

The Charlatan

By

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WGAE Registered

FADE IN:

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

The AUDITORIUM is a full house, standing room only. Most of the patrons are middle aged and older women. All eyes are glued to the STAGE where one STIRLING HOPE (early 30s, flashy, charming) is conducting a psychic reading. He's wearing a hands-free MICROPHONE so all can hear.

Stirling is standing facing a CRYING WOMAN (40s) in the front row. She's crying tears of happiness.

STIRLING

Your mother says she loves you very much. And something about a ring? Did she give you her wedding ring?

CRYING WOMAN

I wear it every day.

The woman holds up her hand to reveal the RING.

STIRLING

She wanted you to have a reminder of her with you always. Are you one of two? You have a... brother.

CRYING WOMAN

I do have a brother!

STIRLING

He's going to play a big part in your future.

The woman nods, overcome with the reading and the accuracy. She brushes away the tears, waiting to hear more.

STIRLING

Your mother is telling me you have children.

(beat - thinking)

One, two, three. Three children.

CRYING WOMAN

I have three kids! I can't believe it. Can you tell my mother that I love her and I miss her?

STIRLING

You just did.

(CONTINUED)

Stirling smiles and takes a step back, opening his arms to the crowd. The audience burst into a round of APPLAUSE. He revels in it, enjoying every last minute.

After a beat while the applause subsides, Stirling stands there rubbing his hands together. He's channeling another dead relative.

As he looks around, an EXTREME CU of his EARPIECE. He presses it in a little tighter.

INT. BACKSTAGE AUDITORIUM - SAME TIME

Backstage in a dark little corner is MADDY (20s, cynical, a little angry all the time). She's watching a TV MONITOR and consulting a NOTEBOOK. She too wears a HEADSET. She presses the SPEAK button.

MADDY

Look to your right, the woman with a yellow top. Her husband died four years ago. His name was George.

Maddy lets go of the speak button and watches.

INT. AUDITORIUM - SAME TIME

Stirling has received the message loud and clear. He walks towards a WOMAN in a yellow shirt (60s) as if being drawn there.

STIRLING

I'm getting the name George and I feel like I need to speak with you.

The woman's mouth drops open in shock. She looks to those surrounding her, trying to believe she's been chosen.

WOMAN IN YELLOW

George was my husband.

STIRLING

I know.

Stirling grins his cheesy grin again and gestures to the audience cuing another round of APPLAUSE. Lights FLASH and dramatic music plays. It's a very flashy display.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

After the show, Stirling is conducting a BOOK SIGNING and AUTOGRAPH SESSION. Signs with his cheesy face are all over the place, along with a hefty PRICE LIST. He's charging for - and selling - everything; his book, his DVD, a photo with him, his autograph, even a hug costs \$5.

The prices aren't stopping anyone. There is a long QUEUE to his table that goes out beyond the door. Stirling gets through them super quick.

Standing in the wings is agent ARTIE ROWLEY (50s, bad comb over) and publicist LIV MONROE (20s, cute).

ON ARTIE AND LIV

ARTIE
Great show today, huh kid?

LIV
I told you not to call me that.

ARTIE
Fine. Great show today, huh angry woman?

All Liv can do is roll her eyes and move on. She's had that conversation too many times.

LIV
For the record, my name is Liv and that is what I prefer to be called. Otherwise, it was great, Stirling was on fire. It's always amazing watching him work. I don't know how he does it.

ARTIE
(sarcastic)
Yeah, he's a miracle worker.

ON STIRLING - taking MONEY from a woman and signing a PHOTO for her.

STIRLING
You enjoy that. Thank you for coming.

He greets the next woman in line and signs a BOOK. He holds it up next to his face, the exact same face is on the book, complete with the smile. He makes the woman laugh before he hands it over to her.

(CONTINUED)

STIRLING

Enjoy the book. May I suggest
reading it in a soapy bubble bath?

The woman raises her eyebrow, loving the innuendo. Stirling winks, enjoying every minute of his session.

EXT. HOPE MANSION - NIGHT

Hope Mansion stands as a sign of wealth, double storey and huge. The grounds seem to go on forever. It is protected by large fences. A LIMO drives through the elaborate front GATE with the initials S.H. and pulls up out the front. Stirling and Artie get out and head for the front door.

INT. HOPE MANSION - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Stirling and Artie enter the kitchen, still pumped from the show. Artie carries a BRIEFCASE which he places on the bench.

STIRLING

I'm starving.

Stirling starts opening cupboard doors and the refrigerator in his quest for a meal.

ARTIE

Today was a goldmine, Stirling. We must have made at least a couple dozen grand.

Stirling finds something edible and joins Artie at the counter. Artie opens the briefcase with pride. Inside are WADS OF CASH.

STIRLING

Couldn't have done it without you Artie. You're everything I could hope for in a manager.

ARTIE

Don't think that we're done yet. You still working on the follow up book? "Your Psychic life part 2"?

STIRLING

Of course.

(CONTINUED)

ARTIE

And the gullible woman's weekly column?

STIRLING

Otherwise known as the Monthly Woman's journal. And yes. I'm almost finished with next month's submission.

ARTIE

Good. I'm going then. The wife is making a roast.

STIRLING

Oh, a roast?

Stirling looks at his half eaten meal that is nothing compared to a real home cooked dish.

ARTIE

I told you, hire a cook. You've got more than enough dough. See what I did there? Dough, cook?

STIRLING

Hilarious.

Artie takes a handful of the cash.

ARTIE

This should cover my cut. Goodbye Stirling. My roast awaits.

He leaves Stirling to finish his meal by himself.

INT. HOPE MANSION - STUDY - NIGHT

Stirling pours himself a SCOTCH and settles in front of his computer. The study is distinguished, full of dark wood furniture, tiffany lamps, and heavy curtains.

Stirling speaks to himself while typing on his computer. He's still in high spirits from the day's work.

STIRLING

Dear Stirling Hope, my son passed away last year and I need to know that he's okay.

He thinks it over.

(CONTINUED)

STIRLING

Dear Worried Mother, your son is happy and doesn't know why you have to worry so much. Just like in life, he needs some space.

Stirling chuckles to himself. He takes a sip of his scotch and leans back to enjoy being so wonderful.

STIRLING

Done. Next. Dear Mr Hope, I have misplaced by mother's antique pearl necklace, can you please ask her where I put it.

(beat)

Ooh, a hard one. Hmmm.

(beat)

Dear Miss Loser of Things, your mother thinks you should be more careful with her jewelry. However, I feel that if you looked in your closet, you will find the necklace.

He shakes his head and takes another drink before continuing on.

INT. HOPE MANSION - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Stirling is enjoying a HOT SHOWER, steam filling the room. He lets the water run over his body for the last time before turning off the water.

He steps out of the shower, his hand searching for a towel. As he does, he SLIPS and falls to the floor with a loud THUD.

Stirling doesn't move, he's completely knocked unconscious.

TIME FADE TO:

INT. HOPE MANSION - BATHROOM - MORNING

Artie opens the bathroom door and calls out Stirling's name. He carefully enters the bathroom and spots Stirling on the floor. He hurries over and tries to wake him, he can't. He pulls out his CELL PHONE and dials in a panic.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Stirling is lying on a TROLLEY and being hurried through the ER. Several NURSES, DOCTORS, and EMT's are flanking the trolley.

EMT

White male, thirty-three years old.
Was found unresponsive this morning
on his bathroom floor. His vitals
are tacky.

DOCTOR

Any idea how long he's been out?

EMT

Couldn't say. His agent found him
this morning when he wasn't
answering his phone. Could have
been there all night. Looks like he
fell out of the shower.

Suddenly, Stirling crashes. The group go into crisis mode.

DOCTOR

He's crashing. Get me a cart!

A NURSE hurries away as the doctor starts manual CPR. The same nurse quickly returns with a DEFIBRILLATOR. The doctor fires up the paddles and give him a few SHOCKS.

DOCTOR

He's back. Let's get him to a room
before we lose him again.

They hurry off. Artie follows them, still in a panic.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Stirling lays on the hospital bed, hooked up to a bunch of machines. He's been stabilized, he'll live. Artie and Liv keep a vigil at his bedside.

LIV

He was just lying on the floor?

ARTIE

Lying there like a dead man. It
almost gave me a heart attack.

(CONTINUED)

LIV
(re: Stirling)
Poor thing.

ARTIE
I know. At my age, my ticker can't
handle these shocks.

LIV
I was talking about Stirling.

ARTIE
Oh, right. Doc says he's going to
be fine once the swelling on his
brain goes away. It was touch and
go there for a while though.

LIV
He does so much for people, he
doesn't deserve something like
this.

Artie nods in agreement. They return to sitting in silence
again.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Some time has passed, there are not so many machines
surrounding Stirling now. He is no longer incubated.
Stirling slowly stirs to life. He opens his eyes and takes
in his surroundings.

As Stirling looks around, he realizes the room is packed
full of all types of PEOPLE. They are everywhere, there is
barely room for anyone else.

STIRLING
What's going on?

Hearing his voice, the people all look at him, seeing that
he has awoken. One man in particular, JASON (40s) steps
forward.

JASON
Hey everyone, he's awake.

Everyone turns to look and rush to his bedside. After a beat
of silence, they all start YELLING ABUSE at him. A group of
three are closest to the bed, LUCAS (50s), MATT (60s), and
RACHEL (50s).

(CONTINUED)

LUCAS

You told my wife I was angry

MATT

You told my son he disappointed me.

RACHEL

You implied I had a lover.

Stirling can't take the abuse. He thrashes from side to side, trying to cover his ears and make them go away.

STIRLING

Go away! Go away! Please leave me alone.

The crowd doesn't relent, they are fired up and angry. Stirling continues with his pleading.

The crowd will consist of the same people throughout the story unless an individual specifically disappears or joins them. There are approximately twenty people in the crowd. They look and act like regular people, a mix of ages, races, and genders.

A NURSE enters. As she steps into the room, all the people suddenly DISAPPEAR. She INJECTS a sedative into Stirling to calm him, quickly sending him back to sleep.

TIME FADE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Another night has passed and Stirling is ready to wake up again. He opens one eye carefully, he spots the group of people again and quickly opens the other eye.

STIRLING

Who are all you people?

The crowd see that he is awake and rush to his bedside again. This time, Jason holds an arm out, signaling them to be quiet.

RACHEL

(to Jason)

We need to talk to him.

JASON

He needs to be conscious first.

(CONTINUED)

STIRLING

What do you want with me?

JASON

We want to talk to you, my name is Jason, this is Rachel. That's Matt, Lucas, Nathan, Demi, and you'll get to know everyone else. Are you going to freak out again?

STIRLING

What do you want?

JASON

You have been pretending to be psychic. For two years now you've been relaying 'messages' to people from their dearly departed.

STIRLING

No I haven't. How dare you accuse me like that?

JASON

Easy. It's true. You can drop the charade. You aren't fooling anyone in this room.

STIRLING

What are you?

JASON

We're the dearly departed. All those spirits that you've apparently been communicating with.

The penny drops for Stirling. He starts shaking his head with the realization.

STIRLING

No. No!

JASON

Oh yeah. And we're a little annoyed.

LUCAS

A little? More like steam coming from ears annoyed.

MATT

You've ruined my family.

(CONTINUED)