

HOAX: DON'T. BE. A SUCKER.

by Annelise Montone

in consultation with Brian Kehoe and Deirdre McAllister

For Brian.

"The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper."

— W.B. Yeats

Participatory magic show

To be performed July 22nd-August 20th, 2016 in Baltimore, Maryland

Length: 1.5 hours with one intermission [approx]

Seventh outline - Last revised June 25th, 2016

I. Pre-Show:

Outside the Tent [Hook, Line and Sucker]

[MAXWELL Fink stands just outside the "tent".]

MAXWELL: Step right up. Step right up. Step right up, why don't you? Won't you? Why not? Are you afraid? Well, are you? Big strong man like you, pretty little girl? That's what I thought. My name is Maxwell Fink and I'm here tonight for you, not for me. You're tired. You're tired of being pushed around. You're tired of being tricked. You're tired of being charmed, hocus-pocused. You're tired of the hocus pocus man. You're tired, and I'm...scared. See, a man like me has plenty of reasons to be afraid. There's only so long you can stay one step ahead, and I'm not getting any younger. So this show, friends, is one night only. One night, the last night. Lucky for you, I guess. But that's every game, really. There's mortality and there's whatever's after that, and there's law in life...and after too, I guess. And you can slip one, for awhile, anyway. But the other, that's what I'm not so sure about, anymore.

I was a rag and bone man, once. A traveller. A seeker. A fraud. Never again. But friends, I have repented, and I'm going to prove it. I know it sounds crazy, but it's true. [Pause.] I know the devil. I don't mean that the preacher *told* me about the devil. I met the man himself. I'm not crazy. It wasn't some old song, he wasn't on a train or in a Cadillac. The devil doesn't travel. He sits still. He sits at the movies, watching Elvis, just like the rest of us. And he looked like Elvis, too. And he told me that I looked a lot like him. Like the devil, not like Elvis. He smelled like fire and lies, and I know that scent well, folks. And, after that, then I decided I would quit, after that night. And I quit. I quit it all, for good. Me and SARAH, we quit it all for good. And now we're here with you, you good people. You God people. You people who have always walked in the sun.

Because you don't deserve it. You don't deserve to be lied to and fooled by bad men and bad women. I can't. I can't take it anymore. I have to tell you. I have to, or *else*, I think. You don't deserve it. So I'm going to tell, that's all. I...well, we, possibly...we're going to tell you how it is. And after we tell you, you'll know. You'll know, and we'll be free.

So, this is my show, like I said, one night only. There is always a time to begin and *now* is the time to begin.

A. The Golden Ball

[SARAH lets out an anguished wail.]

MAXWELL FINK: Not yet! Okay, not yet. So, well...uh...*[stalling for time]* I myself been called a liar. And a liar I am. But I'm not interested in that, not anymore. I'm interested in truth. I'm interested to see if I can still find the truth. You, there *[MAXWELL gets his four volunteers]*? You, sir? You? You Step up, this way. *[MAXWELL stands the volunteers in a row in front of the tent flaps]*. I have in my hand a red velvet bag. In the bag are balls of all colors. I will now place into the bag a golden ball, as gold as truth itself. Now, I'd like you all to pick a ball out of the bag. Make sure I cannot see the ball in your hands, in fact, why don't you take a look at it so you know the color and then put it completely out of sight behind your back. Are all the balls now behind your backs *[They answer "yes"]*. Here is the game. I will ask you a series of yes or no questions. The person who is holding the golden ball will answer my questions honestly. Everyone else will lie. Once again, if you are holding the golden ball, you will answer honestly, if you holding a ball of any other color, you will lie. I've been in this game a long time, I can smell who is lying and who is telling the truth. You'll see.

The questions.

Are you married?

Do you have any children?

Have you ever broken a bone?

Do you own at least one cat?

Is your favorite color green?

[MAXWELL closes his eyes, seems to listen or pause for something. He opens his eyes, points each individual in turn and shouts.]

Liar! Liar! Liar! And you. You are telling the truth. Open your hand, only him, please. *[They do and reveal that he is correct, the last individual is holding the golden ball.]* The truth always smells the same. And I even know which ball you've left for me - it's black *[produces the black ball from the bag]*. Yeah. It always is.

MAXWELL: And now, it's time. It's time. It's time? *[SARAH yells, MAXWELL nods, satisfied]* Now. Now, it is time to begin.

[He disappears into the tent and the guests enter, the house manager assists them with seating. MAXWELL disappears behind the stage. When the guests are seated, he re-enters.]

II. Mary Toth: The Hoax Favors The VAIN

MAXWELL: We're going back. We have to go back so I can show you exactly what I mean. Good men and women. Smart men and smart women. But tricked, fooled, just the same. I can't take it. It's time for it to end. I need...

[He uncovers and spins the wheel, it lands on a word.]

MAXWELL: [QUOTE] Vanity is our first lesson today, children. The hoax will always favor the vain.

[The projector switches on, he holds up a card onto which we see the words: BEWARE THE ENSNARING VANITY OF THE FLESH.]

MAXWELL: Let me demonstrate. *[He wheels out SARAH on the box.]* She *[indicates SARAH]* was Mary Toft, the Rabbit Woman of Goldaming. Twenty-five years old. Nobody from nowhere. And yet! And yet. This girl tricked the entire medical establishment of 1726.

A. Rabbit Production

MAXWELL FINK: Mary Toft made them all believe that she was giving birth to rabbits. The local surgeon, John Howard, even presided over the bloody bunny birth. Rabbits, well, parts of them, anyway *[He begins to pull bloody "rabbit" bits out of a trap door in the box]*, flooded out of Mary Toft. People were amazed, astonished. *[SARAH screams]* Convinced. Eventually, the king of England sent his surgeon to Toft's bedside. *[MAXWELL puts on a doctor's reflector band.]*

SARAH: I've been craving rabbit meat awfully badly, sirs and I've dreamed of rabbits! I've been trying to catch them in my garden!

MAXWELL: Mary Toft gave birth again and again. More and more and more. A Miracle of Science, it was! Those men thought they'd be rich, adored. Cherished for their amazing discovery. But Mary Toft was found out, and they were laughed at. *[SARAH laughs and exits to remove her dress.]*

MAXWELL: The flesh is vain, the flesh of the body. *[SARAH re-enters]* If it bleeds, they believe. *[SARAH curtsies.]* Con men use a lot of things to demonstrate their seeming honesty. To pull you in. Most are dramatic, quite gory. There is no better way to get them to cross your threshold. And then they're in for good. Just ask Sarah-

SARAH: Mary.

B. Needle Through Arm

MAXWELL: Whatever. If I want you to believe, if I want to gain your trust, all I have to do is mortify my flesh. The implements, please. *[SARAH brings out a tray with various wicked looking weapons on it - a small saw, maybe, a hypodermic needle.]* See here! *[MAXWELL rolls up his shirt sleeve.]* Would I dare? How far would I go?

First, we must cleanse the arm. Would you? *[SARAH spits on his arm.]*

Sanitize the arm, I mean, of course. [*SARAH sanitizes his arm from the bottle and wipes it off.*] Thank you.

And now, like Christ himself, I bleed. [*He hesitates, then indicates SARAH*] I will let you choose. [*SARAH picks up a long needle.*] Ah, the hat pin. The classics, they never get old.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a seven inch long ladies' hat pin. It made of steel and comes to a particularly sharp and wicked end. I will commence to shove this pin through my arm to prove that I am an honest man. Observe. [*MAXWELL dramatically shoves the needle through his arm and holds his arm into the air.*] [*Pause.*] And I think. You get. My point. [*Pause for the laugh/groan*]

You are overcome sensation, especially as the wound [*a thin trickle of blood appears*] begins to bleed. [*MAXWELL pulls out the needle and quickly bows*]. Beware those who earn your trust playing the geek! You believe your eyes because you don't know better. Cheap old tricks of the body. Like SARAH with her bloody rabbits-

SARAH: Mary.

MAXWELL: Yes! It's her blood, my blood that makes it honest. That makes it true. Thank you, Mary.

SARAH: Sarah.

MAXWELL: Sarah! [*He catches himself.*] Of course, Sarah. An introduction. This is my longtime ...business...partner, Ms. Sarah Swanson. Ms. Swanson, like myself, is dedicated to the exposure of fraudulent activity and has given up her life of crime to join me in educating the doubting public. A good living, yes, but what of our souls? [*MAXWELL gets the milk crate and sets it center*] Sarah will now tell you her story of a life depraved and of her salvation on the altar of truth.

[*SARAH is silent.*]

Let us move on.

C. Pulse Stopping

MAXWELL: A truly excellent con, one of my own device.

SARAH: One of our best.

MAXWELL: It's so simple. Beautiful, actually. A pretty girl walks by [*indicates SARAH*]. And you say to her: Why ma'am, you are so beautiful, you have literally stopped my heart. She protests but she stops, she's...interested. You've flattered her, her vanity, offered her something blushing of the flesh. A crowd grows, they too, are intrigued. You challenge one of them, a man, her man, maybe, ask if he believes you.

[*To the audience.*]

Do you? Do you believe me? Can I be standing here, in front of you, without a beating heart? [to a specific audience member]. Well, do you? [Ushers the male volunteer onto the stage.]

And now, I say: "Why ma'am you are so beautiful you have literally stopped my heart." And then, I say to you: "Sir, do you believe me?" And you have two options. The first, you say, "no." If you say "no", then you've said that you don't believe the woman to be beautiful, insulting her. So, then you're left with "yes". But "yes" is ridiculous, because, of course, I can't be standing here without my heart beating, it's impossible. So you hesitate, you think. She's impatient, you're not sure. You have to chose one, they're all looking at you and so you say:

[Volunteer says "yes"]

MAXWELL: Yes! He believes my heart can be stopped at will. But maybe the rest of you aren't so sure. [If the volunteer says "no" the line is "No! Oh, he of little faith!"] Ma'am will you please step over here [SARAH steps up to the the edge of the stage]. Sir, I would like you to stand here, next to me. Please observe my pulse [the volunteer takes MAXWELL's pulse]. You will tap out my pulse onto the box, please [the volunteer taps MAXWELL's pulse out onto the box]. Now, observe how I stay turned away from the lady. When I face her, though, I will be overcome and my heart will cease to beat. You will tap out my pulse, please. [The volunteer taps out MAXWELL's pulse onto the box, which slows until it eventually stops.] Ma'am, please, turn your face so that my heart may continue to beat once more. [SARAH turns and MAXWELL's pulse returns to normal.] And now he, her, the crowd, will follow you wherever you want to them to go.

And then it's on to next step.

[He spins the wheel and it lands on a word.]

MAXWELL: Ah, of course. [QUOTE] Money. Everything, from here on out, is, at it's core, about the money.

[The projected words change to BEWARE EASY MONEY, FOR BASE THIEVES ARE GIVEN TO FILTH].

III. Soapy Smith: The Hoax Favors The GREEDY

A. Introduction: Play Money to Real Money

MAXWELL: Ah, greed. Every scammer's bread and butter. The con at it's purest. Greed is a sin and everybody knows it, but boy to do they fall for it, every single time. Nothing [demonstrates the plain brown paper] becomes something [changes it to real money] right before your eyes. Even when you know that you can't get something for nothing. All for a little bit of money.

SARAH: A little bit of money, a little bit of money, so easy on your tongue. What'll I do? How will I-

MAXWELL: Sarah please. We talked about this.

SARAH: We did not talk about *this*-

MAXWELL: Shhhh. [*Sirens are heard.*]

SARAH: Hurry.

MAXWELL: Yeah.

[*SARAH turns away.*]

MAXWELL: You must conquer your greedy hearts. Once they've got you, they'll fleece you. I'll tell you a little story, now, about a man named Soapy Smith. Soapy Smith, 1871. The absolutely ingenious "Prize Package Soap Sell." Here's how it worked: Soapy would set up a suitcase on a street corner with piles and piles of soap inside, soap wrapped in plain brown paper. [*MAXWELL changes plays this out with his own suitcase, his own soap.*] Curious people stopped to look as Smith covered some of the soap with money, one dollar bills, two dollar bills, all the way up to a hundred dollar bills, and then he'd wrap them back up in the brown paper. Then, he would sell the soap for a buck, maybe five. The first to buy quickly found-

SARAH: "A hundred dollar bill! My God!"

MAXWELL: She was, of course, Soapy's skill, his plant -

SARAH: His partner.

MAXWELL: The greed pulsed through the crowd. They bought the bars, left and right, and rushed home to open their treasures. And of course, found out that were the proud owners of a five cent cake of soap. Soapy Smith operated for years and years before they tarred and feathered him. Laugh, sure, but it could be you. It so easily could be you. When you fancy yourself a gambler, remember, the house always wins. [*To SARAH*] Want to play some cards?

B. Aunt Mary's Terrible Secret

[*SARAH goes and fetches two volunteers from the house. She seats them at a table on the stage, with MAXWELL in the middle.*]

MAXWELL: Want to play some cards? Care to make it interesting? Of course you do. The game wouldn't be fair if we weren't playing for real money, so here it is: fifty-two American dollars, as many as there are cards in this deck. You see that this is real money? Not soap? Okay. Here's the game and it's an old one. It's called Blue and Gray. Blue and Gray is a Civil War game that old Soapy would have known and appreciated. [*Fans the cards removes the jokers.*] This is how it works. In every deck of cards, there are three color combinations: red/red, red/black and black/black. Right? [*Demonstrates.*] Now I'll ask you to shuffle the cards, I won't touch them, Sarah won't touch them. Good. [*Throws the cards out.*] Now you, and you alone, have decided who is going to win Blue and Gray, I haven't had anything to do with it. Alright, now, will you take red or black? [*They choose.*] So I will be mixed, both red and black. Sarah will keep track [*SARAH fetches the chalkboard, which has "red" and "black" and "mixed" written in three columns, she will "keep score".*] MAXWELL deals the

deck through, while shouting the combos back to Sarah, who marks them on the board and tells him the scores.] So, that makes me the winner, house takes all.

But you say, it's a dirty deck, right? Alright, so, we'll go again. Sarah, new deck! [*SARAH throws a deck of wrapped cards at him, he catches it and offers it to the opposite person who shuffled before.*] Is it sealed, new? Has it been tampered with, to your eyes? Plastic intact? All right, please open the deck. And, here we go again [*the trick is repeated*]. And I win, I take all. I will always take all. That's the thing, my friends, you can never win when you play with me. It'll never happen.

SARAH: And it never has.

MAXWELL: That's what I'm saying. You can't win with me. Leave your wallets in your pockets and your money at home, I'm begging you.

SARAH: You can sit now.

MAXWELL: [*Grabs their hands.*] You can never win when you play the game. So will you? Will you do that?

SARAH: Let them go, Max, for God's sake! What the hell is *wrong* with you?

MAXWELL: All right. All right. [*He lets them go, but he's ruffled.*] I'm sorry, I'm just so...okay. A break. I need a smoke!

[Intermission, 15 Minutes.]

IV. Magic Device: The Hoax Favors The STUPID

A. Fire to a Block of Ice

[And, we're back. MAXWELL enters the stage without SARAH. He's holding a glass of bourbon.]

MAXWELL: Ladies and gentlemen, we have covered the way a swindler might try to ensnare you with the shocking flesh of the body and then crudely steal your money by preying on your natural greed.

[SARAH enters, out of breath.]

MAXWELL: Nice of you to join us.

SARAH: Give me that.

MAXWELL: No.

[SARAH grabs his glass, puts it in a box, and sits down on the box defiantly. MAXWELL gets another glass from another box.]

[MAXWELL spins the wheel. It lands on a word.]

MAXWELL: [QUOTE] Stupidity.

SARAH: Oh, one you might be able to do.

[MAXWELL ignores her, picks up the card and the projected words are: BEWARE THE MAN WHO COMES WITH A MYSTERIOUS DEVICE.]

MAXWELL: We move now to a subtler form of cruelty: the con man who can enter your mind. Here too, he seeks to win your trust and take your hard-earned cash, but his methods are gentle in nature. It is here that I excelled the most in my day, I am sorry to say.

[He jumps down off of the stage and goes into the audience.]

But now, in front of you good people, I repent. Beware the scientist who talks too fast. Science is, at its core, a noble and beautiful pursuit, essential for the good of all. But it can also be used to dazzle, trick, to deceive and, ultimately, to steal. [MAXWELL pulls a lighter out of his pocket while he speaks. He moves the fire to his hand. To audience member.] Hold out your hand. You see, a shrewd man can even seem to manipulate the elements. He may even say he can change the heat of fire [he takes the flame and squeezes it between his palms, a block of ice drops out] to the coldness of ice. Beware! The scientist who comes with a mysterious, impossible device!

B. Light and Heavy Chest

MAXWELL: [SARAH uncovers the box] Such as this. This box, this quiet, small, unassuming box, has convinced even the most skeptical to invest hundreds, thousands, millions of dollars in what it purports to do. You'll see. I need a volunteer. Are you a trusting person? [SARAH snatches the glass away from him and puts it in a box.] All right, fine, that's fine. First, I'd like you to lift the box and place it on the table. Was that difficult at all for you? Very good. I'll need something from you, now, something personal. It won't be broken or taken, I promise. Anything will do, a pair of eyeglasses, a necklace - yes, all right, thank you. I will place this item in the box. Now, this amazing

SARAH: Never-Before-Seen Scientific Device-

MAXWELL: -will do-

SARAH: the impossible.

MAXWELL: Ma'am, I would like you to please, lift the box. [She does and she can't lift it.] Try harder, really pull. [She does, she still can't lift it.] You see, the box takes your item and reads from it all it needs to know about you. It does this in order to fulfill the purpose of its invention: to steal your strength and sap your will. Think of the applications! Government, military, the possibilities are endless. Now, let's open the box. [SARAH steps forward and opens the box.] Give her back her item. [SARAH hands the woman an item, but it's not hers, it's something else. There is a moment, and then

the volunteer will probably protest.] Sarah. [SARAH sighs and again, hands her the wrong item. A wordless exchange passes between SARAH and MAXWELL and then she gives the woman back her original item.]. Thank you. Now, you may easily lift the box. And there you have it, a mysterious device with limitless applications, not the least of which is charming the stupid.

[SARAH crosses her arms and stares at him.]

MAXWELL: Sarah, spin the wheel. That's what I need you to do. That's all I need you to do. Just spin. The. Wheel.

SARAH: No.

MAXWELL: Do it.

SARAH: That was too far. It was never just yours.

MAXWELL: Sarah!

[Sarah leaves the stage and begins to walk away.]

MAXWELL: Fine! Fine. I'll do it myself.

SARAH: That's for sure.

MAXWELL: Okay, you know what? *[Goes to another box and gets another bourbon glass]* I think it's time to hire a new employee, someone who might be a little easier to work with. *[Indicates an audience member]* Come on up. Go ahead and bring your chair with you.

[The audience member comes up, MAXWELL places the chair to the right of the wheel.]

MAXWELL: Don't worry if you haven't got experience, it's the easiest thing in the world, I mean, honestly, a trained monkey could do it. All I need you to do is spin the wheel. Got it? Okay, go!

[Audience member spins the wheel. It lands on a word.]

All right, now, wheel spinner! Spin! Now sit. Not so hard, is it?

V. Ghosts of Versailles: The Hoax Favors The HOPEFUL

A. The Thing to Spoon Bending

[Audience member spins the wheel and it lands on a word]

MAXWELL: [QUOTE] That's the worst. Hope. Hey, you. You, New Sarah. Take this card and stand right here, okay? Just stand here until I tell you to move? Good. So talented! A natural!

[Audience member picks up the card and the projected words read: *GUARD AGAINST THE SWEET FRUIT OF IMMORTALITY.*]

MAXWELL: There are those who use the most human of emotions: the longing for the beyond, for something...else. [He takes a handkerchief from his pocket, it transforms into *The Thing* as he speaks.] This scum has no conscience, and, if there is any justice, he will get what he deserves. It turns your stomach really. Lying to some poor woman whose child has died, telling her you are in touch with the other side. Saying you can do what only God can do. It's sick. [*The Thing* transforms back into a handkerchief, he shakes his head as he puts it away.] It's sick, and it's profitable. [To audience member.] Okay, now, go get me the spoon tray...the tray on the red box, pick it up and bring it over here. [Audience member brings up the tray with the three spoons on it. MAXWELL picks up one of the spoons.] There are those who claim, as proof of their so-called abilities, to be able to affect the physical world with their minds. [MAXWELL concentrates and bends the first spoon, second spoon, third spoon, throws them to the floor.]

B. The Ghosts of Versailles

[SARAH moves onto the floor to set up the Versailles transparencies.]

MAXWELL: [MAXWELL goes to a box and gets another glass of bourbon out of it, and then hands audience member the card again.] You remember, right? Just stand there. In 1911, two English women named, allegedly, Elizabeth Morison and Frances Lamont but actually Charlotte Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain, wrote a book that told an astonishing tale. Ten years earlier, they had been touring the famous grounds of Versailles, former home of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI. They became confused, lost. Eventually, they wandered far enough that they encountered a strange woman. The woman was shaking a large white sheet out of a window [SARAH puts down the transparency]. Then, they noticed a little girl in the doorway of a farmhouse and a woman, holding out a jug [SARAH puts down the transparency] Morison and Lamont reported that:

SARAH: [Heckling, from the audience] "Everything suddenly looked unnatural, therefore unpleasant, even the trees seemed to become flat and lifeless, like wood worked in tapestry."

MAXWELL: They came across a man wearing a dark cloak and an evil expression [SARAH puts down the transparency] And finally, a woman in a summer hat in a light dress [SARAH puts down the transparency]. The Queen herself! A time traveling Marie, a ghost! And, just from this, just from this book where they screamed ghost, ghost, they would become rich. The biggest lie, told so brazen, strangely makes one gullible by its very audacity. And with what? Ghosts! The most stupid nonsense. Ghosts and the afterlife. We can have ghosts right here, right now. I'll show you. You go sit over there, by the wheel.

C. Tiny Seance

MAXWELL: I need two volunteers. [Gets the volunteers up, seats them at the table] I will show you how easy it is to fraudulently contact the dead. A seance! I will first demonstrate the art of spirit writing. Observe. These chalkboards are completely clean. The false medium will claim that the spirits can translate a message written on the first chalkboard to the clean ones below, without regard for physics. I will write a message on the board, how about [he writes out] "False prophet". Read that out for me.