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COLUMBO
THE CURSE OF SORCERY CIRCUS

Written

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THE CURSE OF SORCERY CIRCUS

FADE IN

EXT. URBAN FIELD - DUSK

The sun sets on a barren field strewn with LITTER and DUST.

A WHISTLE BLOWS and TRUCK ENGINES heed the command. A convoy of TRUCKS and MOBILE HOMES rolls in, kicking up more DUST.

Large posters adorn the trucks like cards from a crazy tarot deck -- Sorcery Circus and its many acts:

A pistol packing LION TAMER. A tattooed STRONG MAN.

A PRINCESS walking on stilts, talking to the birds.

CLOWNS racing to put out a fire.

A KNIFE THROWER launching blades at her HUMAN TARGET PARTNER.

A MIME MAGICIAN. A FIRE BREATHER. A CARNIVAL BARKER.

A PAIR OF ACROBATS. A GIANT firing a MIDGET from a cannon.

And a FORTUNE TELLER consulting her cards.

DUST engulfs this final image, and when it settles...

RAY SHARPS - LION TAMER, 70s, complete with top hat and red jacket - steps forward, blowing his WHISTLE AGAIN.

RAY

Sorcery Circus! Get to work!

INT./EXT. BIG TOP TENT - DUSK

Activity everywhere -- a gypsy CIRCUS TOWN being built.

Elephants pull guide wires, setting the tent poles. Cages roll past with ostriches, panthers and giraffes.

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - DUSK

On the edge of Circus Town, a tattered trailer, its BACK TO AN EMPTY FIELD, sits surrounded by SPOOLS OF ELECTRICAL WIRE.

SONNY THE FIRE BREATHER attaches wire from the spools to connectors on the roof of the trailer.

MERLE THE STRONG MAN hoists spools over his head and carries them off into Circus Town, with MAURICE THE MIME MAGICIAN following along, attaching wire to every trailer they pass.

EXT. WOODED WONDERLAND EXHIBIT - DUSK

Merle steps over aquariums filled with snakes and SPIDERS.

MERLE
Evening, Princess.

PRINCESS ALEXANDRA - a glittery young lady on stilts - straightens a sign: "Princess Alexandra's Wooded Wonderland"

ALEXANDRA
Evening, Merle. Hiya, Maurice.

Maurice tips an invisible hat, plugs a wire into her trailer.

INT. SIDE TENT - DUSK

THUMP! KATRINA THE KNIFE THROWER lands a blade in the center of a bullseye. KAUFFMAN - her husband and HUMAN TARGET - nods, impressed, as he sharpens more blades.

Maurice and Merle pass by in the background.

EXT. WHEEL OF FORTUNE - DUSK

BOB THE CARNIVAL BARKER - a wizardly sort of man - arranges a shelf of prizes beside his side-show scale.

BOB
Salutations to you both!

MERLE
Hey, Bob. Game's at the Tangelinos' tonight. Y'comin'?.

BOB
To borrow the jargon of my contemporaries: I wouldn't be caught dead anywhere else.

Maurice nearly walks beneath Bob's ladder, but catches himself and makes a quick detour.

MERLE
That's what I wanted t'hear.
See you at ten. Be safe, Bob!

INT. MADAM MAGICA'S TRAILER - DUSK

A dark, windowless trailer decorated with candles, curios and a mysterious aura. MADAM MAGICA - a luscious, matronly gypsy, 60s - nervously wrings her hands.

MADAM MAGICA

Ray. I implode you. Please,
don't make me to do it.

Ray uses a LARGE RING OF KEYS to unlock a small mysterious trunk. Inside the trunk, a DECK OF TAROT CARDS fanned across velvet lining - each card depicting a REAL CIRCUS CHARACTER.

Ray hands Madma Magica the deck.

RAY

Deal the cards.

INT. BIG TOP - DUSK

Merle and Maurice circle the tent, setting the wire and passing OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO TANGELINO- TWIN ACROBATS hoisting their safety net into place.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

One/Two/Three/Pull!/One/Two/
Three/Pull!/One/Two/Three/Pull!

CRAPPY THE HAPPY CLOWN maneuvers bleachers into place. Maurice tries to lend a hand but throws off Crappy's balance.

CRAPPY

If I take another wanna them in
the shins, bub, I'm cleanin' the
ostrich cage with yer tongue.

MERLE

Leave him alone, Crappy!

CRAPPY

That's "Happy", you pinworm!

TEENIE TYNIE - 40s, a dim witted, giant stage hand - aligns a MAMMOTH CANNON upon a wooden platform.

MERLE

Evening, Teenie!

Maurice's hands go up: *Don't shoot!*

TEENIE

You're funny, Maurice!

A truck backs up to the platform - nearly flattening Maurice.

BILLY BOBBALOOGA THE HUMAN BULLET jumps out -- three foot, three inches of pure attitude.

BILLY

Teenie! Git yer backside up here front and center! These crates ain't gunna unpack themselves y'know!

TEENIE

Yes sir, Billy.

Billy climbs in the truck bed with a clipboard in hand. Beside him, a DOZEN CRATES the size and shape of car tires.

BILLY

Let's go! Number twelve?

TEENIE

Number twelve.

Teenie loads a crate marked "EXPLOSIVES #12" beneath a TRAP DOOR beside the cannon.

BILLY

Number eleven?

Teenie fumbles the crate and it TUMBLES against the truck.

BILLY (CONT.)

Look, y'idjit! I happen t'like bein' here in one piece. Gives me a sense of completion. You understand?!

TEENIE

Don't worry. I'll be okay.

BILLY

You ain't the "me" I'm worried about! I'm talkin' metaphorical here. Ole Billy Bobbalooga don't need his freakin' head blown off, ya got me?!

TEENIE

Jeez, Billy. If you're so scared, go find Madam Magica. She'll give ya lucky charms and everything. See?

Teenie pulls a BIRD SKULL NECKLACE from under his shirt.

BILLY

Yaaa! What the---

(shaking a fist)
I gotta lucky charm for ya, you
knucklehead. Number eleven?

Teenie tucks his charm away and returns to work.

TEENIE
Touch-ee.

BILLY
What was that?!

TEENIE
Number eleven.

INT. MADAM MAGICA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Ray watches Magica deal out cards in a arc:

MADAM MAGICA
(re: Teenie's card)
One forever looking down.
(re: Crappy's card)
And one forever always frown'd.
(re: Maurice's card)
And one whose head will soon be
crowned
(re: Sonny's card)
And one for who's a secret's
keeping...
(re: Mme Magica card)
and this is whose will will be
weeping...

Magica CATCHES HER BREATH seeing her own card on the table.

MADAM MAGICA (CONT.)
No Ray, this is not rightness.
Please, you do not have to be
knowing these things...

RAY
Yes. I do. You know I do.

She nods and fans the remaining cards in front of Ray.
He selects a card: Billy Bobbalooga the Human Bullet.

RAY (CONT.)
The curse has... spoken!

MADAM MAGICA
Oh, poor Billy. I was just
starting a liking of him.

INT./EXT. BILLY'S TRUCK - DUSK

Billy drives Teenie through the circus confusion.

BILLY

How many times do I gotta
explain it to ya, ya big jerk?
The Curse ain't nuthin but
granny underpants stories and
media hype fer morons!

TEENIE

But what about Bobo?

BILLY

Bobo? Bad luck. Yer more
likely t'git some disease from
them stupid bones you got strung
up around yer neck then y'are
from any kinda curse.

TEENIE

But what about Mank and Korko?

BILLY

What about 'em? They drown.

TEENIE

Korke was a porpoise, Billy.

BILLY

So? Porpoises drown, don't
they? Porpi? Porposisuses?

Billy whips around a bend and SLAMS ON THE BRAKES - inches
from Maurice *Walking against the Wind*.

BILLY (CONT.)

Move it, mutie!

Merle strides in front of the truck.

MERLE

Hey, Pipsqueak! That's twice
you almost squashed him today!
Where d'you think you can just
git off---

BILLY

I'll git off any where I want,
lunkhead, and you know why?

OUTSIDE THE TRUCK

BILLY (CONT.)

(hopping out)

Cuz I'm Billy Bobbalooga, that's why! And I pull more money into this flea bag excuse of a circus than all the rest of you freaks combined!

Merle hoists Billy up by his lapels.

MERLE

Is that a fact?!

BILLY

Yeah, and here's another: yer breath stinks so yer wife ran away with the dingo boy!

MERLE

Why, you little---

RAY (OS)

Merle, what's going on?!

Ray approaches and Merle drops Billy back to the ground.

MERLE

Nothin', Mr. Sharps. We were just... you know, havin' a little chat. That's all.

Ray kneels down and helps Billy straighten his jacket.

RAY

You okay, Billy?

BILLY

Git offa me, Sharps! And tell that muscleheada yers if he lays another finger on me, I walk.

RAY

Don't worry Billy. You have my word on it.

BILLY

Great. That and five cents'll git me a nickel.

(to Maurice)

Outta my way.

He stomps the mime's toe, jumps in the truck and PEELS out.

BACK INSIDE THE TRUCK

Teenie stares at him, stunned.

TEENIE

You... shouldn't pick on them
that way.

BILLY

Aw, wudda you know?

TEENIE

Well, everyone knows Merle was
in jail cuz he killed a guy.
That's where he got so strong.

BILLY

(taking it in)
Great. Now y'tell me.

The truck passes Merle's poster looming in the background.

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - DUSK

As the SUN SETS, Sonny climbs down from the WIRE-STREWN ROOF.
He grabs a KEY from atop a FUSE BOX and lets himself inside
the ONLY ENTRANCE - a single door at one end of the trailer.

INT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - DUSK

One-third electric company, one-third work shop, one-third
bedroom. Ray's trailer is the EPITOME OF TIDINESS.

Sonny steps through the door, STOOPING OVER to pass beneath
HUNDREDS OF WIRES LOOPED AND DROOPING from the ceiling.

He walks to a WORKBENCH piled high with drawers, bottles,
jars and boxes - all of them LABELED. From a jar marked
"Sonny" he removes a small plastic FUNNEL.

Sonny moves to a metal cabinet and opens it. A BOTTLE OF
CHIANTI stares him in the face.

Sonny licks his lips, fighting temptation. He fiddles with
the protruding cork, placing the bottle on the workbench.

Returning, Sonny pulls a LARGE ORANGE CAN to the lip of the
shelf. He pulls a plastic SQUEEZE BOTTLE from his pocket,
opens it and inserts the funnel.

Tapping a small spigot on the can, a thin trickle of CLEAR
LIQUID funnels into the squeeze bottle. Quickly, the can
RUNS LOW and Sonny must tip it to top-off the bottle.

Ray enters, DUCKING UNDER THE WIRES which run over his back.

RAY

Sonny, how many times do I gotta tell ya? PLEASE, don't leave the key in the door.

SONNY

Sorry, boss. Won't happen again. But guess what, we're---

RAY

(re: the Chianti)
Hey, what're y'doin' with this?

SONNY

It was in my way.

RAY

You didn't...

SONNY

Six months, two weeks and three days, boss. No, I didn't.

Ray places the Chianti bottle on the bottom shelf of the cabinet - a shelf stocked with WINE AND LIQUOR BOTTLES.

RAY

Good boy. Come on, let's go play God.

SONNY

Sure, boss. But guess what, we're almost outta juice again.

RAY

Hard to imagine. Maybe somebody left the key in the door... and boy scouts came by and stole it for their lanterns!

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - DUSK

Merle LAUGHS, watching Maurice *Trapped in an Invisible Cube*.

Ray marches out the door and the two straighten up. Maurice *Plays the Drums* while Merle supplies the sound effects.

MERLE

Brrummm, rat-a-tat, brrummm,
rat-a-tat, brrummm, rat-a-tat.

Sonny squeezes some of the clear liquid into his mouth and replaces the key atop the FUSE BOX. Ray removes a KEYCHAIN FULL OF KEYS and unlocks the fuse box.

RAY

Let there be light!

Ray flips one huge switch and the circus FLICKERS TO LIFE.
Sonny blows a FIREBALL into the air and the other men CHEER.

INT. MADAM MAGICA'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Magica consults a crystal ball. A KNOCK and the door opens.

MADAM MAGICA

(not looking over)

Darling. My brain's been
thinking...

BILLY

(barging in)

Great. Never hurts t'try
something new. Got a minute?
Good. I need t'ask y'something.

MADAM MAGICA

Billy! Whatever for are you
doing in here?

BILLY

Why don't you tell me, Magica?
Yer the one with all the hocus
pocus. Work with me, huh?

MADAM MAGICA

Yes, Billy. You are now in
needing of my pocus.

BILLY

And yer hocus.

MADAM MAGICA

And my hocus... Billy, I am
knowing you are scared.

BILLY

Who d'you think yer talkin' to?
I ain't scareda nuthin'! But I
know y'gave Teenie that whatcha-
ma-jiggy. So, just t'play it
safe, why don't y'just quick,
whip me up one, too.

MADAM MAGICA

You are meaning the amulet of
protectication?

BILLY

Yeah. Wanna them.

MADAM MAGICA

I'm sorry, Billy. There is no helping for you now when the choosing is chose.

BILLY

English, Magica. Speak English! What are you babbling about?

MADAM MAGICA

Your fate, Billy! You are... How to say it? Doomed.

BILLY

Bull-loons. Says who?

MADAM MAGICA

the Arching of Death, Billy. I'm knowing you are the newling here, but with every five yearlings there is always one who is to be dying.

BILLY

You don't think I know that? The dope's been givin' me the dope all week.

MADAM MAGICA

There's no doping, Billy. I'm telling you now my secretings, so listen. Forever since the days of the hippiness, the cards have never been telling me wrong. Look. You, Billy - you, in the center of the Arching of Death.

She points ominously the table -- Billy staring at his own likeness on the card.

BILLY

You git yer kicks this way? Huh, Magica? Think this is fun?

MADAM MAGICA

No. These are Ray's kickings. He makes me to do it...

BILLY

This is Ray Sharps's idea?! I knew I smelled somethin' funny when I came in. Gimme those!

He rifles through the stack of cards and slaps RAY'S CARD DOWN ON TOP OF HIS OWN CARD.

BILLY (CONT.)

There! What do you think about that, witchy-poo? What do the cards say now, huh? Now Ray's butt's in the whatcha-m'call-it, not mine!

MADAM MAGICA

No, Billy. The cards... they are spoken.

BILLY

Yeah? Well, you've spoken about all I can take. Now it's time for ole Billy Bobbalooga to do some spoken... speaken, shprechen--- Outta my way!

He storms out, TOSSING THE CARDS away. They fall, leaving a random pattern of circus characters lying across the floor.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TEENIE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Teenie sets his coffee-pot alarm clock. The TIME: 11:45. He climbs into bed; SOUNDS OF A POKER GAME wafting in the air.

KATRINA (OS)

All right, folks. Ante up, ante up. The game is five card circus stud; a pair of crazy eights to open, trips to win. Black twos, red sixes and the queena diamonds wild.

EXT. POKER TRAILER - NIGHT

A RAUCOUS GROUP of circus performers sit squeezed around a card table. Katrina deals. Merle throws in his hand, rises.

MERLE

Fold! Anyone need a Fresca?

People answer Merle and he digs the drinks from a trough.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

(sharing cards)

A pair of whats to open?

Maurice mimes: *Food to his Mouth.*

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
Tongues?/Chewing?/Hungry?/Eat?

Maurice mimes: *A thumb over his shoulder.*

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
Shoulder bone?/Yesterday?/Ate?/
Eights?/Eights are wild.

Princess Alexandra sits with a python around her neck. Sonny
dances his fingers in front of the snake, singing...

SONNY
There's a place in France/Where
the naked ladies dance/There's a
whole in the wall/Where the men
can see it all.

CRAPPY
(re: his cards)
Not where I'm sittin', there
ain't.

KATRINA
Quit yer belly achin'.
(to Kauffman)
And gimme those!

She swipes her cards from Kauffman's hand.

KAUFFMAN
Yeah, quit yer belly achin',
Crappy.

CRAPPY
That's "Happy" ya milquetoast.
Say it again and I'm knockin'
yer block off!

KAUFFMAN
It. It. It.

Crappy takes a SWING at Kauffman but Katrina BLOCKS it away
-- causing the snake to HISS, causing Sonny to KNOCK into
Maurice, to BUMP into Or'ongelo to BUMP into L'mongelo, who
SPILLS Merle's Fresca just as he returns to the table.

KATRINA
Cut it out, Crappy!

CRAPPY
You cut it out!

MERLE
Botha yuse, cut it out!

CRAPPY
Yeah, or what?!

MERLE
Or... or I'll---

BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG.
BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG. BANG.

Mayhem. People hit the deck, flip the table, run outside.

EXT. POKER TRAILER - NIGHT

Hidden in an alcove across the way, Ray watches the poker party rush outside -- the CHIANTI BOTTLE stuffed in his pocket. Smoke wafts past the trailer, into the night air.

Ray STIFLES A LAUGH while Maurice picks up some scraps of paper from the ground and hands them to Merle.

MERLE
(to the crowd)
Firecrackers.

PRINCESS
Very funny, Mr. Sharps!

CRAPPY
Yeah. Funny like a car crash!

BOB
Ray! Please, deign us with your presence on this of all circus evenings. Ray?

Ray LAUGHS A HAUNTING LAUGH and sneaks off in the darkness.

CRAPPY
Aw, suit yourself crabgrass!

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
That's funny/Get it? Suit?
Yourself/ The cards? The suit?

CRAPPY
That's not funny, this is funny.

He SMACKS them both on the back of the head.

MERLE
Aw, man. I'm outta Fresca!

EXT. CIRCUS TOWN - NIGHT

Ray conducts rounds -- checking locks and wire connections. He rounds a bend and is nearly bowled over by Merle.

RAY

Watch it, Stone. Y'almost killed me.

MERLE

I'm really sorry, boss. I just, I gotta...

(checking his watch)

It's almost midnight.

RAY

You're not afraid of spirits are you Merle?

MERLE

Ain't you?

Ray smiles, pulling the Chianti bottle from his pocket.

RAY

Let's just say I believe in some spirits more than others.

MERLE

Man, I sure could use a little nerve tonic right about now.

Ray turns his back and continues with his rounds.

RAY

Yeah, well, good luck with that.

Merle sneers, then checks his watch and sprints off.

INT. WOODED WONDERLAND EXHIBIT - NIGHT

A heat lamp GLOWS inside a tarantula's aquarium.

A small SNAP as the lock breaks.

Leather-gloved hands open the lid and reach inside. They cradle a gigantic TARANTULA; (or perhaps it only seems so large because the hands are so small.)

EXT. BIG TOP - NIGHT

Beneath the poster depicting Teenie shooting Billy from a cannon, Ray pulls a small METAL FLASK from inside his coat and takes a long, strong drink.

A MONKEY SCREAMS in the distance. A LION ROARS, and Ray ducks into the Big Top tent.

Just as Ray disappears, Billy creeps by from the opposite direction -- a SHOEBOX tucked under his arm.

INT. TEENIE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Cradling his lucky charm, Teenie sleeps with FITFUL SNORES. His alarm clock reads: 12:01 a.m.

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

From his pocket, Billy pulls out a MAGNET tied to a length of string. He tosses the magnet atop the fuse box - CLINK.

Billy yanks the magnet back - the KEY attached. He climbs Ray's steps, UNLOCKS the door and carries the shoebox inside.

INT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

Moonlight shines through a DUSTY WINDOW above Ray's workbench. Billy flips a light switch, illuminating the workshop with a single bulb inside a CHINESE LANTERN.

Billy, due to his height, walks easily beneath the wires.

He climbs up on a stool, places the shoebox on the bench, and scans the labeled drawers: Fuses, Sparklers, Detonators, M-80s, M-60s, Lady Fingers, Blasting Caps, Shotgun Shells.

Billy grabs two SHOTGUN SHELLS from the drawer and drags the stool across the room, BENEATH THE WIRES.

Climbing onto the stool, Billy grabs and TUGS AT THE WIRES.

EXT. BIG TOP - NIGHT

Ray emerges, tucking the CHIANTI BOTTLE under one arm. Lights around Circus Town FLICKER for a moment.

Ray studies the lights. FLICKER FLICKER. Agitated, he storms back into Circus Town with BOTTLE IN HAND.

INT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

Billy tugs a large ELECTRIC WIRE NOOSE across the entrance way. Satisfied, Billy pinches open the shotgun shells and spills HUNDREDS OF BBS across the floor.

Billy climbs onto Ray's workbench and unhooks the Chinese lantern from the ceiling. He tightens his grip on the wire, and the noose tightens as well.

Billy unscrews the bulb and the room goes DARK -- a full moon through the DUSTY WINDOW the only light.

FOOTSTEPS approach from outside.

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

Ray eyes the KEY in his lock, the door SLIGHTLY AJAR.

RAY

Sugar pie? Is that you?

PLINK, PLINK, PLINK. A single BB rolls out through the door and down the dirty metal steps. Ray sticks the bottle back into his pocket then reaches into the small of his back.

Ray pulls out a HAND GUN - a petite .22 automatic - and uses it to push open the door. Ray steps inside, GUN RAISED.

INT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

Ray reaches for the LIGHT SWITCH - nothing.

RAY

Sonny? Merle? It's not funny.

Ray ducks beneath the wires - his PISTOL PACKING RIGHT ARM entering the workshop before his head does.

Billy sees Ray's head emerging into the moonlight and yanks fiercely at the wire in his hand.

The GIANT NOOSE TIGHTENS. The wire wraps around Ray's neck - but also around his right arm, trapping it against his head.

RAY (CONT.)

Ggggaaaahhhkkkkk!

Billy ties the wire to a table vice, Ray DANGLING like a marionette. He opens the shoebox and tosses THE TARANTULA.

It lands on Ray's face.

RAY (CONT.)

Aaaaaahhhhheeeeeiiiiii!

Ray's FEET SCRAMBLE across the BBs. The noose TIGHTENS.

Ray's ARM'S FLAIL. The GUN lands on the BENCH.

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

LIGHTS FLICKER across Circus Town and DULL THUDS can be heard from inside; first FRANTIC, then SLOWING...

INT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

Ray dangles in the noose - his TANGLED ARM keeping him from complete strangulation - while his FEET WEAKLY SEARCH for solid ground. Billy struts to the center of the bench.

BILLY

Pretty funny, ain't it Sharps?
Looks like the Curse is on you
this time!

Ray sees Billy in silhouette - the moon backlighting him through the dusty window.

RAY

I'll kill you! Just like all
the others!

Ray's grip tightens on the CHIANTI BOTTLE in his pocket.

BILLY

Save your breath, Sharps.
Y'ain't got much left.

With a burst of strength, Ray throws the bottle at Billy. Billy ducks. The bottle misses his head by inches and SHATTERS THE WINDOW behind him. Ray charges for the gun...

RAY (CONT.)

Aaaaaahhhhhh!

But the noose YANKS him back. Billy grabs the gun and when Ray lunges again...

RAY (CONT.)

Rrrraaaaaahhhhhh!

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Click... CLICK. CLICK.

EXT. BACK SIDE OF RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

Billy sticks his head out the window as VOICES rise up.

BOB (OS)

Ray, must you continue your
explosive antics indefinitely?
Whichever item you recently
destroyed remedied the elec-
trical situation quite nicely!

SONNY (OS)

Boss? You okay?

Billy ducks inside. A pack of lit FIRECRACKERS flies out the window and lands in the dust. BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

CRAPPY (OS)

I'll tell ya what - he's not
gunna be okay if he doesn't pipe
down and get some shut eye!

KAUFFMAN (OS)

Yeah, pipe down and get some---

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

Shut up, Kauffman!

Billy creeps around back, SHOEBOX in hand. Kneeling down, he gathers the BROKEN GLASS into the empty box.

He listens -- SILENCE. And then...

MERLE (OS)

Say g'night, Ray!

BILLY

Yeah, g'night Ray.

Billy searches for the bottle, but to no avail. Instead, he sees his FOOTPRINTS SCATTERED EVERYWHERE IN THE DUST.

He opens up a WATER SPIGOT on Ray's trailer and carries the shoebox back around front. A torrent of WATER SPRAYS destroys the dusty footprints.

INT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

Billy unties the wire from the workbench and Ray's body slumps half-way to the ground. The chinese lantern swings wildly while Billy gets to work in the moonlight.

He places the EMPTY shotgun shells back in their drawer, then wipes the workbench clean. He dumps the GLASS BENEATH THE WINDOW. Placing the gun in the shoe box, he SNIFFS THE AIR...

BILLY

Lush.

Billy opens the cabinet and pulls A FULL FIFTH OF WHISKEY from the bottom shelf. He unscrews the cap and takes a snootful to calm his nerves.

Then he gently wraps Ray's hand around the bottle to leave fingerprints and slides the bottle INTO RAY'S COAT POCKET.

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

Billy sneaks out, LOCKS the door and removes the key. He deftly tosses it... CLINK; right on top of the fuse box.

He bounds down the steps, shoebox under arm, and races off.

EXT. TEENIE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

The POKER GAME CONTINUES as Billy creeps up to the trailer. Inside, Teenie SNORES LOUDLY.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
(OS)

Put your ante up! Hungarian
stud. One eyed yaks are wild.

CRAPPY (OS)
Ain't no yaks in that deck.

Billy tosses Ray's gun onto the roof -- THUD. Teenie's SNORING STOPS for a moment... but then STARTS right back up.

MERLE (OS)
Jacks! They said Jacks!

PRINCESS (OS)
Actually, they said Yaks.

BOB (OS)
But I believe they meant Jacks.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
No. Yaks!

Next to the steps, TEENIE'S WORK BOOTS wait for a new day. Billy grabs them and scurries away.

CRAPPY (OS)
Now I gotta yak!

EXT. BACK OF RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - NIGHT

LARGE BOOTS step into the mud puddle, but SMALL GLOVED HANDS turn off the spigot.

Billy - wearing TEENIE'S BOOTS - stomps around, leaving a MENACING SET OF FOOTPRINTS beneath Ray's broken window.

MADAM MAGICA (OS)
Oh snuggle bunting! Here I am
coming!

Billy peaks around the side of the trailer and sees a bo-and-bonnet-wearing Magica sauntering up to Ray's trailer.

Billy backs silently away from the scene of the crime.

EXT. TEENIE'S TRAILER - NIGHT

Billy replaces the muddy boots while Teenie SNORES.

BOB (OS)

Theoretically, my dear, the odds
are quite good that---

KATRINA (OS)

Keep yer odds to yerself.

KAUFFMAN (OS)

Yeah. Keep yer odds---

A BLOOD CURDLING CRY echoes through Circus Town, as Billy
creeps off in the opposite direction.

MADAM MAGICA (OS)

AAaaaaaaiiiiiiiiiieeeeeiiiiiii!!!!

A light pops on inside Teenie's trailer.

POKER VOICES (OS)

Who is that? Everything all
right? What gives? Hello?

A terrified Teenie opens the door in his pajamas and stares
out into the night as Madam Magica continues to SCREAM.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

EXT. CIRCUS PARKING LOT - DAWN

Columbo pulls his Peugeot into the deserted parking lot.

Bleary eyed and half awake, he checks his notebook to make
sure he has the right address. Maurice shuffles by.

COLUMBO

Excuse me! Pardon me, sir. I
was wondering if you could tell
me where to find, uhm...

Searching his notes, Columbo pulls a pencil from his pocket.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

The uh... the trailer belonging
to a Mr. Ray Sharps?

Columbo studies Maurice's sad and mournful mime face.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

Oh. My condolences, sir. I'm sorry. You knew Mr. Sharps?

(Maurice nods)

Professionally?

(Maurice nods)

And sir, if I may? What would that profession be?

Maurice takes Columbo's pencil and magically turns it into a black carnation. He tucks it into Columbo's raincoat lapel.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

Hmmm. I see. Thank you, sir.

Now, if you could just...

Maurice points down the corridor of posters and to the right.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

Down here and to the right?

Thank you again, sir. And uh, one more thing... is there a place where I can grab a cup of coffee around here?

He turns back to the mime, but Maurice has disappeared.

EXT. CIRCUS TOWN - DAWN

Columbo walks past the painted circus posters, while the character's REAL VOICES can be heard right around the corner.

PRINCESS (OS)

I bet it was pure fear that killed him.

BOB (OS)

Hardly. Magica reported that his neck was snapped. Rather reminiscent of J. J. Morris when the potatoes fell on his head.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
(OS)

I remember that/No you don't.
It was Winter of '87/Summer of '92/Winter of '87/Summer of '92.

KATRINA (OS)

She said he was shot.

KAUFFMAN (OS)

Yeah. He was shot.

CRAPPY (OS)
He wasn't shot. He was
strangulated.

BOB
Preposterous.

Columbo steps up silently behind the bickering bunch --
everyone from the poker game except Maurice and Merle.

SONNY
No, no, no. Alexandra's right.
It was fear that killed him.

KATRINA
Then why all the gunshots if it
was fear, fireboy?

CRAPPY
Prob'ly shot himself in the head
- afraid he'd have to work with
your husband again today.

The crowd MOANS, throwing chunks of donuts at the clown.

COLUMBO
Excuse me, I was just
wondering... How many of you
heard gun shots last night?

The crowd CLAMS UP, staring at the Lieutenant.

CRAPPY
And who the humpty-dump are you?

COLUMBO
Oh, I'm sorry. Didn't I say?
Lieutenant Columbo. Homicide.

CRAPPY
No, Lt. Crumbo, y'didn't say.
But let me say this: Get lost.
We didn't hear nuthin'.

BOB
(on the sly)
Quiet, Crappy.

KAUFFMAN
(on the not so sly)
Yeah. Quiet, Crappy.

CRAPPY
Watch it, noodlehead!

Crappy SMACKS Kauffman's forehead and a small scuffle breaks out. Columbo rubs his tired eyes and stifles a yawn.

COLUMBO

Is it possible that this Mr. Crappy could be right---

CRAPPY

I'm Happy!

COLUMBO

If you say so, sir. Is it possible Mr. Sharps could have shot himself?!

BOB

Is it possible? Yes. But only so far as to say that it is possible because Mr. Sharps, or Ray as I like to call him, possessed the one and only gun in our humble village and...

His colleagues stare him down.

BOB (CONT.)

That he... I don't... No way... Shot himself? Not possible.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

It wasn't gunshots/It was fire-crackers. Ray makes his own/He's very good/They're too loud!

KATRINA

That's crazy! Who ever heard of a guy gettin' killed by a buncha firecrackers?

PRINCESS

It was fear.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, it was fear.

The crowd ERUPTS WITH THEORIES. A SHRILL WHISTLE blows.

BILLY (OS)

Sorcery Circus! Are we gunna put on a show today or what?!

The performers run off as Billy leads a GAGGLE OF NEWS REPORTERS. Columbo mingles in with the gaggle.

BILLY (CONT.)

Right this way, ladies and germs, and allow me to introduce to you the latest casualty of the Curse of Sorcery Circus...

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - MORNING

OFFICER SEDGEWICK - fresh from the academy - cordons off the trailer with crime scene tape and pylons.

BILLY (CONT.)

...His name is Ray Sharps, rhymes with harps, which he's probably playing right now in circus heaven. God rest.

FLASHBULBS POP relentlessly; Billy posing, pulling down the tape for better shots, hamming it up. Sedgewick approaches.

SEDGEWICK

Step back, please. Step back.

BILLY

Get away, kid. Y'bother me.

(to the reporters)

Yes, the Curse has claimed another victim - another bizarre death at the hands of a mysterious hex. But don't worry, folks! Today's performances will continue, as scheduled, at Noon and six o'clock sharp!

REPORTER #1

But, how do we know the circus is safe?

BILLY

Read our web-site, you ding-dong! Sorcery-Circus-dot-com. It'll tell you the circus is never safe because Billy Bobbalooga faces death daily -- all shows starting at Noon and Six o'clock sharp!

REPORTER #2

How'd the Curse strike this time, Bill?

BILLY

That's Billy. Billy Bobbalooga to you - Four Bs, one Why, a whole buncha Oooooos and an "I Gotcha"! Just kidding, folks. All I can tell you is that it was a "strange and bizarre accident", That's B.I.Z.A.R.R.E.

Columbo nudges one of the reporters.

COLUMBO

Excuse me, ma'am. Do you have a pencil I could borrow? Thanks.

BILLY (CONT.)

And, of course, the cops are still finding evidence as we speak. We'll have answers at a press conference immediately following our two shows at Noon and six o'clock sharp!

COLUMBO

Excuse me. What kind of evidence would that be, sir?

BILLY

What's that?

COLUMBO

You said the, uh, "Police are still finding evidence as we speak." I was just wondering... What kind of evidence would that be, Mr. Bobbalooga?

BILLY

The criminal kind, you moron.

The reporters CHUCKLE as Columbo pushes to the front.

COLUMBO

The criminal kind, sir?

BILLY

You know: foot prints, murder weapon? That kind of stuff.

COLUMBO

Oh. Footprints. Murder weapon. Any fingerprints there, sir? At the murder scene?

BILLY

No. No fingerprints.

COLUMBO

Okay. No fingerprints. And I was also curious about...

Billy hustles along like a tour guide behind schedule.

BILLY

Now, if you'll all follow me, I'll take you to the mighty Big Top where fantastic performances are held twice daily -- at Noon and Six o'clock sharp!

The crowd follows Billy while Columbo steps beneath the tape.

SEDGEWICK

Sorry, buddy. No reporters. This is an official crime scene.

COLUMBO

Good, because I'm here on official business. Lt. Columbo.

SEDGEWICK

Oh. Sorry, Lieutenant. I didn't know. Nice disguise. Would you like to see the woman?

COLUMBO

What woman?

SEDGEWICK

The one who found the body. She called it in at 0100. I was the initial unit on scene at 0120. Forensics arrived at 02---

COLUMBO

Maybe later. Who questioned Bobbalooga?

SEDGEWICK

Who questioned who, sir?

COLUMBO

The tour guide.

SEDGEWICK

Nobody, sir. We've been waiting for you. I did break up a small group when I arrived...

(checking his notes)
Or'ongelo and L'mongelo
Tangelino, Princess Alexandra
Bailey Goree Davies, a Kauffman
and Katrina Zagrev, a Merle
Stone. Nope, no Bobbalooga.
First time he's been here today.

COLUMBO
Thank you, officer. May I
borrow that?

Columbo takes the list and walks to Ray's front door.

SEDGEWICK
Anything else, Lieutenant?

COLUMBO
Yeah... could you find me a cup
of coffee, please?

INT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - MORNING

Columbo enters as F.O. SERGEANT BULLARD removes a BULLET
RIDDLED FLASK from Ray's inside pocket; WHISKEY dripping out.

SGT. BULLARD
L.T., what d'you say?

Columbo enters - bent over, head first - studying the body.

COLUMBO
Well, Sergeant, I'd say someone
had a worse night than I did.
And that's saying something.

SGT. BULLARD
Yeah, you don't look so hot.

COLUMBO
The Mrs., she's taking one of
them Polynesian Cooking Classes.

SGT. BULLARD
Ooooffff....

COLUMBO
Too spicy if you ask me. Red
pepper pork pie. She slept like
a baby. I was up all night.

SGT. BULLARD
I don't blame you.

COLUMBO

Apparently Mr. Sharps suffered from a bit more than Polynesian pork pie...

SGT. BULLARD

Shot six times with a twenty-two at close range; five to eight feet. Four shots went through him, two got stopped in his whiskey flask...

COLUMBO

No wonder it smells like a bar rag in here.

Sgt. Bullard points to the bottle in Ray's pocket.

SGT. BULLARD

Seagrams seems t'be the flavor of choice. The way I figure it, this guy was over here messing with the wires. He's hooking them up, tying them around, whatever... and some Sasquatch comes up to the window---

COLUMBO

This window? You'd have to be six feet tall just to peak inside.

SGT. BULLARD

I know. Wait'll you see the prints.

COLUMBO

You've got fingerprints?

SGT. BULLARD

No. Footprints. The guy could play in the NBA.

COLUMBO

No fingerprints?

SGT. BULLARD

I haven't dusted yet, but I'm telling you, the guy did his dirty work from right outside.

As Sgt. Bullard explains his theory, Columbo studies the window, the room... He's not buying it.

SGT. BULLARD (CONT.)

This sasquatch, he's angry, he's insane, he's jealous, I don't know... but he sticks a gun through the glass and scares the wits outta this guy. He tries to get away, but there's nowhere to go: there's wires, and loops and nooses and whatever... and the guy's strung up like a fish in a barrel... He shoots him six times and runs away.

COLUMBO

Well, something's fishy.

Columbo inspects the window and the broken glass.

COLUMBO

You say he shot him through this window, huh? It's a pretty dirty window.

SGT. BULLARD

Maybe that's why he broke it.

COLUMBO

Oh, he broke the window and then he shot him? I don't understand. Why would he do that?

SGT. BULLARD

I don't know. Why does anyone kill anyone, L.T.? All I know is that my ballistics say this man was shot from five feet to eight feet away... and eight feet's just outside that window.

COLUMBO

And five feet would be from right about here?

SGT. BULLARD

Yeah, but---

COLUMBO

Can I have some tweezers, sergeant?

Sgt. Bullard gives him the tweezers -- Columbo laying his head on the side of the workbench.

SGT. BULLARD
What've you got there,
Lieutenant?

COLUMBO
It's all that dust...

SGT. BULLARD
Yeah. There's dust everywhere.
These people are gypsies. They
probably drove across Utah last
night... Nevada, whatever.

Columbo picks up a single piece of glass and studies it.

COLUMBO
But, this glass has dust on its
edges. See? This window's
dusty, I can understand that.
Dusty on the outside, dusty on
the inside. But if that glass
breaks, the edges should still
be clean, right? Like this...

Columbo demonstrates a CLEAN EDGE of the broken window pane.

COLUMBO (CONT.)
But this piece is dusty on it's
edge. All of them are. Look.
That's something I don't under-
stand... How did they get dusty
falling onto this bench?

Bullard checks the glass, comparing it to the window frame.

SGT. BULLARD
All I know is the guy who left
those prints did his dirty work
from out there because there's
no way he crawled through this
window.

COLUMBO
Other signs of forced entry?

SGT. BULLARD
Just the window. Trailer was
locked up tight.

Columbo looks around.

COLUMBO
Keys missing?

SGT. BULLARD

Nope. Had them on a key chain,
key ring... whatever. They were
in his front pocket.

Columbo uses a handkerchief to pull the Seagrams bottle from
Ray's jacket pocket.

COLUMBO

Why do you suppose somebody
would carry around a fifth of
whiskey and a flask of whiskey
at the same time?

SGT. BULLARD

I's say the guy liked to drink.

COLUMBO

Then why's the bottle full?

SGT. BULLARD

I don't know. Maybe he was on
his way out?

COLUMBO

It just doesn't seem---

SEDGEWICK (OS)

Heads up. Hot coffee coming
through! Wooooahhh!

Sedgewick ducks beneath the wires, SLIPPING on some the BBs.
Grabbing wires, SPILLING COFFEE, he FALLS onto his butt.

SGT. BULLARD

Smooth, Sedgewick. Real smooth.

Sgt. Bullard helps the officer stand. Columbo kneels next to
one of the coffee cups on the floor.

SGT. BULLARD (CONT.)

Don't worry, L.T. We'll get you
some more coffee...

Columbo uses tweezers to pick up a BB.

COLUMBO

Officer, I think I'd like to see
that woman now.

INT. MADAM MAGICA'S TRAILER - DAY

Magica operates her Ouija board and WEEPS.

COLUMBO

Uhm... Miss? Lieutenant
Columbo. Homicide.

MADAM MAGICA

Yes, darling. Come in, I've
been inspecting you.

COLUMBO

It's nice and cool in here.
Quiet, too.

MADAM MAGICA

Yes. The padded walls are a
necessary of my profession.

COLUMBO

Your profession, Miss...?

MADAM MAGICA

Madam.

COLUMBO

(blushing)

Madam, ma'am?

MADAM MAGICA

Of course, Calypso. Madam
Magica; seer of all there is to
be seeing. Well... excepting
for Ray. Poor, poor Ray...

COLUMBO

Yes, I've been over there. I'm
sorry you had to see that. It's
never easy, miss madam, ma'am.

Columbo consoles her with a pat on her hand. She takes it,
and studies his palm as he sits and talks.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

If it's all right with you, I'd
like to ask you a few questions
about yourself and Mr. Sharps
and what happened, if you feel
you can talk about it...

(she nods)

Thank you. I appreciate that.
Uhm... When exactly did you
first discover Mr. Sharp's body?

MADAM MAGICA

1967. A beautiful man, he was. Used to take his bathing in a copper tub of mine. I let him because I liked him that way.

COLUMBO

No, ma'am. I meant---

MADAM MAGICA

The summer of loveliness, remember?

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am. But I meant last night. When did you find Mr. Sharps in his trailer?

MADAM MAGICA

Oh, of course. It was half of the way past twelve in the middling of the night.

COLUMBO

And how do you know, for sure, that it was twelve-thirty?

MADAM MAGICA

You are giving question to my modesty, darling.

COLUMBO

I don't mean to, ma'am. But I have to ask.

MADAM MAGICA

That's okay. I like you, Calypso. So, just between us twosome? Ray and I have an encounterment every week for thirty-four years. Always in the same time, always in the same placement.

COLUMBO

That's a lot of encounterment, ma'am.

She nods somberly, pointing to his hand.

MADAM MAGICA

You know, Calypso, you have here quite a long Love Line...

COLUMBO

Well, that's nice of you to say,
ma'am, but---

MADAM MAGICA

And there is a womanhood of
mystery in your life, yes?

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am. That'd be my wife.
But tell me, you had all these
meetings all of these years...

MADAM MAGICA

Always every Friday nights.
Always he inspections the circus
and always I am coming over to
tuck him into his bedding.

COLUMBO

And that would be always at
twelve-thirty?

MADAM MAGICA

Like a clock working.
(starting to sob)
But now, the clock, it's not
working so much any more...

COLUMBO

Ma'am, try to remember, did you
see or hear anything unusual
last night? Anything at all?

MADAM MAGICA

The knob, on the door, she is
locked. But the knob on the
door, she is never locked when
he is lying in waiting for me -
whiching is why I went around to
the backside, for to see if his
lightings were lighted.

COLUMBO

And were they?

MADAM MAGICA

No. Only the moon was lighting
- lighting up to a broken window
and all the muddiness and all
the murder...

She BREAKS DOWN. The door flies open and Merle rushes over.

MERLE

Hey! You leave her alone!

MADAM MAGICA

Oh Merle, you muscular wonderment, relax. This is Calypso. He's a homicide, and I'm about to be reading his mind. Behold!

(to Columbo)

You're wanting to be asking me something, yes?

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am.

MADAM MAGICA

I'll go get them for you.

She leaves the men alone. Merle gives Columbo a cold stare.

COLUMBO

Lt. Columbo. I'm investigating the death of Ray Sharps. Did you know Mr. Sharps?

(beat)

Maybe professionally?

(beat)

I tell ya, it's quite a case.

(beat)

If there's anything you might like to add... Maybe later...

Magica returns, giving Merle a friendly slap on the cheek.

MADAM MAGICA

Babushka, be nice.

She hands Columbo a pair of MUD-COVERED HIGH HEELS.

MADAM MAGICA (CONT.)

Here you are going, Calypso. And perhaps another question before I am having to go off for the working class, yes?

She checks her make-up in a compact

COLUMBO

(impressed)

Uhm... yes. I wanted to know... Since the door was locked, and the window is so high... How was it you were able to see Mr. Sharps inside the trailer? Maybe you jumped...?

MADAM MAGICA

Madam Magica is not for jumping,
Calypso. A mirroring can be
used for more than looking at
your own good looking-ness, yes?

She holds her compact high over her head and angles it toward
Columbo, catching his eye and winking at him.

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am.
And thank you, sir.

Columbo lets himself out.

EXT. MADAM MAGICA'S TRAILER - DAY

HIGH HEELS in hand, Columbo walks away deep in thought.

Behind him, Merle carries Magica from her trailer in one arm,
a trunk in the other.

Suddenly, Columbo spins around.

COLUMBO

Miss? Madam, ma'am? There's
just one thing I gotta know...

MADAM MAGICA

Yes, Calypso? What is your
thingy?

COLUMBO

I was just curious, ma'am, how
did you know I was going to ask
for your shoes?

MADAM MAGICA

Darling, Madam Magica knows all!
(with a wink)
And besides, I love to watch all
the mysteries moving on my tv.

EXT. BACK SIDE OF RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - DAY

POLICE TAPE circles the trailer TEN YARDS OUT. From inside,
Bullard dusts the window sill for prints.

Columbo carries MAGICA'S HEELS around the side of the trailer
and kneels down next to TWO TYPES OF FOOTPRINTS DRIED INTO
THE MUD -- MAGICA'S interspersed with TEENIE'S.

SGT. BULLARD

Cute shoes, L.T..

COLUMBO

Yeah, my wife would love 'em.
Picking up any prints in there?

Columbo places Magica's heels into a footprint and uses his pencil to mark HOW DEEP HER SHOES SUNK into the mud.

SGT. BULLARD

Just Mr. Sharps' so far. There's a few that aren't his on the booze cabinet, but nothing substantial. Nothing big enough to match Big Foot there.

COLUMBO

I'd like to know about them any way. Just in case.

Columbo rests Magica's shoe INTO ONE OF TEENIE'S FOOTPRINTS. The heel rests ONLY TWO-THIRDS AS DEEP as when it was placed in Magica's print. He marks this depth with pencil as well.

SGT. BULLARD

Yeah, but the bullet trajectories line up straight through this window. Your shooter was standing right there.

COLUMBO

At some point last night you're right I think he was. There's just one thing bothering me...

SGT. BULLARD

And what's that?

Columbo picks a firecracker IMBEDDED IN THE MUD, in the BOTTOM of a Teenie Tynie footprint.

COLUMBO

Witnesses heard firecrackers around 12:15. I figured maybe they were used to cover up the sounds of the gun fire when Mr. Sharps was shot.

SGT. BULLARD

I'll buy that.

COLUMBO

Except it doesn't make sense. If the murderer lit these firecrackers as a decoy, then why's all the paper imbedded in the mud? It's like he stepped on it after it was already here.

SGT. BULLARD

You sure about that?

COLUMBO

Take a look. Whoever left these prints, left them after the firecrackers went off, which means after Mr. Sharps was shot to death.

SGT. BULLARD

Well, I'll take a closer look. I'll get pictures and castings of the area right away. All right, sir? L.T.?

Sgt. Bullard leans out to see Columbo, and finds him studying something beyond the trailer -- something Bullard cannot see.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

(whispering)

Sergeant, I need you to get pictures and plaster casts of this area. Right away.

SGT. BULLARD

(whispering)

Sure. Anything else?

Columbo starts crawling away, toward the edge of the trailer.

COLUMBO

(whispering)

Yeah. Mr. Sharps' hand gun. If he was alone in there, it should still be in the trailer. Find it, would you please?

SGT. BULLARD

(whispering)

Okay, fine, whatever. But... why are we whispering?

But it's too late: Columbo has CRAWLED AROUND THE CORNER. Sgt. Bullard shakes his head with humored bewilderment.

EXT. SIDE OF RAY'S TRAILER - DAY

We see what Columbo is following: Princess Alexandra crawling, panther-like, along the corridor of trailers.

With utmost care, she SEARCHES under bits of trash, beneath a tire well, no stone unturned... She crawls out of sight.

Then, walking the other way, Columbo sees a pair of GIANT MUDDY BOOTS tromping through the dust.

Columbo looks up and sees Teenie stopped at the Police Line, THERMOS in hand and a frown upon his face.

EXT. POLICE LINE, FRONT OF RAY'S TRAILER - DAY

Columbo approaches.

COLUMBO

Good morning, sir. I'm Lt.
Columbo, Los Angeles Homicide.

TEENIE

(processing)

You're a cop?

COLUMBO

Yes, sir. And I'd like to ask
you a few questions if I could?

TEENIE

Sure. Do you have a gun?

COLUMBO

No, I'm not that kind of cop.

TEENIE

Oh. Want some coffee? Cops
love coffee, right?

COLUMBO

You read my mind, sir.

TEENIE

Really? I didn't mean to.

As Teenie unscrews his thermos and pours a lid full...

TEENIE (CONT.)

Are you here to protect us?

COLUMBO

Well, sir. That depends. What
is it you need protection from?

TEENIE

The Curse. What else?

Just as Teenie is about to hand Columbo the coffee...

BILLY (OS)

Teenie, you idjit! Git to work!

...he pitches it into the dirt and quickly screws the lid back onto the thermos as Billy storms up.

BILLY (CONT.)

And you! News conference is over. Beat it or buy a ticket, bub. My boy's got work to do.

COLUMBO

Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I just have a few more questions for---

BILLY

Are you deaf?! Get outta here. The cops need t'question him, not the local litterbox liner. Now, scram!

TEENIE

But, Billy. He is a cop.

BILLY

Stuff it, Teenie. This guy's no cop, he's a flop. Listen you---

Billy turns and finds Columbo's badge in his face.

COLUMBO

Lt. Columbo. Homicide. And with your permission, sir, I'd like to just follow up on a few questions with this gentleman.

BILLY

(smiling wide)

Anything you say, officer.

TEENIE

Did you hear that, Billy? He called me a gentleman.

BILLY

Shut up, knucklehead. He's got some questions t'ask ya.

(to Columbo)

And go easy on him. He's a little slow.

COLUMBO

I understand. I'm a little slow myself sometimes.

(to Teenie)

Okay. Let's see here. Right. Now, what's your full name, sir?

TEENIE

Teenie. Teenie Tynie.

COLUMBO

All right, Mr. Tynie. Uhm, do you happen to know how your boots got all muddy?

Teenie studies the boots, surprised. Billy smirks.

TEENIE

No.

COLUMBO

No. Okay. Thank you Mr. Tynie, I think that should do it.

BILLY

That's it?! That's all you're gonna ask him?!

TEENIE

(pondering)

Maybe it rained last night?

COLUMBO

Oh, that's good. "Maybe it rained last night." Thank you, sir. You've been a big help.

(re: his boots)

Mind if I... take a quick look?

Columbo squats down, inspecting the muddy boots. Billy sidles up next to him.

BILLY

Look, Captain...

COLUMBO

Please, it's just Lieutenant.

BILLY

Well, maybe you'd be a Captain if you put in a little more effort. Look at you. Looks like you slept in those clothes.

COLUMBO

Well, as a matter of fact...

BILLY

Hey, I'm talkin' here. You come to my circus---

TEENIE (OS)

Your circus?!

BILLY

Shut up, Teenie! You come into my circus, poke yer nose around perpetratin' a news hound, then double-back and ask know nuthin' questions t'yer prime suspect---

Columbo gingerly works on peeling a piece of firecracker scrap paper from Teenie's boot.

TEENIE

I'm a suspect?! What for?

BILLY

Ray's dead, okay?! Someone shot him last night! You happy now?!

Teenie staggers back, PAPER peeling off in Columbo's hand.

TEENIE

Ray?! The curse got Ray?!
But--- But---

COLUMBO

Sir, we don't think a Curse had anything to do with this.

TEENIE

It wasn't the Curse?

COLUMBO

No, sir. It was---

TEENIE

Then... If it didn't get Ray...
Oh my gosh... Then the curse...
It's still out there... It's...

SGT. BULLARD (OS)

Aaaaaahhhhhhhh!!!!

Teenie runs away. Columbo rushes to the trailer, DROPPING HIS CIGAR. Billy picks it up and chomps on it, smirking.

INT. RAY'S TRAILER - DAY

Columbo ducks under the wires, into the bedroom area.

SEDGEWICK

Lieutenant! Don't move!

Bullard kneels at a bedside table, a TARANTULA on his hand.

SGT. BULLARD

One bite and I'm a goner.

SEDGEWICK

Oh, man...

The spider moves, both Sedgewick and Bullard freeze. Columbo steps around Sedgewick, removing the rookie's brand new hat.

SGT. BULLARD

No sudden movement, L.T.. Nice and easy... just stay right there. Hey, what're you doing?

Columbo removes a throw pillow from the bed.

COLUMBO

(approaching)

Did you find the gun?

SGT. BULLARD

No. He's got a back holster but no gun in it, but I---

COLUMBO

A holster. With no gun? That doesn't seem to make much sense. Perhaps the murderer came inside after all and---

SGT. BULLARD

Please, Lieutenant, I'm kinda in the middle of a situation here. If you don't mind...

Columbo SMACKS the underside of Bullard's arm, sending the tarantula straight up into the air. He catches it with the hat on its way down and covers it with the pillow.

COLUMBO

(exiting)

Let me know if you find the gun.

EXT. CORRIDOR OF POSTERS - DAY

Princess Alexandra continues her search. Columbo walks up beside her, hat in hand. She notices him but keeps crawling.

COLUMBO

G'morning, ma'am. Can I help you find something?

PRINCESS

You're that detective, aren't you?

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am. Mind if I ask---

PRINCESS

I'm not supposed to talk to you.

COLUMBO

No? Why's that?

PRINCESS

Because Billy says you're gonna try t'shut the circus down and get us all in trouble and---

COLUMBO

That's Billy Bobbalooga?

PRINCESS

Well, duh. And Merle says we gotta stick together because no one understands the Curse like we do, so...

COLUMBO

And that's Merle Stone? The uh... with the big arms?

PRINCESS

Right. And so, they said you'd be nosin' around and not to say anything if you were.

COLUMBO

That's too bad because I was working on this case involving a missing tarantula but---

PRINCESS

You found Cleo? Where was he?

COLUMBO

Well, it's difficult to know for sure if the spider in question belongs to you, Miss...?

PRINCESS

Oh, I'm Princess Alexandra Bailey Goree Davies. And I'm in charge of all small creatures at Sorcery Circus.

COLUMBO

I see. Well, the problem is this particular creature wasn't wearing any identification at the time, so...

PRINCESS

Well, who else would be missing a tarantula around here? Jeez!

COLUMBO

You'd be surprised, ma'am. Ray Sharps, for one. Before the uh... tragic incident, we know that he collected them and---

PRINCESS

That's a lie. Who told you that? Ray was scared to death of spiders. He wouldn't even let them paint one on my poster.

COLUMBO

Is that so? Well, perhaps you'd be able to describe the insect in question?

PRINCESS

Okay. To start, it's not an insect. It's an arachnid on account of it has eight legs. And it's black all over and about the size of a sand dollar, except he's got a little bitty brown spot right back here...

Columbo lifts the pillow and reveals the spider in question. She grabs Cleo and snuggles his fur to her nose.

PRINCESS

Oh there you are! Did some one want to play with you?

(to Columbo)
You know, most people think they're poisonous, but that's just the girls tarantulas and I don't use them. Boy tarantulas are safe.

COLUMBO
Is that why you don't keep them locked up?

PRINCESS
Who told you that? I lock them up every night.

COLUMBO
Except for last night.

PRINCESS
Did too.
(off his look)
What? I can't help it if someone broke in and took him outta his -- what do you call it -- aquarium? Can I?

COLUMBO
No, ma'am. One of the bottom aquariums?

PRINCESS
Second from the bottom, yeah.

COLUMBO
About this tall?

Columbo moves his hand around, faking it.

PRINCESS
Yeah. Who told you that?

COLUMBO
Sorry, ma'am. Police Business. I'm really not supposed to discuss it.

EXT. CIRCUS COFFEE SHACK/CONCESSION STAND - DAY

Just outside the Big Top, some of the performers get a bite to eat: Or'ongelo, L'mongelo, Maurice, Katrina, Kauffman, Merle and Magica gather around Crappy as he finishes a joke.

CRAPPY

And so the third guy says, "If I'da known you said 'pianist', I'da left my flute at home." And the first guy squints and says, "That's a flute?"

(the crowd GROANS)

What? Come on. That's funny!

SONNY

How'd you ever make it as a clown, anyway?

CRAPPY

Simple, I dressed up like your mother and I---

Columbo walks up and the conversation dies. Columbo wades through them and places his order at the counter.

COLUMBO

One large coffee, please.
Black.

STAND OPERATOR

One dollar. Yer lucky, it's the last of the pot.

He pours the coffee. It runs LIKE SYRUP into the cup.

COLUMBO

Well, maybe a little cream.

The operator slides a CANISTER OF POWDERED CREAM over to Columbo, but Merle intercepts it.

MERLE

Excuse me. Cream anyone?

CRAPPY

Oh, yeah. Over here!

Merle tosses the cream to Crappy.

COLUMBO

Please, go right ahead. I was just... taking a break before I wrapped up the investigation.

MERLE

Leaving all ready?

COLUMBO

I suppose so. You know how the curse is? But I'll be back...

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, in five years!

Columbo ignores them, busying himself with his notebook.

COLUMBO

Right, sir. Or sooner. You know, once the gun's found...

KATRINA

Gun?

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

He was shot?/He wasn't shot/He said he was shot/He did not!

MERLE

(to Magica)

I thought you said he was strangled in his own wires?

MADAM MAGICA

He was. Calypso, tell them, he was hanging from a nuisance around his neck. Am I right?

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am. He was strangled.

CRAPPY

You just said he was shot!

COLUMBO

That's right, sir. Could I have some of that creamer if you're finished? Usually I don't---

CRAPPY

No, I'm not finished! Was he shot or was he strangulated?!

COLUMBO

Yes, sir.

CRAPPY

Yer cruisin' for a bruise, buddy.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, cruisin' for a bruise.

ALL

Yeah. What gives? How'd he die? Tell us! We gotta right to know. No, we don't! Tell us anyway! Yeah, how'd he die?!

They surround Columbo, backing him up into Merle.

CRAPPY

Awright, detective Mumbo Jumbo. Spill it. How'd he die?

COLUMBO

All right, sir. Fine. If you insist. I'll try to walk you through the course of events...

MERLE

That's better.

COLUMBO

Now, as we all know, Mr. Sharps' gun was a...

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

A little pistol/I think it's a 21/It's a 22/Yeah, a 22!

COLUMBO

Very good. And last night Ray went home after he...

KATRINA

After he scared the crap outta us at the poker game.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, he was doin' rounds.

COLUMBO

Exactly. And last night while you were at the poker game. And that was just you ma'am, and you sir, and...

CRAPPY

And her and him and all the resta us. We know. We was there. Tell us something we don't know!

SONNY

Shut up, Crappy, and let him talk. Go ahead, he scared us with the firecrackers.

COLUMBO

And where was that?

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

Playing poker/In our trailer/
It's the blue one /It's green/
It's blue/Green/ Blue/Green!

COLUMBO

And like I said, that's where he
lit the firecrackers?

MERLE

Right.

COLUMBO

And after that, as we all know,
he went on with his rounds of
the circus...

CRAPPY

Gimmee a freakin' break! We
know! He was doin' rounds and
then more fire-crackers and then
what happened?

COLUMBO

Right. That second set of
firecrackers. That's important.
The one's over by Mr. Sharps'
trailer. Anybody hear those?
They were lit at about...?

MERLE

It had to be after midnight.

COLUMBO

After midnight, sir? How do you
know?

MERLE

Believe me. I was sittin' safe
and sound at the poker game with
a case of Fresca under my feet
at twelve o'clock sharp. I even
checked my watch.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, he checked his watch.

MADAM MAGICA

I never heard the fires cracking
and I left my trailings at
twelve and a half.

They all turn to Magica.

KATRINA

Yeah? Where were you going in the middle of the night?

MADAM MAGICA

Nowhere. Nothing. Forget it. I'm not remembering. Calypso, tell us more!

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am, madam. So, between midnight and twelve thirty, as near as I can figure, this second set of firecrackers went off and---

A SHRILL WHISTLE startles everyone.

BILLY (OS)

Just what in the name of Good and Evil is going on here?! Sorcery Circus, listen up! We got eight hundred people outside those gates and I don't see noone workin' today! Someone wanna explain that?! Anyone?!

The gathering disappears in an instant, leaving Columbo with notes and his cup of coffee. Billy storms up with a shovel.

BILLY (CONT.)

Ah, Captain Bubblehead. I shoulda guessed! Tryna be first in line to the circus, huh?

COLUMBO

Well, Mr. Bobbalooga, actually sir, I was thinking about something you told me earlier and...

BILLY

Good. You want a job? Here.

Billy thrusts the shovel at Columbo.

BILLY (CONT.)

Go clean the pachyderm cage.

Billy starts aligning the chairs, the waste baskets, etc.

COLUMBO

No, sir, actually there's this question that's been sticking in the back of my head...

BILLY

Gimme that shovel back, maybe I can knock it loose.

COLUMBO

This morning, you told Mr. Tynie that Ray Sharps had been shot.

BILLY

Yeah, so?

COLUMBO

So, how did you know that, sir?

BILLY

How did I know what?

COLUMBO

That Ray Sharps was shot to death?

Billy wrestles with a trashcan, stalling for time: think, think... finally, an angle.

BILLY

Think about it. Half the people who die in this stinkin' country get shot. It was a fifty-fifty probability, so I went with it. Was I right?

COLUMBO

Yes, sir. You were right. Very good, sir. So, it was a guess?

BILLY

Yeah, it was a guess. You gunna drink that coffee?

COLUMBO

Yes, sir. In just a minute...

CIRCUS MUSIC starts up through the speakers.

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)

Ladies and Gentlemen and children of all ages, welcome to Sorcery Circus! Please make your way to our glorious Big Top!

BILLY

I gotta go. Here, enjoy the show -- and tell yer friends about it, if y'have any!

He slaps a ticket on the table, picks up the shovel and storms off. But before he escapes...

COLUMBO

Oh, Mr. Bobbalooga! Sir!

BILLY

What?!

COLUMBO

Could I have your weight, sir.

BILLY

I am waiting you idjit! Wudda you want?!

COLUMBO

No, sir. Your weight. How much do you weigh, sir? If you don't mind my asking, that is.

BILLY

(teeth clenched)

Seventy-eight pounds.

COLUMBO

Thank you, sir.

BILLY

You done?

COLUMBO

Yes, sir.

BILLY

You sure?

COLUMBO

I think so, sir. Thank you. And I hope you break a leg, sir.

BILLY

The feeling's mutual!

Billy leaves. Columbo pours cream into his coffee but the LID FALLS OFF and the entire canister DUMPS INTO HIS CUP.

INT. BIG TOP - DAY

The circus in FULL SWING. Or'ongelo and L'mongelo fly overhead on the trapeze while Crappy races below trying to catch them with a butterfly net. The CROWD LOVES IT.

Columbo makes his way through the BACKSTAGE CHAOS. Princess Alexandra walks by him on stilts, ANIMALS ROAR from their cages. Kauffman rolls past with a bullseye full of knives.

Everywhere he looks, Columbo sees activity. He turns and turns; he can't take it all in fast enough...

Until he bumps into Billy putting on a crash helmet.

BILLY

Hey! Watch it, putty head!

Billy whirls around dressed in cape, boots and helmet.

COLUMBO

Oh, sorry there, Mr. Bobbalooga. I was just, uh... admiring the circus and---

BILLY

Admire it from the stands, would ya? That's why I gave ya a dag-gone ticket!

COLUMBO

Yes, sir. But first I wanted to ask you something else.

BILLY

Well, I ain't got time!

COLUMBO

I understand, sir. But I was just curious about the press conference.

BILLY

What about it?

COLUMBO

It's just that you told all those reporters that the police had found evidence at the scene of the crime...

BILLY

They usually do, Lt. Dumbo.

COLUMBO

But, you said they found footprints, sir, at the scene of the crime. And, funny enough, guess what they found?

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)

A warm round of applause for Or'ongelo and L'mongelo, our own Armenian Aerial Acrobats!

The crowd APPLAUDS. Billy busies himself applying goggles, gloves and chin guard.

BILLY

Footprints?

COLUMBO

Yes sir, they found footprints.

BILLY

Footprints, fingerprints, murder weapon. It's the same in any mystery book you ever read.

COLUMBO

Exactly what I was thinking, sir. You know, my wife loves a good mystery. But that's what struck me as odd, sir, because right after you said they found the footprints... I mean, right after it, then you said they didn't find any fingerprints. See, I woulda thought that if you'da guessed footprints, you woulda guessed fingerprints, too, like in the mysteries.

BILLY

Well, like I said, it was just a guess.

COLUMBO

Just a guess on the fingerprints, too?

BILLY

Yep, just a guess.

The APPLAUSE CONTINUES. Or'ongelo and L'mongelo come running off stage. Billy slaps them five as they pass.

BILLY

Good job, boys! Good job!
They're eatin' it up out there!
Encore, encore!

The two acrobats return to the stage and the APPLAUSE RISES.

COLUMBO

Well, Mr. Bobbalooga, since
you're so good at all that
guessing, maybe you could help
me with just one more question.
See, it's the footprints again.
Now, there's two pairs of foot-
prints in the mud behind Mr.
Sharps' trailer: Mr. Tynie's, I
believe, and Ms. Madam Magica's.

Billy starts swinging his arms, doing breathing exercises.

BILLY

And your question is?

COLUMBO

Since Mr. Tynie's not so tiny,
you'd think his footprint would
be deeper than a footprint made
by someone like Madam Magica who
probably only weighs about a
hundred pounds soaking wet.

BILLY

Yer the one who's all wet, bub.
That wasn't even a question.

COLUMBO

Yes, sir. That's very observant
of you, very observant.

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)

Ladies & gentlemen and children
of all shapes and sizes! Please
return to your seats and prepare
yourselves for the moment you've
all been waiting for!

BILLY

That's me!

COLUMBO

Then I'll make it quick, sir...

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)
Ladies and Gentlemen, please
join me in welcoming for your
own personal entertainment...

The lights dim, a DRUM ROLL begins and a SPOTLIGHT dances
around the arena.

BILLY
No, I'll make it quick! There
ain't a jerk under this Big Top
that can stick me t'that weasel
last night, 'cludin' you!

COLUMBO
Well, I'd sure like to try, sir.

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)
The one and only... the heart
pounding... stare inducing...
stomach clenching... death
defying performance of...

BILLY
Try it then. You think you can
prove I killed 'im? Take me
downtown, git me a lawyer and
we'll go toe to toe. Otherwise,
git outta my way!

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)
Billy Bobbalooga the Human
Bullet!

The CROWD ERUPTS as Billy runs into the ring.

INT. BIG TOP, PERFORMANCE PLATFORM - DAY

Billy climbs a ladder to the mouth of the giant cannon, while
in the background Teenie crowbars open CRATE #1 and loads a
charge into the back side of the cannon.

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)
Billy Bobbalooga the Human
Bullet will now prepare to be
shot across big top - across 500
feet of unprotected ground -
clear over to the other side!

Billy waves from the barrel of the gun.

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)
And, like a cannon ball, into
the cannon he goes!

Billy secures his goggles and slides into the cannon.

BOB (ON SPEAKERS)
Ladies and Gentlemen! Boys and
Girls! If you'll please help me
count down to the final moment.
10... 9...

INT. BIG TOP, BACK STAGE

Columbo starts making his way to the far side of the tent.

CROWD
8... 7... 6...

He passes Sedgewick watching like a captivated child.

COLUMBO
Officer, follow me. Get your
handcuffs ready.

Sedgewick runs after Columbo

PERFORMERS
5... 4... 3...

INT. BIG TOP, PERFORMANCE PLATFORM - DAY

Teenie lights the fuse.

CROWD
2... 1... Zero!

KA-BOOOOOOOM!!! Billy hurls through the air. The spotlight
follows him until...

BILLY
Aaaaiiiiiieeeeeee!!!!

The spotlight loses track of Billy. RIIIIP!!!! FABRIC TEARS

The spotlight finds a BOBBALOOGA-SIZED HOLE in the tent.

BILLY (CONT.)
Aaaaiiiiiieeeeeee!!!!

An awful CRASH announces the conclusion of Billy's flight.

FADE OUT

FADE IN

EXT. BIG TOP PARKING LOT - DAY

Officer Sedgewick tapes off an area as a stunned crowd files out of the Big Top. Cars depart in droves.

SEDGEWICK

Keep moving, please. Nothing to see here. Back to your cars. Show's over. Keep moving...

BEHIND THE LINE

Billy Bobbalooga's LIFELESS LEGS extend from the windshield of Columbo's Peugeot. Columbo and Bullard study the scene.

SGT. BULLARD

Insurance cover that, you think? Midget through the windshield?

Columbo uses tweezers to remove A SINGLE BB from a crack in the sole of Billy's shoe.

COLUMBO

Mr. Bobbalooga meet Ray Sharps.

SEDGEWICK (OS)

Lieutenant!

Columbo sees Sedgewick trying to keep Maurice at bay.

Maurice: *Follow me!* Columbo beckons the call.

COLUMBO

Watch the paint job when you take him out, would you, Sgt.?

INT. BIG TOP - DAY

CHAOS. With the stands empty, the performers argue openly -- Crappy threatening a terrified Teenie with a CROWBAR.

TEENIE

But I didn't do nuthin'!

CRAPPY

Oh yeah? Well yer stayin' right there 'til we git some answers!

KATRINA

Aw, let him go ya big bully!

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
But he killed Billy/He did not
kill Billy/Yes he did/No he
didn't/Yes he did/No he didn't!

BOB
I portend that the Curse was the
ultimate cause of Ray's demise.

KAUFFMAN
Yeah, what he said!

MERLE
Shut up, Kauffman, the Curse
don't never strike twice!

Maurice leads Columbo into the fray.

COLUMBO
Excuse me! If everyone could
just...

PRINCESS
That's right. One death's
plenty every five years, and---

BOB
Has anyone considered that this
is the genesis of not only a new
century for the Curse, but also
a new millenium?

CRAPPY
So what, chicken butt?

BOB
One death in the first
millenium... Two deaths in the
second millenium...

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
Exactly/That's stupid/It's
wonderful/I hate it/You love it!

Columbo tries to gain some control over the mob.

COLUMBO
If I could just get everybody to
settle down for a...

SONNY
He's got a point!

KAUFFMAN
Yeah, he's got a point.

CRAPPY
Well his head sure does!

PRINCESS
Shut up, Crappy!

MADAM MAGICA
Eeeeeiiiiiaaaaaa!

The ARGUMENT STOPS, all eyes turning to Magica.

MADAM MAGICA
I can take all that I have took!
No more!

MERLE
But, Magica, we've gotta---

MADAM MAGICA
No-no-no! Babushka, be
listening to me. The Cursing is
out of the hand and the foot.

BOB
You don't mean to suggest...

MADAM MAGICA
Yes, I am suggesticating we are
all in mortifying endangerment.
The cursing could striking again
at any one of us! At any
timing. We must... Vamoose!

The performers ERUPT; each taking sides, pushing and shoving.

PERFORMERS
The curse's outta control/We're
done for/No, Teenie did it!
Teenie didn't kill no one/Yes he
did/No he didn't/He's a monster/
Don't you touch him/I'll kill
ya/You wouldn't dare/Try me/
Innocent/Guilty/Innocent/Guilty!

Teenie makes a break for it. Crappy lurches for him with the
crowbar but Merle reigns him in.

MERLE
Let him go, Crappy! He didn't
do nuthin'.

CRAPPY
I know ya did it, ya freak show
reject! I just wanna know how!

MERLE

Alla you, listen up! Y'got one hour. Go pack yer stuff and we'll meet back here t'get yer final pay checks! I hate t'say it, but Sorcery Circus... is finished!

They break up in every direction - revealing Columbo.

COLUMBO

Sir, if I could just have a second... Ma'am... Excuse me.

He gives up, unwrapping a cigar

BOB

Detective, this curse has plagued our establishment for nearly half a century. So, unless you are more crafty than the gods who rule our fate, I think your assistance to our humble cause here is complete.

COLUMBO

I'm beginning to get that impression.

Columbo climbs the steps of the cannon platform.

INT. CANNON PLATFORM - DAY

Columbo inspects the open and empty CRATE #1. Next to it, he discovers the trap door - unlocked.

Climbing down, Columbo inspects the other crates. He tries to open them but they've been nailed shut. Suddenly, a crowbar arrives. Columbo looks up to find Maurice.

COLUMBO

Thank you, sir. Dangerous line of work. I bet you really have to know what you're doing. You know who measures these out?

Maurice: Yes. He points to the ACME name. Columbo pries the top crate open - the cake of powder fits SNUGLY inside.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

Not a lot of room for error, is there?

Maurice: Nope.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

And who oversees the order? Is that Mr. Sharps?

Maurice: *No. Billy.*

COLUMBO (CONT.)

(climbing out)

And who has the key to this lock?

Maurice: *Billy.*

COLUMBO (CONT.)

Billy Bobbalooga. Is that right? Thank you, sir.

Maurice tips his hat and smiles. He flicks his thumb and a flame emerges. He lights Columbo's cigar.

COLUMBO

You sir, are a gentleman and a scholar.

INT. BACK STAGE AT THE BIG TOP - DAY

A make-up table holds a PHOTOGRAPH from 1957: two dozen performers in the Big Top. Front and center: RAY SHARPS with a SQUEAMISH ASSISTANT - CRAPPY giving them both bunny-ears.

Katrina lays a tray full of knives, daggers and axes upon the make-up table.

KATRINA

Know what this means, don'tcha?

She whips a knife behind her - THUNK. And another and another. THUNK. THUNK. THUNK.

KATRINA (CONT.)

Carnivals and State Fairs. I hate Carnivals and State Fairs.

Kauffman sits at a bullseye twenty feet away. He removes the knives from the target and packs them into a case.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, me too.

Columbo strolls around the corner.

COLUMBO

Excuse me, mind if I?

A cleaver flies by - KA-THUMP - pinning Columbo's cigar to the wall. Kauffman pulls the cleaver loose, tossing the cigar into the dirt. Columbo shakes his head.

COLUMBO

You know, maybe there is something to this curse after all.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, it's outta control. It could kill anybody. Even you.

THUNK. THUNK. THUNK. Knives fly right between the two men. Kauffman scowls as he removes the knives.

KATRINA

Hey! You're pretty good down there. You didn't even flinch!

COLUMBO

It's easy, ma'am. I'm too scared t'move.

KATRINA

That's the beauty of it! People eat that stuff up.

Columbo approaches Katrina as she continues throwing.

COLUMBO

People eat what up, ma'am?

KATRINA

Danger. You don't think they watch me throw knives cuz they like t'see metal tossed around, do ya? They watch cuz they think one day I might just cut my husband's head off. Sharps taught me that. Smart man.

Columbo picks up the photo from the make-up table.

COLUMBO

I guess Mr. Sharps has been here a long time, if this is him...?

KATRINA

That's him.

COLUMBO

Who's his friend? Does she still work here?

Katrina shakes her head, picks up another set of blades.

KATRINA

Don't you know nuthin'? Dimples was the first to go. 'Course back in '57 it wasn't a curse, it was just called An Accident.

COLUMBO

Nineteen, fifty-seven, ma'am?

KATRINA

(pointing)

Those are my folks. They did the knives back then. Way they told it, work was tight, everyone did their own job and someone else's. Ray'd gotten heat exhaustion settin' up the tents. He was too sick t'go on, so she took his place. Idiot. Put her head in the lion's mouth. Lion hadn't eaten for three days...

COLUMBO

That's terrible.

KATRINA

Terrible for Dimples, but the crowd loved it. Standing ovation.

COLUMBO

Ma'am, I think that's what they call "morbid curiosity".

KATRINA

It's called a couple yearsa sold out shows is what it's called. Luckily, right about the time people start losin' interest, it happened again -- brakes went out on a clown car, squashed Jack Bivouac like a pancake.

COLUMBO

When was that, ma'am?

KATRINA

Five years after Dimples, to the day.

COLUMBO

That's uncanny, ma'am.

KATRINA

Tell me about it. Killer clown cars, drownings, electicution, impalement, heart attack, you name it.

COLUMBO

Every five years...

KATRINA

That's why we're the Sorcery Circus. Back then we were just Circus Galore, but by '67 Ray'd figured out this place had messed up juju: 1825 good days, and one really bad one.

COLUMBO

But this one was twice as bad, is that it?

KATRINA

I guess. I mean, losin' Billy the Boob wasn't all that bad.

COLUMBO

Ma'am?

KATRINA

Oh, don't get me wrong. I wouldn't wish death on no one, but if it had t'be someone...

She throws her last knife, starts packing the make-up table.

COLUMBO

Anyone else feel that way about Mr. Bobbalooga?

KATRINA

Be hard pressed t'find someone who didn't, except maybe the giant. But none of them'd ever do nuthin' about it. Buncha wimps. I kept thinkin' Merle'd snap and rip his head off... But he's on probation, so---
(she blanches)
Don't tell him I told you that.

COLUMBO

No, ma'am.

KAUFFMAN (OS)

Sweetie! We're missin' a blade!

COLUMBO

What was he on probation for?

Katrina finds the knife in the dirt. She picks it up.

KATRINA

He did fifteen for blowin' up his boss's car... with his boss in it. But you didn't hear it from me.

COLUMBO

No, ma'am. Thank you, ma'am.

Columbo turns to go, Katrina pulls back to throw the knife.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

Oh, and where could I find---

She throws the knife, distracted. THUNK.

KAUFFMAN (OS)

Ow!!

COLUMBO

(wincing)

Never mind, ma'am. Sorry, sir.

EXT. BIG TOP - DAY

Columbo traipses along the corridor of posters, studying his potential suspects. Bullard and Sedgewick fall in step.

SGT. BULLARD

Here's the accident report, L.T.. Maybe your insurance company can---

COLUMBO

Sergeant, I don't think Mr. Bobbalooga was killed by accident.

SGT. BULLARD

Curse, accident, mishap... whatever. Too much gunpowder sent the twerp in orbit.

COLUMBO

No, I think he was murdered, and by one of these people up here.

SGT. BULLARD

If you say so, L.T. Sedgewick,
go find that guy with the big
feet and arrest him for murder -
twice!

SEDGEWICK

Yes, sir.

Sedgewick hurries off, Columbo stares at Teenie's poster.

COLUMBO

The giant didn't do it.

SGT. BULLARD

Make up your mind, L.T. Did the
sasquatch do it or not?

COLUMBO

That cannon, it uses gunpowder
that comes in packed crates.
The crates are numbered and
sealed to the exact size.

SGT. BULLARD

So?

COLUMBO

It's impossible to accidentally
put too much gunpowder in the
cannon, Sergeant.

SGT. BULLARD

But you said he was murdered.

COLUMBO

That's right. I don't know why,
I don't know how, but I know
that someone at this circus has
been killing people for almost
fifty years. And we've got less
than an hour to find him or
he'll disappear for good.

SGT. BULLARD

What do you want me to do?

COLUMBO

There's a website for this
circus. Sorcery Circus dot-com.
I want you to bring me every-
thing you can about this curse.

EXT. POKER TRAILER - DAY

The door, open wide, reveals the REMAINS OF THE POKER GAME.
From somewhere inside, an argument ensues.

OR'ONGELO &
L'MONGELO (OS)
Texas/Tennessee/Texas/Tennessee/
Who ever heard of Tennessee Hold
'em?/They play Texas Hold 'em in
Tennessee!/No they don't/Yes
they do/Texas/Tennessee/Texas!

Columbo inspects the remnants of Ray's firecrackers. He
finds a full one and lights it. BANG! Or'ongelo and
L'mongelo stick their heads out of two separate windows.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
What is it?/Who is it?/What do
you want?!

COLUMBO
Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know
anybody was home. I was just...
Are these the fireworks Mr.
Sharps lit last night? The ones
that broke up your poker game?

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
I don't know/Yes you do/Not for
sure/Sure they are/You don't
know/Sure I do/Not for sure/I
think they are/We don't know.

COLUMBO
Where were the two of you last
night? Here? Playing poker?

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
That's right/Right here/Here we
were/Playing poker/Right here.

COLUMBO
And do you have any witnesses?

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
We have Crappy/And Katrina/And
the Princess and Katrina/I said
Katrina/Did you say Bob?/No Bob
was here, I said Katrina/And so
was Sonny/And so was Merle/And
so was Merle and the mime/I just
said that/No you didn't/Yes I
did!

COLUMBO

All eight of you were here? All night long?

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

Until the screaming/No they weren't/Yes they were/Except for Merle/Yes he was/No, he got soda/Yeah, you're right/He was gone for ten minutes/More like fifteen/It was ten/It was fifteen!

COLUMBO

Merle Stone left this trailer last night? By himself? What time was that?

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

He went for soda/A case of Fresca/At eleven thirty/ It was twelve/ Eleven thirty!/Twelve!

Columbo walks as they CONTINUE TO ARGUE.

EXT. RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - DAY

With the ORANGE CAN and his funnel in hand, Sonny replaces the key atop the fuse box.

SONNY

Hurry it up. Let's scram.

Merle hoists a row of empty spools over his head.

MERLE

I don't care what anybody says, I'm takin' as mucha that wire with me as I can carry.

At the police line they encounter Columbo, waiting for them.

COLUMBO

Can I help you gentlemen?

SONNY

I doubt it.

COLUMBO

Oh, I don't, sir. I don't doubt it at all. I could help by explaining that it's illegal to be inside an active crime scene.

Sonny and Merle exchange glances.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

Because I'm sure you realize that this would be a violation of your parole, if either of you gentlemen happen to be on parole, that is.

SONNY

Aw, come on, man, I was just gettin' my stuff!

MERLE

Shut up, Sonny.

Columbo taps the near-empty orange can.

COLUMBO

These items belong to you, sir?

SONNY

That's right, they're---

Sonny gets a sharp look from Merle. Sonny crosses his arms.

SONNY (CONT.)

That's right.

COLUMBO

If these items belong to you, sir, then why are they locked inside Mr. Sharps' trailer?

Sonny looks to Merle for help.

MERLE

Security.

SONNY

Boss keeps all the volatiles under one lock and key.

COLUMBO

Volatiles, sir?

SONNY

Here, I'll show you.

Sonny tips the can to his mouth and drains the liquid.

COLUMBO

And would that one key be the key you just hid on the fuse box, sir? Or one of the keys Mr. Sharps had in his pocket?

SONNY

MmmmRrrggghmmmm.

MERLE

When he said one key, he really didn't mean just one key.

COLUMBO

Oh, I see. When he said one key he really meant two keys?

MERLE

The boss had two keys t'every lock in th'circus. One he kept for himself, and a spare for anyone who needed it.

Sonny blows a LARGE FLAME from his mouth -- which CATCHES FIRE to one of Merle's spools. Merle drops the spools CRASHING TO THE GROUND as they try to bat out the fire.

Columbo runs to Ray's trailer and grabs the fire extinguisher clamped to the fuse box. He momentarily pauses to WIPE IT CLEAN OF DUST, then races back to the fire.

COLUMBO

Here, use this!

Merle takes the extinguisher and douses the flame.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

That's some stuff you got there, sir. What's in it?

MERLE

Ray's secret formula.

SONNY

It's a Kaboom Cocktail: kerosene and glycerin.

COLUMBO

A Kaboom Cocktail. Sure, with kerosene and glycerin, that's a good name for it. Do you mind if I---

A squad car races up, Officer Sedgewick jumping out.

SEDGEWICK

Lieutenant!

COLUMBO

Officer, fire's under control.

SEDGEWICK

Sgt. Bullard sent me. Someone found the gun.

COLUMBO

That's excellent.

(to Merle and Sonny)

Gentlemen, will you excuse me? And, I'll just take these for evidence... Leave the spools.

He gingerly picks up the extinguisher and fuel can.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

And thank you, sir, for the demonstration. I always wanted t'know how that was done.

SONNY

You're welcome.

He climbs into the front seat and Sedgewick drives off -- leaving Merle staring spitefully at a smiling Sonny.

SONNY (CONT.)

What?

Merle pushes him to the ground.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

Sedgewick zips along as Columbo bags the items.

COLUMBO

And have Sgt. Bullard dust both of these for fingerprints. I want them compared to anything he pulled off the cannon.

SEDGEWICK

Dusted for prints. Yes, sir.

EXT. TEENIE'S TRAILER - DAY

Sgt. Bullard stands on the roof of the trailer taking photos.

Columbo gets out of the car and wades through the crowd to a LADDER leaned against the trailer. The crowd contains Or'ongelo, L'mongelo, Katrina, Kauffman, Maurice, Bob and Princess Alexandra - who stands high on a PAIR OF STILTS.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

But he's such a nice boy/He's a loner/A troubled man/He kept to himself/He musta just snapped.

KATRINA
I knew it all along.

KAUFFMAN
Yeah, all along.

Maurice: *Walking a Tightrope.*

BOB
Indeed, the razor's edge between
good and evil can often be mis-
stepped.

Columbo climbs the ladder, finding the GUN lying out in the
MIDDLE OF THE ROOF.

SGT. BULLARD
Lieutenant, we've gotta find
that giant.

COLUMBO
Who found the gun?

PRINCESS (OS)
I did.

Columbo looks over and finds himself face to face with
Princess Alexandra high on her stilts.

COLUMBO
That's quite a growth spurt
you've had, ma'am. How'd you
find this weapon?

PRINCESS
I was just walking by. I take
down all the signs.

COLUMBO
Just walking by? Did you move
the gun or was it---

PRINCESS
No, it was right there. I went
and got the police.

COLUMBO
That was a good job, ma'am.
Thank you.

ALEXANDRA
You really think Teenie killed
Mr. Sharps?

COLUMBO

That's what we're trying to find out, ma'am. Officer Sedgewick, will you take this young lady's statement, please?

SEDGEWICK

Yes, sir. Ma'am, if you'll come with me...

Columbo turns to Bullard, who gathers the gun for evidence.

COLUMBO

Seems like a funny place to hide a gun.

SGT. BULLARD

Yeah, well... I don't think we're playin' with the sharpest marble in the bag, L.T..

Columbo descends the ladder, deep in thought. He wades back through the crowd while Bullard addresses them from on high.

SGT. BULLARD (CONT.)

I need everyone's attention, please! I know this man, this Teenie Tynie, was a friend of yours... a colleague, whatever. But right now we need to bring him in for questioning. So, please, if anyone knows where we can find him, we sure could use your help.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah! We'll go catch him for you and we'll bring him in!

SGT. BULLARD

No, that's not what I---

BOB

Leave no stone unturned!

KATRINA

Is there a reward?!

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

A reward/We'll be famous/We'll be rich/We'll be on TV/Let's go!

SGT. BULLARD

Wait a minute! I never said reward!

But it's too late. The crowd has run off - all except Princess Alexandra who sits atop the police car.

PRINCESS

...and then I brought the sergeant back here and showed him the roof. But of course---

COLUMBO

Excuse me, ma'am. Do you have any idea where I could buy a Fresca around here?

PRINCESS

A Fresca? Sure. I think Merle gets 'em right down the street over there. A couple blocks, there's a mini-mart.

COLUMBO

Thank you, ma'am.

PRINCESS

Sure, no problem.
(back to Sedgewick)
But of course I didn't know if I should tell or not cuz Teenie's kinda like my friend and all...

INT. MINI MART - DAY

A lone MINI-MART CASHIER stands in front of his COMPUTER, amidst Slim Jims and Telephone Calling Cards.

COLUMBO

It would have been some time between eleven thirty and midnight...

MINI MART CASHIER

Well, I didn't work last night, but... I can just... punch in a case of Fresca - we don't sell a lot of that - and... it should just take a second.

COLUMBO

I'd appreciate that, sir.

Columbo pours himself a large cup of FRESHLY BREWED COFFEE.

MINI MART CASHIER

Here it is. We've sold two cases of Fresca. One in 1998 and the other last night.

COLUMBO

Can you tell the exact time of that sale, by any chance, sir?

MINI MART CASHIER

No problem. Just... click and wait and... eleven fifty-four.

Columbo pulls two dollars from his pockets.

COLUMBO

That's a little steep for coffee, don't you think?

(smiling)

Oh, you mean the Fresca, sir. That's good because I only have a couple bucks. Eleven fifty-four did you say? Last night?

MINI MART CASHIER

That's right. And the coffee's only a dollar.

Columbo hands over ONE OF HIS TWO REMAINING DOLLARS.

COLUMBO

And thank you, sir. I can't tell you what this means to me.

MINI MART CASHIER

Have a nice day!

EXT. MINI MART - DAY

Columbo takes a sip of his coffee. As he passes by, Crappy talks on a payphone, fiddling with the COIN TROUGH.

CRAPPY

Amputation-cramputation! Git off yer greasy butt and come pick me up. Chop chop, I'm outta here in half an hour! Sure, tell me all about it.

Crappy covers the mouthpiece and holds it away from his ear.

CRAPPY (CONT.)

Wudda ya know, rubbahead?

COLUMBO

I was wondering, sir, if you might have change for a dollar? I need to make a call.

CRAPPY

Yeah, sure.

(into the phone)

Look, are y'comin' or what? Of course I care. I just said I did. You wanna know how much? You really wanna know? You listening?

He gives the mouth piece his best BRONX CHEER, then SLAMS down the receiver and swipes COLUMBO'S LAST DOLLAR.

CRAPPY (CONT.)

Contortionists.

(giving him change)

Here's fifty and there's sumthin in the changer for ya.

Columbo balances his coffee on the phone booth ledge and deposits one of the quarters.

COLUMBO (INTO PHONE)

Yes, good afternoon, this is Lt. Columbo. I'd like to speak to someone in the bomb squad. Yes, I'll hold...

He reaches into the trough, but all he finds is a STRING OF GUM STUCK TO HIS FINGER. He calls after Crappy and YANKS the phone cord taut - knocking his COFFEE TO THE GROUND.

COLUMBO (INTO PHONE)

Aw, crap. Oh no, not you ma'am. I'm just... Perhaps you could help me. Lt. Columbo, Homicide division. I'm curious, what would happen if I mixed kerosene and glyserine with gun powder?

EXT. CIRCUS TOWN - DAY

Columbo returns and makes a point of CHECKING HIS WATCH.

Behind him, Kauffman wields a BUTCHER KNIFE, peering around corners. The SOUNDS OF RILED ANIMALS rises in the distance.

CRAPPY (OS)

Here Teenie Teenie! Here Teenie!

WHACK! Crappy slams a CROWBAR against a covered bale of hay.

CRAPPY (CONT.)

Here Teenie Teenie Teenie!

Columbo looks around - the circus has gone mad - everywhere there are people on the hunt: Princess with a BUTTERFLY NET, Maurice with a BASEBALL BAT, Sonny with a PITCHFORK...

EXT. MADAM MAGICA'S TRAILER - DAY

Merle stands guard outside as Columbo arrives.

COLUMBO

Is Miss Madam Magica at home?

MERLE

She's busy.

COLUMBO

Well then maybe you can clear something up for me. See, I know you went to the mini mart last night, and you bought a case of Fresca at 11:54.

MERLE

So?

COLUMBO

So, you said you checked your watch at the poker game.

MERLE

So?

COLUMBO

And you were pretty sure it was midnight, sir. Remember?

MERLE

I remember.

COLUMBO

Well, it's at least an eight minute walk from the circus to the store, sir. So how could you be back here by---

MERLE

I ran.

COLUMBO

You ran, sir? With a case of soda? That's almost a mile.

MERLE

So?

COLUMBO

I'm curious, sir. Why would you do something like that?

Merle grabs Columbo by the lapels, lifts him up nose to nose.

MERLE

(whispering)

I was scared, awright?

COLUMBO

I know exactly how y'feel, sir.

MERLE

You don't know what it's like. Sharps was one brave hombre, but even he needed a gut fulla wine just t'go out there by himself. Me, I didn't have that. So I just ran as fast as I could.

MADAM MAGICA (OS)

Babushka, put down the Calypso. Please me, and here are the checks for paying the peoples.

Merle takes the stack of envelopes.

MERLE

Thanks, Magica. I'll see y'in the Big Top.

(to Columbo)

That's our little secret.

COLUMBO

Yes, sir. But... you meant whiskey, right? It wasn't wine that Mr. Sharps had...

MERLE

I think I know the difference between a whiskey bottle and a wine bottle, detective.

Columbo scratches his head. Magica gabs him by the arm.

MADAM MAGICA

Well, whining is fine, but the whisking is always quicker. Come, Calypso. Tell me what you're wanting, because I know your wanting somethings...

INT. MADAM MAGICA'S TRAILER - DAY

Columbo closes the door behind him - Magica's trailer lit with hundreds of candles circling her crystal ball.

COLUMBO

Ma'am, I was just hoping... I don't know... I don't usually do things this way, but...

MADAM MAGICA

You're wanting me to be helping with the finding of the Teenie Tynie man.

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am. I'm kind of worried about him.

MADAM MAGICA

Yes, let me just find my crystal ball bearings. Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm.

She gazes into the crystal ball. Columbo looks around the room -- the TAROT CARDS catching his attention. He studies Billy's and Ray's cards on the table.

MADAM MAGICA (CONT.)

(chanting)

Teenie's watching bunny rabbits, at the very topping. His tears are wetting fishing nets, and might not never be for stopping.

Her eyes open, the trance gone.

MADAM MAGICA (CONT.)

Calypso, did I help you?

COLUMBO

Well ma'am, it didn't hurt me.

MADAM MAGICA

I can be trying again.

COLUMBO

(re: the cards)

Maybe you could try with these.

MADAM MAGICA

No, no more with those. Already they show me things I want to never know.

He holds up the cards for Billy and Ray.

COLUMBO

And what was that, ma'am?

MADAM MAGICA

The Arching of Death, Calypso. Every five yearlings I am to make the arching so Ray can be finding out who is to be dying.

COLUMBO

And you use these cards to see out who's going to die next?

MADAM MAGICA

Believe in me, Calypso, I'm wishing I couldn't. But Ray, he's always for running the circus... And so a catching by surprise with the death, it's hard for his businessing.

COLUMBO

And it works, ma'am? With these cards?

MADAM MAGICA

Madam Magica knows all! For forty-five yearlings, death was never for catching Ray by surprisement - with the excepting of last night, of course.

Columbo studies the cards.

COLUMBO

And why is that? I mean, his card's here, in the uh... the Archway of... the Curse here.

MADAM MAGICA

Billy did the putting of Ray in the Arching of Death..

COLUMBO

Billy Bobbalooga? He knew about this... this stuff, ma'am?

MADAM MAGICA

Yes, Calypso. He was maddening. I tell to him he is doomed - maybe for him to be leaving, it would be good, I'm thinking. But he is not for the listening to me. So he does the putment of Ray in the arching and then... with the slamming of the doorment. And now either of them, they are dead.

Columbo moves the cards side by side. He studies them.

MADAM MAGICA (CONT.)

For me, even for to be touching in the Archment of Death I think could be a big dangerment.

Columbo quickly removes his fingers, wiping them on his coat.

EXT. BIG TOP - DAY

Or'ongelo and L'mongelo exit the tent with pitchforks in hand as Columbo arrives.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

He's not in here/Maybe over there/We tried that way/How 'bout this way?/Good idea!

INT. BIG TOP - DAY

Columbo enters the center ring. He studies the cannon. DRIP -- something lands on his cheek.

He looks up - a SAFETY NET. Beyond, a trapeze platform.

Columbo wipes the drop from his face, he smells it then tastes it. He walks to the base of the platform and begins climbing a ladder hundreds of feet tall.

INT. BIG TOP, TRAPEZE PLATFORM - DAY

Teenie sits alone and puffy faced, flinging TEARS from his cheeks off into the air. Columbo climbs onto the platform.

COLUMBO

Mind if I join you?

TEENIE

No.

Columbo gets his footing. The hole Billy made in the tent looks out over a sky decorated with puffy white clouds.

COLUMBO

I guess you're used to heights.

TEENIE

I like looking at the clouds.
They look like bunny rabbits.

Columbo notices his distance to the ground below, and moves closer to the center of the platform.

COLUMBO

Y'know, when I was little my brothers and sisters always used to take me out to Coney Island in the summer. And every summer we'd go see the circus.

TEENIE

This circus?

COLUMBO

I don't know. It could've been. I used to just love to sit there and smell the cotton candy and listen to all the animals.

TEENIE

Me, too.

COLUMBO

The trapeze was my favorite, but usually from down there. Not up here, like this.

TEENIE

I like the horses.

COLUMBO

Yeah, I like the horses too.

The men share a smile.

TEENIE

Are you here to arrest me?

COLUMBO

No, sir.

TEENIE

Please?

COLUMBO

And why would I do that, sir?

TEENIE

Well, if you arrest me for killing Billy, then that means the curse didn't do it and if the curse didn't do it then the curse only killed Ray and if the curse only killed Ray then it's not all outta control, and if it's not all outta control then the circus don't hafta close and if the circus don't hafta close, then everybody won't be so sad.

COLUMBO

Sir, I like the way you think. There's only one problem...

TEENIE

What's that?

COLUMBO

You didn't kill anybody.

TEENIE

I didn't?

COLUMBO

Sir, when I was little and my sisters got ice cream on their new shirts, you know who they used to blame?

(Teenie doesn't)

If my brothers got in trouble for breaking windows, they blamed the same person: me.

TEENIE

You broke windows?

COLUMBO

No, but I got blamed for it. Just like you. I got blamed for so many different things, I couldn't keep track of all the things I didn't do.

TEENIE

MmmHmm. And did you used to get in trouble, too?

COLUMBO

All the time.

TEENIE

Billy used t'get in trouble.
Sometimes he'd stick up for me
and get in all sortsa trouble.

COLUMBO

Well, sir, Billy was the kind of
guy that---

TEENIE

He used t'tell me, "Teenie, they
might look up to ya, but they'll
never look out for ya. So, ya
gotta look out for yourself.

COLUMBO

That sounds like him, all right.

TEENIE

He's the best friend I ever had.

Teenie slams his fist against the TRAPEZE, knocking it loose.
It SWINGS OUT over the circus.

TEENIE (CONT.)

And now the circus is over and
it's all my fault!

COLUMBO

It's all right, sir. That's why
I'm here. I was hoping that---

The TRAPEZE SWINGS BACK and knocks into Columbo. He lurches
back, trying to catch his balance... Columbo teeters.

His arms swing wildly. He drops his cigar. He grabs for
Teenie, but it's too late... COLUMBO FALLS into the abyss.

COLUMBO

Aaaaaahhhhhh!!!!

Teenie watches him fall -- the YELL TURNING TO LAUGHTER.

TEENIE

Hey, Mister! You okay?!

Columbo bounces off the safety net

COLUMBO

Couldn't be better! Couldn't be
better! Sir, don't go anywhere!
Stay right there!

Columbo climbs down from the net.

TEENIE

Hey! Where you goin'? What about savin' the circus?!

COLUMBO

Sir, I'll be right back! If you still want me to arrest you, I'll be glad t'do it then!

EXT. BIG TOP - DAY

Columbo exits, only to find Sedgewick racing inside.

SEDGEWICK

Lieutenant, I heard you yell.

COLUMBO

I'm fine. Listen, Mr. Tynie's in there. I need you to keep him safe until I get back.

SEDGEWICK

Sure, but where---

COLUMBO

Just keep him safe!

EXT. CIRCUS TOWN - DAY

Columbo rushes against a tide of weapon- and suitcase-wielding circus performers heading TOWARD THE BIG TOP.

Crappy tries to trip Columbo with a leg extension, but the detective sidesteps, picking up speed.

Bullard catches up to Columbo, handing him a stack of paper.

SGT. BULLARD

Here's the print-out for the website. You know, each death has its own page with pictures and a history and---

COLUMBO

Thank you, Sergeant.

SGT. BULLARD

And we got a fingerprint match off that orange can you gave to Sedgewick. They matched the unknown prints we found on the booze cabinet inside.

COLUMBO

Thank you, Sergeant.

SGT. BULLARD
Musta found some coffee, eh
Lieutenant?

COLUMBO
Sergeant, check your notes. Was
there a wine bottle inside Mr.
Sharps' trailer?

Bullard slows down, checking his notes, catching his breath.

SGT. BULLARD
Musta been cappuccino.

EXT. BACK SIDE OF RAY'S HIGH VOLTAGE TRAILER - DAY

Columbo studyies the window. Sgt. Bullard trails in.

SGT. BULLARD
No wine in the trailer, L.T.
Just booze. What's going on?

COLUMBO
Why wouldn't a man, if he knew
he was about to die... Why
wouldn't he try everything he
could to stay alive?

SGT. BULLARD
Who?

COLUMBO
Mr. Sharps. He was strangled,
attacked by a spider, he lost
his gun, he was shot six times.
But he never thought to use the
bottle in his pocket to defend
himself? It doesn't make sense.

SGT. BULLARD
Well, you never know what goes
through a guy's mind when he's
about to meet his maker.

COLUMBO
I do now, Sergeant. And I'll
tell you - a man about to die,
without even thinking about it,
he'll try everything he can to
stay alive. Two minutes ago,
sergeant, I was trying to fly.

Columbo climbs under the police line and further out into the
field. He kicks aside wine bottles and beer cans. He
searches behind tufts of grass, inside abandoned tires...

COLUMBO (CONT.)

So I know, if Mr. Sharps was being attacked inside, he would have done something with that bottle - he did do something with that bottle - because that bottle in his pocket was not the bottle he had when he returned last night. He used that. He threw it and broke that window... And that's why the pieces of glass were dusty on the edges. Because they fell onto the ground and got dusty.

And finally... he finds it: RAY'S CHIANTI BOTTLE stuck inside an old scraggly bush. Triumphantly he holds it up.

SGT. BULLARD

Only one problem, sir. The area under the window was all muddy.

Columbo uncorks it and takes a sniff; it kicks his head back.

COLUMBO

Those footprints and the mud were a set up. Mr. Bobbalooga wanted us to think the window was broken from the outside-in, when really he was inside the whole time.

SGT. BULLARD

The midget killed sharps? Then who killed the midget?

COLUMBO

That's what I'm gunna finds out.

He seals the bottle and hustles off toward the Big Top.

INT. BIG TOP - DAY

Teenie clings to the ladder a few feet off the ground. ALL THE PERFORMERS SURROUND HIM, Sedgewick keeping them at bay.

SEDGEWICK

Get back! Everyone back!

MERLE

I wanna see justice!

CRAPPY

Yeah, just us and him alone - for about ten minutes!

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO
He killed Billy/He killed Ray/
Billy/Ray/Billy/Ray/Billy/Ray!

KATRINA
I knew it all along.

KAUFFMAN
Yeah, all along!

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!

Firecracker SMOKE clears and Columbo stands - his cigar
burning in one hand, the Chianti bottle in the other.

COLUMBO
I'm sorry. I hate to bother you
ladies and gentlemen. But I
think you're about t'lynch the
wrong person.

CRAPPY
Wudda you know?! We all saw him
send the shrimp into orbit!

KAUFFMAN
Yeah, and he shot Ray, too.

Columbo flips through the web page printouts.

COLUMBO
Well then, we also need to
arrest him for killing Korko and
J.J. Morris and Jack Bivouac and
Dimples and Kangpoon and every
death since 1957...

BOB
Are you suggesting that one
person is responsible for all
those disagreeable deaths?

COLUMBO
Yes, sir. I am.

PRINCESS
But why would anyone?

KAUFFMAN
Yeah, why?

COLUMBO

Well, my wife, Mrs. Columbo, she's taught me a little bit about these web pages over the years. See this, right here? This means that your web page has had almost a million people visit this site so far.

KATRINA

I told ya. People eat that stuff up!

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am. And you also have newspaper or magazine articles. It's called publicity, and Mr. Sharps knew how to use it. When people die in your circus, it's good for business.

BOB

Regardless, my good man, your theory is preposterous. The only individuals still in the employ of the circus since 1957 are...

TEENIE

Ray and Happy.

KATRINA

Yeah, and with Ray dead, that only leaves...

All eyes turn to Crappy.

CRAPPY

What? What're you lookin' at?

SONNY

You're just twisted enough to drown a porpoise.

MADAM MAGICA

Or poison a sword swallowing!

MERLE

Or impale the fat lady.

KATRINA

Or over shoot the human bullet.

CRAPPY

You guys got it all wrong.
Sure, impale the fat lady,
that's funny stuff... But I
didn't kill no one. Help me out
here, Columbo Dumbo.

COLUMBO

I'd be glad to, sir.

Columbo places the Chianti bottle on the cannon platform and
steps closer to the crowd.

CRAPPY

Well, that's a start.

Crappy and grabs the bottle and Columbo GRINS TO HIMSELF.

COLUMBO

Ladies and gentlemen, the clown
didn't do it. The murderer was
a little bit smarter than Mr.
Happy here...

Crappy takes a HUGE DRINK of the whiskey.

COLUMBO (CONT.)

...in fact, he was an expert in
one field in particular.

Columbo HOLDS UP HIS CIGAR just as Crappy SPITS THE LIQUID
from his mouth. It bursts into a BRIGHT ORANGE FLAME.

BOB

Pyrotechnics.

COLUMBO

That's right, sir. Someone who
knew that kerosene and glyserine
in the right balance would send
Mr. Bobalooga shooting over the
safety net and out into the
parking lot.

As Crappy GASPS FOR BREATH, all eyes turn to Sonny.

SONNY

Kerosene and glyserine? Hey!
That's my kaboom cocktail. No
wonder I was runnin' low.
Someone stole my juice.

PRINCESS

Yeah, juice that coulda blown
Billy outta the tent.

TEENIE

Ray knew all about explosives.

KATRINA

Shut up, Teenie. Wudda y'got
t'say for yourself brightboy?

They close in on Sonny.

SONNY

Well, I'd say someone used this
to... Wait a minute. You don't
think it was me do ya?

COLUMBO

Of course whoever added the
kaboom cocktail had to do it
last night, so the liquid
wouldn't be moist when Mr. Tynie
loaded the charge.

TEENIE

And the crates didn't get here
'til we got here until after
six. Billy brought 'em in.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

So it hadda be last night/Last
night's easy/They were all with
us/Playing cards/ All together.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, everyone was! Except
Magica and Teenie.

TEENIE

And Billy and Ray.

CRAPPY

Yeah, featherhead, we know. But
Ray was too busy dyin' t'be
payin' much attention.

SONNY

See? I didn't do nuthin'. I
was with you guys all night.

PRINCESS

But Merle wasn't...

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, but Merle wasn't.

All eyes turn to Merle.

BOB

And I believe your former employer came to a rather explosive end of similar proportions, did he not?

MERLE

Hey! I served my time!

SGT. BULLARD

Can you account for your whereabouts last night after you left the poker game?

Merle looks to Columbo for help.

COLUMBO

No need, Sergeant. Who ever tampered with the gunpowder had a key.

SEDGEWICK

Or knew how to pick locks.

SONNY

Of course!

All eyes turn to Maurice, who *mimes a defense*.

TEENIE (OS)

Ray had a key to everything.

MADAM MAGICA

The mimer, he was always wanting for the running of the circus. Was it the mimer, Calypso?

COLUMBO

No, ma'am. Whoever killed Mr. Sharps knew he was terrified of spiders - and also weighed less than you do. We could tell that from the footprints left behind.

All eyes turn to Princess Alexandra.

SGT. BULLARD

That'd explain how she knew where to find the gun.

CRAPPY

Why you little, rotten...

PRINCESS

Hey! I was with alla you last night! Maurice, too. Remember? She's the one who wasn't there!

All eyes turn to Madam Magica.

MADAM MAGICA

But I can be weighing nothing more or nothing less than what I'm right now weighing.

All eyes return to Columbo.

CRAPPY

All right, Lieutenant Crumbo, we give up.

BOB

Indeed detective, no one person meets your selective criteria.

COLUMBO

I never said one person killed them both.

KATRINA

You said some one's been killing people for almost fifty years!

COLUMBO

Yes, ma'am. Someone at this circus murdered nine people. I'm certain of that. But Mr. Sharps is not one of them.

MERLE

But he was murdered, right?!

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

My someone/not her/who weighs/less than her.

BOB

And there in lies the contradiction. With the exception of Princess Alexandra, nobody here weighs less than Madam Magica.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah.

Columbo takes a pensive puff of his cigar.

COLUMBO

Billy did.

PERFORMERS

What?! But Billy's dead! What do you mean? That's crazy!

CRAPPY

But the runt's only worked here a few months.

TEENIE

But... Why would Billy do that?

COLUMBO

Because he didn't want to die.

MERLE

And he thought Ray was gunna kill him? He shoulda killed me.

KATRINA

Yeah, Ray'd never kill his best performer.

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, no way!

COLUMBO

Perhaps Madam Magica can will be able to explain it...

MADAM MAGICA

Aye Columbo! I'm understanding! Are you meaning for when I was building the Arching of Death---

BOB

You created a Tarot Arch of Death, Magica? Whatever for?

MADAM MAGICA

For to be reading in the future darlings, why else for?

MERLE

What'd ya see?

MADAM MAGICA

My seeing was of Billy. He was the choosing for the death.

The crowd GASPS, transfixed.

MADAM MAGICA (CONT.)

I am of the knowing it is going to be a full of terror deathing.

COLUMBO

Excuse me, ma'am. But tell them about Billy when he found out.

MADAM MAGICA

Fine, Calypso. When for Billy is seeing the Arching, he becomes maddening and is forever with the throwing of Ray's card into the Arching of Death.

MERLE

You had a double card under the death arch?

Again, they all GASP.

MADAM MAGICA

Can you believe?!

COLUMBO

Exactly. See, ladies and gentlemen, I believe Billy found out what Ray was up to. Your boss, Mr. Sharps had figured out a sinister way to promote your Sorcery Circus---

KATRINA

We get the point, detective..

KAUFFMAN

Yeah, we're not thick.

OR'ONGELO & L'MONGELO

Yeah, the midget double jinxed us/You can't put two cards in the arch of death/Not unless you want trouble/And they got it!

OTHERS

I knew it/The curse ain't outta control/It was balancing itself out/Two for one/Tit for tat/
Yeah, tit for tat/We're saved!

Everybody CHEERS, slapping themselves on the backs!
Until.... A LOUD WHISTLE AND a strange, NEW VOICE:

NEW VOICE (OS)

All right, Sorcery Circus, if
the Curse ain't outta control,
then we ain't outta business!
Sorcery Circus! Get to work!

The CROWD CHEERS and runs off in every direction.

Columbo, totally speechless, stands face to face with the new
leader of Sorcery Circus -- Maurice the Mime Magician.

MAURICE

Madam Magica was right, I've
just been dyin' t'say that.

COLUMBO

But sir, the Curse... It didn't
kill those men.

Maurice shrugs.

MAURICE

Are you saying I'm working with
a murderer?

COLUMBO

No, sir. Not that I know of.

MAURICE

Then why jinx it? The Curse has
done well by this circus for
forty-five years. If we're
lucky, it will for another
forty-five.

COLUMBO

Of course, sir. But...

MAURICE

And besides, some things are
better left unsaid.

Maurice flicks his wrist and three tickets appear out of thin
air. He hands them to Columbo, gives him a wink and exits.

SEDGEWICK

So who are we arresting,
Lieutenant?

COLUMBO

No one, officer.

Teenie climbs down from the ladder and approaches Columbo.

TEENIE

Ray killed Billy, didn't he?.
He set a trap for him.

COLUMBO

Yes, sir. He's the only one who
could have done it. He snuck
inside here last night when
everyone was busy playing cards,
and he added that Kaboom
Cocktail to the gunpowder he
knew you'd be using today.

TEENIE

Cuz I always gotta use number
one first.

COLUMBO

That's right. He had an extra
key and all the time in the
world. Once he did that, all he
had to do was wait.

TEENIE

Except that's when Billy killed
Ray, isn't it? When he went
back to his trailer to wait.

COLUMBO

I'm afraid so, sir.

TEENIE

Poor Billy. And poor Ray

SGT. BULLARD

They killed each other?

Columbo nods.

TEENIE

So... no more Curse?

COLUMBO

No more Curse, Mr. Tynie.

Teenie nods and hands his lucky charm to Sgt. Bullard.

TEENIE

Then I better get to work. Are
you coming to the show? Please?

COLUMBO

Wouldn't miss it for the world.

Teenie smiles and lumbers off.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BIG TOP - EVENING

CALLIOPE MUSIC. The circus in full swing. Columbo and Sgt. Bullard sit in the front row, laughing and munching on cotton candy as Crappy chases Sonny's FIREBALL around center ring.

SGT. BULLARD

I gotta hand it to you, Lieutenant. You sure put up with a lot of guff from these people.

COLUMBO

That's part of the atmosphere, Sergeant. It's why I love the circus - fear and humor, side by side.

SEDEGWICK

Hot coffee, coming through.

Sedgewick hands Columbo a steaming cup. Columbo cradles it like a baby. Then, his EYES GROW WIDE -- Crappy chasing Sonny with a bucket of water.

Crappy HOISTS THE BUCKET back... Sonny ducks.

Columbo cringes - trying to protect his coffee from what could be WATER OR CONFETTI...

Crappy lets fly...

The image freezes...

The CALLIOPE MUSIC BOPPING ALONG as credits roll.

FADE OUT