

SCENE ONE

FRANZ: Anatol is an idle, young bachelor, flirting with philosophy and recently discovered of the mechanics of logic. Like many of his species, he is devoted to material comfort and novelty. His rooms are filled with Persian carpets, heavy drapes, an abundance of candles and lamps shaded in colored glass. It might occur to one that he is a romantic. It may even appear that he is a hedonist. But then there are his paintings. They are just ahead of fashion and speak of real artistic sensibility. And his books; the latest and the best, and they cram his shelves. This odd mix of the lavish and the real speaks of a craving for something beyond the ordinary. It is twilight. He arrives home, bringing his best friend Max with him. They enter into his sitting room -- TO CHALLENGE FATE.

MAX: That was amazing, Anatol.

ANATOL: Oh, Max, you are so easily impressed.

MAX: No, I'm not. But that was astonishing! I've always considered such things to be bunk, but... that was incredible!

ANATOL: Calm down.

MAX: You told Franz to dance, and he dances! You told him his sweetheart is dead, and he cries! That he's a judge, and he pardons a criminal!

ANATOL: Parlor games, Max.

MAX: It was phenomenal!

ANATOL: You haven't seen the half of it.

MAX: Like you were a... druid or a sorcerer or... the magus!

ANATOL: Nothing of the sort.

MAX: And in spite of all that, I can't quite put it into perspective. I still don't quite accept it.

ANATOL: So? If we could have told your great-great grandfather that the earth rotates, it would have made him dizzy. He wouldn't have accepted the idea, but the earth still turns, doesn't it?

MAX: Planetary rotation is one thing, but this... to change a mind at will, that is truly... incredible!

ANATOL: Only because it's unfamiliar to you. What's more common than the sun rising, yet what if you'd never seen it happen before, imagine how it would affect you! Same thing.

MAX: Oh, that's clever, that's very clever.

ANATOL: Imagine someone who'd only experienced a tree in winter, suddenly seeing a tree in spring!

MAX: Ohhoh! Yes!

ANATOL: Imagine someone who's never been in love, and suddenly...! My God, what that could do to your precious perspective?

MAX: Alright. But the mind, Anatol, the mind! Such a fickle thing, and so personal... And then a little Mesmerism...

ANATOL: Hypnotism...

MAX: ...hypnotism... and poof! Your whole reality changes...

ANATOL: Whether you accept it or not.

MAX: Hwoo. I could never let anyone do that to me, I know that for sure.

ANATOL: Nothing to be afraid of. We accept the impossible all the time. The only difference between the possible and the impossible is our acceptance of the first and our suspicion of the later.

MAX: Fine, so I accept that I'm a chimney sweep, and before I know it I'm up the flue ruining my clothes.

ANATOL: Those... those are just parlor tricks. There is so much more about hypnotism. It has... implications. It has... some mysterious and tremendous untapped, scientific potential.

MAX: Does it?

ANATOL: Yes! Look -- just by suggestion Franz traveled to dozens of worlds in the space of an hour! Imagine if we could do that for ourselves!?

MAX: Hypnotize ourselves?

ANATOL: It's been done. Why, we'd be explorers of our own imaginations!

MAX: Most of us have no problem doing that, Anatol.

ANATOL: I don't mean petty worries and frets like "who's she with?" or "what did she mean when she said such and such"

MAX: Neither did I.

ANATOL: We'd be wanderers on a fantastic journey. We'd never have to leave our parlors, and we could travel the universe in an instant.

MAX: Have you tried?

ANATOL: Me? No luck. I'm stuck with my petty worries and frets.

MAX: Cora?

ANATOL: She drives me crazy.

MAX: She does.

ANATOL: Your meaning, please?

MAX: You suspect her based on nothing but your own imagination, and it is she drives you crazy?

ANATOL: No, no, it's way beyond suspicion, I've reached the point where I'm convinced she's cheating on me. I sit there stroking her hair, thinking, what a little harlot you are, pretending to love me while you're probably... well. Anyway. Even in the middle of... our best moments together, you understand... suddenly I know. I know she's been with someone else in exactly this way, swearing love to him just as easily as she swears it to me. I know.

MAX: How?

ANATOL: I just know.

MAX: You're dreaming.

ANATOL: No, no, I have evidence. I can prove it.

MAX: Really!

ANATOL: I can. Listen. If what I fear is the same as what I feel, and if what I feel is the same as what I believe to be true, then what I fear, is true.

MAX: That's your proof?

ANATOL: It's logic.

MAX: Ah.

ANATOL: A syllogism. Alright, look at it this way; girls have affairs, therefore, they are always unfaithful. Alright, how about this; I read two or three books at a time, they keep two or three men at a time.

MAX: This is what you do with your spare time?

ANATOL: Your meaning?

MAX: Who's the other man?

ANATOL: How on earth am I supposed to know that? It could be anyone! Prince to poet -- anyone! She gets around! I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. She just wants to have a good time like... other people. And when she swears that she loves me -- forever -- she means it... because at that moment I'm the only man on her mind. And I completely understand that. I'm more or less the same. More or less. And, I don't really fault her for it, because who in their right mind would announce to their lover that they're carrying on with someone else, anyway?

MAX: However...

ANATOL: However, what?

MAX: There's an however in all that, somewhere. Suppose she really does love you? Have you considered that?

ANATOL: Makes no difference.

MAX: But it's so logical; if she loves you, she'll be faithful.

ANATOL: That's not logical, at all!

MAX: It isn't?

ANATOL: No. Look. I'm a logical man. And I love her, so how come I'm not faithful?

MAX: You just said it. You're logical -- in your way -- and you're a man.

ANATOL: I'm a man. The final argument. Listen, men always think women are different when it comes to... love and things like that -- and I don't mean women who've been locked up all their lives or who have somehow managed never to learn any social skills, and who really are different -- I mean normal girls, girls who are exactly the same as you and me.

MAX: The same as you and me? How did we just get lumped together?

ANATOL: I can declare my utter and exclusive love to a girl -- despite the fact that I've said exactly the same thing to another girl the night before -- and be completely genuine. I can! And I seriously doubt that anyone, male or female, is any different. So, logically; I could ask Cora the "big question", forgive her everything before she even started to answer, beg her to tell me the truth -- the truth without consequences -- and she would still lie. Girls have begged me and I've lied, and not felt the least bit guilty. When lies can make girls so happy, why should I tell the truth and make them miserable?

MAX: So how can you expect Cora to tell you the truth?

ANATOL: Because her lies don't make me happy.

MAX: What does make you happy?

ANATOL: Simplicity and honesty.

MAX: Ha!

ANATOL: Your meaning?

MAX: Nothing.

ANATOL: Max...

MAX: Really, nothing. You were saying...

ANATOL: I would be happy simply by knowing the truth from a woman. That's all. No room for doubt. Simplicity and honesty.

MAX: Forgive me my mirth.

ANATOL: I am in a constant state of forgiveness where you are concerned.

MAX: I appreciate it. So, you want a simple statement of genuine love from Cora, but one shored up by a guarantee of scientific truth. An honesty so complete that not even you can weave webs around it.

ANATOL: Nothing more.

MAX: Well, for pete sakes, why don't you hypnotize her?

ANATOL: What?

MAX: Put her in one of your trances. Instruct her to tell only the truth. Then ask her if she's faithful. She'll say yes, it's all scientific and accurate and all, we'll all have a good chuckle and you can invent new reasons to distrust her. How about it?

ANATOL: Hm.

MAX: You don't have to stop there. I mean if you want real security, get the details. Where have you just been? Where are you going when you leave here? Do you love anyone else? What's his name...?

ANATOL: Max!

MAX: Instant reassurance!

ANATOL: Max! You've a genius! That's it! That's the untapped scientific potential I was talking about!

Power over women! I'll be like Nietzsche's Superhero!

MAX: It'd be a good chuckle.

ANATOL: You don't think she actually has something to hide, do you?

MAX: What, suspect Cora?

ANATOL: I can suspect her. You cannot. No husband admits his wife's failings except among strangers. The same goes for girlfriends. And you are not a stranger.

MAX: So, my job as friend is to encourage lies.

ANATOL: Shhh!

MAX: What?

ANATOL: Shhh!!! Can't you hear? Her footsteps in the hall. It's her.

MAX: What footsteps?

ANATOL: Here she comes, she's approaching the door, and... (throwing open the door, he makes an instantaneous transformation) Cora, darling.

CORA: Good evening, my love.

She goes to kiss him but stops when she notices there is someone else in the room

ANATOL: What? Oh, it's only Max.

CORA: Hi. Cora.

MAX: Only Max. How do you do.

CORA: (to Anatol) Why are you sitting around in the dark?

ANATOL: You know how I revel in the twilight.

CORA: Oh, Anatol... you breathe poetry.

ANATOL: You're all my inspiration. (they kiss again)

CORA: But I can't see a thing, so I'm going to light some candles anyway.

ANATOL: Isn't she... ?

MAX: She is.

CORA: So you boys have been chatting away in the dark, have you?

ANATOL: Chatting away.

CORA: Anything I'd find interesting?

ANATOL: A scientific discussion.

CORA: Science?

MAX: Hypnotism.

CORA: Hypnotism. I'm so sick of hypnotism. Hypnotism, hypnotism! That's all anyone our age talks about anymore. I don't understand what all the fuss is about...

ANATOL: Yes, but...

CORA: And neither do any of them. No one does it. No one demonstrates. No one offers to put a spell on me.

ANATOL: On you? Really? You'd be... interested?

CORA: I'm as curious as anyone.

ANATOL: Are you?

CORA: But I wouldn't let just anyone enthrall me.

ANATOL: Wouldn't you?

CORA: I'd let you do it, because I love you.

ANATOL: I'm flattered.

CORA: But no one else.

ANATOL: I could, you know.

CORA: Really?

ANATOL: I have the skill.

CORA: Do you?

ANATOL: And if you wish...

CORA: You could take me to other worlds...?

ANATOL: Don't I take you there, anyway?

CORA: Then I know you could.

ANATOL: Anywhere you like.

CORA: Well, why not? Just so I understand what the fuss is about.

ANATOL: I must tell you. This is not a parlor trick. This is purely scientific.

CORA: But it would be fun, too, wouldn't it?

ANATOL: Perhaps...

CORA: With you, Anatol? Everything is fun. (she kisses him) How about right now?

ANATOL: Now?

CORA: Now.

ANATOL: You just happen to have caught me in the right mood.

CORA: Wonderful. What do I have to do?

ANATOL: Sit right here, be very, very quiet and I help you will yourself to sleep.

CORA: Will myself to sleep.

ANATOL: That's right. Now, watch my hand. Back and forth, back and forth. That's right. Now, let your eyes close.

He strokes her eyes and forehead

CORA: Now what?

ANATOL: Don't think about it, just relax into a deep, deep sleep, a deep, deep sleep.

CORA: (giggling) That tickles!

ANATOL: Shhh, don't talk, sleep. Sleep. You are already very tired...

CORA: I am not!

ANATOL: You are. Getting a little sleepy, a little sleepy...

CORA: A little, alright, a little sleepy, yes...

ANATOL: Your eyelids are getting heavy, very heavy. You can barely lift your arms, your arms are very heavy.

CORA: They are very...

ANATOL: Tired, you are very tired, now sleep, sleep... Sleep. Your eyes are tightly closed, you cannot open your eyes. You are deep and fast asleep. Sleep, sleep.

MAX: Anatol?

ANATOL: Shh! Deep, deep, sleep. Sleep. There. Now, what is it?

MAX: Is she really asleep?

ANATOL: Does she look asleep? (Max waves at her) No! We have to wait. (they do) Alright. Cora! Cora, you will answer whatever I ask you. What is your name?

CORA: Cora.

ANATOL: (a moment of great satisfaction) Cora, you're in the forest. When I tell you to open your eyes, you will see and hear the most beautiful forest... Open your eyes.

CORA: How lovely... ah! Sycamores! Shhhh! Listen to that lark. What a beautiful sound!

ANATOL: Close your eyes... (he returns to her the trance) Cora, you will always tell me the truth. What will you do?

CORA: I will always tell you the truth.

ANATOL: You will answer all my questions, and you will answer them truthfully and when you wake, you will have forgotten everything. Do you understand?

CORA: I understand.

ANATOL: (to Max) So, where do we start?

MAX: How old is she?

ANATOL: Nineteen. Ah, good idea! Cora, how old are you?

CORA: Twenty-five.

MAX: (laughs)

ANATOL: Shh! This is phenomenal!

MAX: She's apparently a very good subject.

ANATOL: It's working! Cora. Cora, do you love me? (she looks confused, Max stifles his laughter)
Do you love me?

CORA: Yes.

ANATOL: There, you see!

MAX: That's not quite the "big question". Ask her is she faithful.

ANATOL: Yes. Faithful. Cora... (stops himself) That's not an appropriate question.

MAX: It isn't?

ANATOL: No. You can't ask it right out like that.

MAX: Why not?

ANATOL: It's vague, we need to phrase it differently.

MAX: Seems precise to me.

ANATOL: No, that's just the problem. It's not precise.

MAX: It isn't?

ANATOL: "Are you faithful?" It could mean anything!

MAX: For instance?

ANATOL: When are we talking about? She might have been in love with someone before she met me, and since I don't specify exactly when she might have been unfaithful, she'd answer no.

MAX: That would be amusing.

ANATOL: For you, perhaps. For her it would be grossly unfair. It's not her fault if she's fallen in love before. How was she to know then, that someday she'd meet me?

MAX: You're right, grossly unfair.

ANATOL: Grossly.

MAX: So back to your question...

ANATOL: It's awkward, we need to reword it.

MAX: How about, "Cora, have you been faithful since we've known each other?"

ANATOL: That's better. Cora, have you... That's wrong too.

MAX: Why?

ANATOL: How could we have possibly known those first few days that our love would grow to such profound depths? At that point we both thought it was just a fling.

MAX: So?

ANATOL: So, she may have been in love with someone else at the time. Who knows what she was up to the day before we met? Maybe she had something else going that she couldn't break off, and maybe it went on like that for weeks, and how could I blame her for that?

MAX: That's very liberal of you.

ANATOL: Not really, I just don't want to take unfair advantage of the situation.

MAX: Spoken like a gentleman. How about this, "Cora, have you been unfaithful to me since we've been in love?"

ANATOL: That sounds right.

MAX: Thank you.

ANATOL: But it isn't.

MAX: Of course not.

ANATOL: We need to define "faithful". Yes! Picture her on a train, just yesterday, and imagine that a man across from her happened to let his foot touch hers. Now, normally that would count for nothing, but she is not in a normal state, the trance has made her mind subtler than either of us can imagine, so who's to say that she wouldn't interpret what happened on the train as being "unfaithful"?

MAX: That's ridiculous!

ANATOL: And she knows that if she so much as looks at another man I view that as infidelity. I admit, it's a little extreme on my part, nevertheless, it leaves the whole question wide open to interpretation.

MAX: What did she say when you told her that?

ANATOL: About her looking at another man? Oh, she laughed. Or suppose someone kissed her under the mistletoe!

MAX: I don't think that would...

ANATOL: Well, someone could have!

MAX: What all this comes down to is that you're not going to ask her at all, am I right?

ANATOL: No, no, I'll ask her, I just have to...

MAX: ...come up with another objection. Listen, if you ask, kindly, lovingly, if she is faithful to you, she's not going to think about feet on the train or kisses under the mistletoe. Besides, if her answer's not clear, we can have her go into detail.

ANATOL: You're dead set on my asking her, is that it?

MAX: Me? You're the one who wants to know!

ANATOL: I just thought of something else.

MAX: No!

ANATOL: Yes. The subconscious.

MAX: The subconscious.

ANATOL: I believe in subconscious processes.

MAX: Subconscious processes.

ANATOL: Under certain external and artificial stimuli, one can fall prey to a host of uncontrollable and deeply buried urges that will surface in spite of any efforts to maintain integrity or control over the conscious personality.

MAX: Could you make yourself a little more obscure?

ANATOL: Yes. Imagine a room, dimly lit and full of romantic atmosphere.

MAX: (looking around) Dim, atmospheric. I've got it.

ANATOL: There she is, sitting with another man.

MAX: How'd she get there?

ANATOL: Don't worry about that, these things can happen. Now, imagine a glass of absinthe, the aroma of spiced cigarettes, a crystal chandelier with a golden glow, crimson curtains. Everywhere, loneliness and silence. Words are whispered gently into the shell of her ear.

MAX: Oh really...

ANATOL: Stronger women than Cora have succumbed to such things.

MAX: As you well know, I'm sure. No, my question still stands. If she's so in love with you, how did she get into a room like that with another man in the first place?

ANATOL: Life is full of enigmas.

MAX: *You* are the enigma. You have before you the key to a quandary that has puzzled men since time began! One question and you find out if she's yours. If not, one more finds out who shares her, and a third, how big the share is. You are being allowed to challenge fate, and you turn coward. I don't understand! You want to know the truth? Here it is! You've got the choice right now; truth or romantic fantasy. Which is it? (Anatol looks dolefully at Max) Ah. I see. Alright, then, wake her up. But don't give me that "great afflicted hero" routine. You make your bed, you sleep in it.

ANATOL: I really want to ask her.

MAX: Sure you do.

ANATOL: Only... not in front of you. The truth is only half the pain, the other half is being pitied for it. If I have to hear an ugly truth, I want to be alone. It's not that I'm trying to hide anything from you. You'll know if she's been unfaithful because you'll never see her here again. But for you

to find out now, at the same time as I do, I couldn't stand that.

MAX: I'll wait in there. (he leaves)

ANATOL: It'll only be a minute. (turning to the entranced girl) Cora do you... Cora have you... Cora are you...? Oh God! Cora... wake up and kiss me!

CORA: Oh my, how long was I asleep? Where's Max?

ANATOL: Max! (to Cora) You went into a deep trance. You said... things.

CORA: Nothing I shouldn't have, I hope.

MAX: (returning) He asked you questions.

CORA: Did he?

ANATOL: I did.

CORA: Did I answer them?

ANATOL: Every one.

CORA: Tell me!

ANATOL: I can't, my darling. We'll try again tomorrow.

CORA: Oh, no we won't try again tomorrow. I don't like answering questions I don't remember. I probably said a lot of silly things that aren't true.

ANATOL: Well, you did say you loved me.

CORA: Did I?

MAX: Amazing the silly things you say in your sleep.

CORA: But it's not silly at all when I say it awake.

ANATOL: My angel! (they kiss)

MAX: I'll be going.

ANATOL: Going?

MAX: Yes, I...

ANATOL: Do you mind if I don't see you out?

CORA: Goodbye, Max!

MAX: Of course not. One more question. Does this mean that hypnotic lies are better than real ones? Or since, as you say, believing lies gives us such pleasure, does it really matter at all? (observing the kissing couple) I guess it doesn't. Adieu.