

MARK

Ohhh... Celebrating are we?

Before Abby can grab another glass, Mark intercepts the bottle and pours himself a glass, purposefully not offering any to Abby. Abby points to the card next to the bottle.

ABBY

From Mom and Dad, to you.

MARK

What are we celebrating? Your big debut?

More focused on avoiding confrontation than pouring herself a drink, Abby reaches for a second glass.

ABBY

I'll cheers to that. Sure. To my debut or whatever you want to call it.

MARK

Felt good, didn't it? That bright ass spotlight?

ABBY

Yeah! Sure. I don't know. I felt like it was a pretty smooth save.

MARK

(bitterly)

It's misdirection. It didn't need saving.

Mark is trying not to snap. He aggressively shoots his entire glass of champagne.

MARK

(eerily pointed)

How'd you do it?

ABBY

(coyly)

A magician never tells her secrets-

MARK

-YOU'RE not the magician! I'M the magician! While we're at it, I noticed you took your sweet ass time with that little bow at the end. Don't get used to it. Hustle the curtain call a little, alright?

In the nick of time, TIM, Mark's agent knocks on the door and

lets himself in.

TIM

Oh good, you guys wasted no time with the champagne. Cheers. Nice finale trick by the way. Didn't recognize that one from rehearsal.

Every praiseful word grinds Marks gears more. Abby gives a smile to Tim before slumping her head again. A gut-wrenching silence falls over the dressing room.

MARK

(begrudgingly)

What's up, Tim?

Tim begins to work his way over to the alcohol. He begins pouring himself a glass dramatically.

TIM

Just wanted to let y'all know that a talent scout might've seen tonight's show and might've offered to bring the routine out to Vegas for a test run on a new TV competition. Apparently you'll be in the premiere episode if you nail it. Taping's in a week. Saturday. No biggie.

Tim puts the bottle down and raises his glass.

MARK

That's the kind of news I like to hear.

Mark switches on dime, raising his glass and suddenly feeling like a king.

MARK (CONT.)

To Vegas!

Tim and Mark clink their champagne, throw back their drinks, and slam the glasses down. Tim leaves. Abby is left hanging.

MARK (CONT.)

Don't fuck this up for me, alright? I told Mom that I'd protect you, so it would be a damn shame if your little secret got out.

Mark glares back at Abby before leaving and slamming the door

behind him.

ABBY  
(under her breath)  
... To Vegas.

Abby takes one final gulp of champagne, hoping it will make the new journey seem like a good idea.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ABBY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Abby empties out the bottle of champagne straight into her mouth. As she stares drunkenly ahead, the cork of the bottle floats in mid air in front of the faint light of the television.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
Coming soon! A new talent competition  
is coming to your television. Acts  
from all over come to Las Vegas to  
battle it out to become America's next  
superstar-

Abby jolts out her hand as the remote flies across the room into her grasp. She clicks off the TV. We see the confines of her messy, shoebox of an apartment seemingly close in around her as she falls into a drunken stupor.

CUT TO:

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - MORNING

Abby, groggy and hungover, trudges in while Mark stands in the middle of the rehearsal studio, talking himself through his grandiose vision for his act.

MARK  
What do you mean you didn't have money  
for the bus.

ABBY  
I don't know. I just didn't have cash  
on me I guess... or at all. Does it  
matter? I walked all the way here just  
for you. You're welcome.

MARK  
You're acting like I don't pay you or  
some shit. Whatever. I was thinking

about our production value. I feel like our act right now doesn't play well for-

ABBY

-For a normal-sized theater?

MARK

I was going to say for the cameras, but touché.

ABBY

Mark, I thought I made it painfully obvious two seconds ago that we don't have the money for any type "production value."

MARK

Then I guess we'll just have to buck up now and win the goddamn competition.

ABBY

Mark-

MARK

I don't care Abby! If I want to levitate then I'll find a way to fucking levitate.

ABBY

Alright what are some better tricks to try?

MARK

The key is stunts. It's all about that Hollywood bullshit.

ABBY

Last time I checked you weren't Criss Angel, so let's reel it in.

MARK

Until you've got your own act and pay your own bills, I'll make the calls.

Abby clenches her jaw to keep her from saying something equally as idiotic.

MARK (CONT.)

Great. Can we begin?

Abby raises one eyebrow in disgust.

MARK (CONT.)  
I'll take that as a yes.

FADE TO:

EXT. PLAZA - EVENING

Abby is shuffling a deck of cards on the sidewalk near the plaza.

ABBY  
(tentatively)  
Pick a card. Any card.

People are continuously passing her without batting an eye. A TEENAGER walks up awkwardly.

ABBY (CONT.)  
Check this out!

Abby flicks the card in her hand and it switches to another card out of nowhere. The teenager puts a 5 dollar bill in the hat in front of Abby but barely stays to watch the trick.

ABBY (CONT.)  
Thanks.

Abby looks at the Ace of Hearts in her hand. As she grips tighter, the card bursts into flames. Abby quickly stomps it out.

CUT TO:

INT. ABBY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Abby dumps out the hat of change onto the counter. Abby picks out a penny. As she closes her fist around it, she crushes it. Abby grabs her phone and regretfully dials a number.

ABBY  
Hey.

MOM (V.O.)  
Hello?

ABBY  
It's me Mom.

MOM (V.O.)  
Oh. Hi Abigail.

ABBY  
Hey, I know we haven't talked in a minute. Thanks for coming to the show. I just wanted to see if you guys could maybe like spot me for a little bit.

MOM (V.O.)  
Doesn't Mark pay you?

ABBY  
Well yeah, but... I don't know. It's not really a living wage.

MOM (V.O.)  
Can't you just be grateful for Mark. He's always had your back, and he's never asked us for money-

Abby abruptly hangs up. Abby then takes the now useless coin and fires it at the empty champagne. The bottle shatters. Abby seethes.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STOP - MORNING

The bus pulls up to Abby's stop. On the side of the bus is a huge sign for another local magic show. Abby looks over at the bus doors and jams them momentarily while she reads. For the first time in a while, Abby's face lights up with hope. Abby walks over to the door, unjamming it and stepping in.

BUS DRIVER  
Sorry about that. Door's being weird.

ABBY  
No worries at all!

Abby proudly inserts her bus fee and walks back into the bus.

FADE TO:

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY

Abby is building a new top platform to their set for a new trick. Mark walks into the studio.



MARK

Well you're here early. What's all this?

ABBY

You said you wanted to levitate right?

MARK

I mean I guess.

ABBY

Step right on up and prepare your card trick.

Mark hesitantly joins Abby on the top of the set.

MARK

No explanation? You're just gonna make me leap to my death, and I'm just supposed to trust you?

ABBY

Yeah. Exactly.

MARK

Abby this better not be some bullshit with your powers.

ABBY

A magician never tells her-

MARK

I'M the magician.

ABBY

(lying)

Chill out. It's a stunt. You said it yourself. "Hollywood" shit, right?

MARK

I swear to God if you pull some shit right now I'm taking you to hell with me.

ABBY

Oh my Goooooooood. Mark. It'll be fine. Just make sure you're wearing this belt. The magnet on the back will catch on the platform on the way down.

Abby throws tosses Mark a placebo belt. The belt is crudely

made to look technologically advanced.

ABBY (CONT.)

Step off, pull the card, and say the damn line. I promise it's gonna work. It *has* to work.

Mark holds the belt out in front of him.

MARK

A magnet? Is gonna catch me?

ABBY

Yeah. Why wouldn't it?

Mark looks back at her skeptically. Abby starts to bullshit her way through the logic in order to make Mark trust her.

ABBY (CONT.)

Come on. Didn't you take physics? Inverse square law?

Mark looks over the edge, seemingly at his grave. The height would be fatal if something went wrong. Mark tries not to show his fear or lack of science knowledge. Mark attempts to regain his confidence and nods, pretending to understand.

MARK

Sure. Yeah. Obviously.

Mark puts on the belt and puts his toes over the edge. He takes a baby step off and begins to fall. Halfway to the ground, Abby extends her hands and catches him. Mark's heart beats out of his chest and she lowers him down to the stage.

ABBY

See? Easy! That's a finale if I've ever seen one.

MARK

Jesus Christ, Abby. Fine. You're right. You got me what I asked for I guess. Why are you suddenly so gung-ho this morning.

ABBY

I want to tryout my own act.

MARK

What?

ABBY

I don't know I just feel like it might be cool to test out some of my own tricks.

MARK

But you're my assistant. Where is this coming from?

ABBY

There's an open mic talent show at The Spirit downtown tomorrow night. Can you get me in?

MARK

I'm sure I can, but I just don't understand. We have a gig literally this weekend. Why now?

ABBY

A 5 minute set. That's it. That's all I want.

MARK

Is that the only reason you figured this whole finale out?

ABBY

No, but I guess you kinda owe me one.

MARK

Alright. Fine. You better not pull any actual magic shit though. I'll call up Diego and see what I can do.

ABBY

Thank you.

FADE TO:

INT. THE SPIRIT - NIGHT

Abby waits backstage nervously. She awkwardly waves at a few of the other acts. She looks around the bar for DIEGO. Abby walks over to Diego who is going over the list of acts with the SOUND TECHIE.

ABBY

Hey. Diego, right?

DIEGO

Hey! Do I know you?

ABBY

Oh um yeah! Well not formally, but I'm part of the talent for tonight. I just wanted to check to see where I'm at in the lineup.

DIEGO

Lemme see... Yeah I don't actually see an Abby on my list.

ABBY

Oh sure. It's probably under Mark. My brother called to request the slot.

DIEGO

Yeah, no Mark either. Sorry, you might have to try again next week.

ABBY

Well can't you just give me like a 5 minute set or something?

DIEGO

Sorry I can't make exceptions for a first timer. I hate to say it.

ABBY

(stammering)

Alright. I mean... yeah sure. Alright I'll be outside if you happened to need an extra act.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SPIRIT - NIGHT

Abby stands outside, trying to call Mark, but every call goes to voicemail. She looks up at the marquee. A picture of JASON, the famous magician on the side of the bus shines above The Spirit bar. The sign reads:

Shows every night Thurs-Sat!

Abby's scowl softens slightly.

FADE TO:

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - DAY

Mark and Abby are grabbing the materials to build their set pieces.

MARK

So they just didn't have your name and then they wouldn't let you go anyway?

ABBY

Yep. Fucking stupid. I don't get it.

MARK

(disingenuously)

Damn. That's rough. Well there'll be other opportunities I'm sure. For now, we gotta focus on Vegas. Then maybe your mind will be changed on having your own act.

ABBY

It was you.

MARK

What?

ABBY

I fucking knew it.

MARK

What are you talking about?

ABBY

God fucking dammit. You didn't even bother calling. What is so bad about me wanting to have my own act? I don't get it?

MARK

You're MY assistant, Abby. Why do you want out so badly?

ABBY

That's literally the problem. You wouldn't be shit without me, yet somehow you can't even be bothered to give me a bow or more than a few bucks a week.

MARK

I don't get it. If you're so special

then why are you still trying to steal my spotlight?

ABBY

Guess I'll stop trying then. It would be shame if Jason happened to treat me with an ounce of respect and I jumped ship?

MARK

Abby. One day away from the competition. What the hell?

ABBY

It doesn't matter anymore. You told me to make something of myself-

MARK

You're going too far. This is why I never bothered calling Diego. You just fuck me over time and time again and you're ungrateful the whole way through. Clearly you want nothing to do with me.

ABBY

Maybe I don't.

Abby begins to walk toward the door.

MARK

No you don't get to quit on me.

Abby stops dead in her tracks.

MARK

I won't let you to come to Vegas tomorrow. I've got to get all this shit to the theater. Fuck it. I'll do the show without you. I don't have time for this.

After a pause, she storms out of the studio, emboldened to prove her worth.

CUT TO:

INT. LOCAL MAGIC SHOW - NIGHT

Abby sits in the audience watching as Jason presents his final trick. The crowd goes wild, and Abby nods her head

approvingly.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAGIC SHOW STAGE DOOR - NIGHT

Abby barely musters up the courage to catch Jason at the stage door after the show, resume in hand.

ABBY

Hi. Sorry, I don't mean to intrude. I was at your show. I'm a budding magician in the area and I was just wondering if you might be looking for any performers to open for you? Not that your act lacked anything I just feel like I might have the power... the chops to complete your show.

Abby shakily hands over her headshot and resume.

JASON

All of this is more just assistant experience rather than actual gigs you headlined. What makes you so special.

Abby snaps and a business card appears in her hand.

ABBY

Thoughts? Gimme a call when you get the chance. I'll have my agent work something out.

JASON

You don't have an agent. It literally says on your resume.

ABBY

Ok well gimme a chance anyway. I don't have representation yet, but that's where you come in.

JASON

Wait. Do you know Mark Mercer?

ABBY

My brother. Magic runs in the family I guess.

JASON

I wouldn't want to steal you away from

him.

ABBY

I'm just his assistant. I want to try  
out my own act.

Jason is halfway in the car. He begins to close the door but  
pauses for a second.

JASON

Listen. I get a lot of amateurs asking  
for handouts. Once you get some actual  
experience under your belt, we can  
talk.

Abby clenches her fists and keeps the door open. Jason  
struggles, but Abby lets go, realizing that he's already  
casted her out. The door slams, and Jason looks curiously  
back as the car speeds off, leaving Abby in the exhaust.

FADE TO:

INT. ABBY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Abby dumps out some change again. Abby walks around the room  
and picks up the coins she threw in frustration. She is able  
to reform them back to their original state and adds them to  
her wallet. She collapses on the couch, performance outfit  
still on. Her phone rings from an unknown number. A voicemail  
comes through.

JASON (V.O.)

Hey! This is Jason. I'm assuming this  
is in fact your number on your resume.  
Listen, I was thinking about what your  
said before. You've got a natural  
spark to you, and I'd love to see what  
you can do. What are you up to  
tomorrow night? If you aren't too  
busy, I could use an opening act.  
Anyway, lemme know what you think.

Abby lays in a stunned silence after the phone clicks with  
hope in her eyes. After a moment, her phone dings again. She  
anxiously snatches her phone.

A notification shows a text from Mark:

Mark: Just wanted to say I'm sorry. I know I fucked up. You  
deserve to be at the show just as much as I do. I really want  
you to be there.



Abby slowly lowers her phone and stares at ceiling.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN STOP - NIGHT

Abby sprints for the train. She just makes it in. Realizing she is a dollar short, Abby insert one of the bills and then slyly conjures it back out to reuse it again. Abby holds her breath as the dollar slips back in. \*A DING\* indicating that Abby can get on.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

Mark has stepped up to the stage.

MARK

Ladies and Gentlemen! My name is Mark.  
I'm 33 years old, and I'm here to  
prove that I am America's Most  
Magnificent.

JUDGE

Is it just you today?

MARK

Yep... Looks like it's just me.

JUDGE

A one man show. Respect. You may begin  
whenever you're ready.

CUT TO:

INT. THE SPIRIT - NIGHT

Jason's show is about to begin.

ANNOUNCER

Welcome everybody! Thank you for  
coming to see this spectacular!

CUT TO:

EXT. THEATER - NIGHT

Abby, out of breath but full of determination, races up to the stage door. A SECURITY GUARD stands blocking.

ABBY

Hi. Yeah. Excuse me. Sorry. I'm apart  
of the show and I need to get  
backstage.

GUARD

Do you have any proof of entry.

Abby reaches for anything. She finds the deck of cards in her  
back pocket. She fumbles around with the cards, praying for a  
miracle.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

Mark begins shuffling his own deck of cards. Preparing his  
final trick of the set. He fans out the cards.

MARK

Pick a card... any card. I know. The  
oldest trick in the book. Literally.

A smattering of half-hearted laughter across the room.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Abby frantically rounds the corner of the hallway into the  
green room. The door to the stage is locked. Abby feels  
around in her pockets. She grabs a penny and begins to crush  
it in her palm. Quickly, she begins to shove the makeshift  
key into the door.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

Before taking his place at the top of the platform, Mark puts  
on the placebo belt, preparing for his leap of faith finale.  
He takes the deepest breath and begins to step slowly out  
over the edge toward his doom, his ego overtaking his doubt.

CUT TO:

INT. THE SPIRIT - NIGHT

The announcer steps back up onto stage.

## ANNOUNCER

Alright everyone. Let's give a warm  
welcome to our opening act for  
tonight... Of Mercer Magic fame...  
Making her mainstage debut... Abby  
Mercer!

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

Abby leaps out from backstage as Mark begins to plummet. Mark  
is realizes his fate.

ABBY

Allow me!

Abby raises both of her hands, and Mark's fall stops halfway  
to the ground. Mark looks as Abby nods and raises her  
eyebrows as if to say "finish the trick." Mark, unable to  
utter a word, pulls out the card and reveals it to the crowd.  
This time... he gets it right.

Abby lowers Mark the rest of the way. She stands in the  
spotlight as the audience erupts into thunderous applause.  
Mark takes to the front of the stage and takes his bow,  
clearly still shaken.

After a pause, Mark gestures back to Abby. Abby takes center  
stage once again and takes the final bow as the audience  
continues to lose their minds.

FADE OUT: