

BARROOM BY THE LIGHT

TOPSY TOPSY  
I HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN  
TOPSY  
AND YOU KNOW I NEVER WILL

*(Lights dim, then fade.)*

END OF PLAY

CIRCUS REAL

## CIRCUS REAL

BY ALEXIS KOZAK

Alexis Kozak is an award-winning actor, playwright, director, and public school teacher. He loves theatre, reading, soccer, and his family...in no particular order.

He holds an MFA in Playwriting from  
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### CHARACTERS

ALISA: *Female, early- to mid-20's. A reader of crystal balls. Much is communicated in her "Mm"s.*

KING: *Male, mid- to late-30's. Owner of this particular circus. Slow and methodical, ignites quickly, controlled violence, and he turns on a dime—it's a survival mechanism.*

SETTING: *The inside of a circus caravan carriage. Somewhere in the middle of North America.*

TIME: *Middle part of last century.*

Note: The "real" in "Circus Real" is pronounced *réal*, as in "royal."

*Middle part of last century. Somewhere in the middle of North America. The inside of a private circus caravan carriage, the place where Alisa tells fortunes but also sleeps and lives. Maybe an exotic curtain with fringe—Turkish looking. An old beat up glass orb that passes for a crystal ball, cradled in a small base. A cot or bed.*

Alisa—young and pretty—cuts into an old apple with a knife. She hears someone coming. She quickly—and obviously, for the purposes of the audience—hides the knife in her dress. King enters, sizes Alisa up, takes down his suspenders.

KING: Damn tigers won't eat.

ALISA: Mm.

KING: "Mm." Like getting blood out of a stone. "Mm."

ALISA: Maybe they're not hungry.

KING: Oh, they're hungry alright. They're hungry. *(Pause. King looks at Alisa. Alisa ignores King.)* I'm sixty short. Again. That's fifty in Piqua, eighty in Kenton, sixty here in Ashland. That's, what?—

ALISA: What are you doing here?

KING: A hundred ninety dollars. Only a fool would think that you all aren't making money on the side, behind my back, over my head. And what kind of a person would I be if I didn't let that go on here and there. But that's different than someone putting their hand into the till. That's treason, as far as Circus Real is concerned.

ALISA: What do you want, King?

KING: That's taking money out of their own mouths, as I see it.

ALISA: Circus Real goes back hundreds of years. There's a bloodline. There's tradition. There's loyalty. KING: Then how come nobody won't tell me nothing? *(With mockery, scorn.)* "Circus Real."

ALISA: Because they're watching out for each other's honor.

KING: Somebody's stealing from me, and you're worried about honor?

ALISA: You don't understand.

KING: I understand stealing.

ALISA: You've never understood, you'll never understand.

KING: Is that right?

ALISA: My mother was part of that bloodline. I'm part of that bloodline.

KING: What happened to "no honor among thieves"?

ALISA: You're not one of us.

KING: "Us"? Ha, ha, ha. "Us."

ALISA: You'll never be one of us.

KING: I own this whole shindig.

ALISA: That doesn't make it yours.

KING: "That doesn't make it yours." See, you say things like that, don't even make sense.

ALISA: Mm.

KING: *(Of the crystal ball.)* What about that stupid—? Can't you look in there and tell me who it is? Or is it all bullshit?

ALISA: You look, if you think it's all—*(King goes to pick up the crystal ball.)* Look, I said. Don't touch.

KING: I'll touch whatever I want. *(Yet, King is careful not to touch it. King looks into the crystal ball.)* I can't see anything.

ALISA: Mm.

KING: So it's total bullshit.

ALISA: If you say so.

KING: Then I guess I came here for nothing.

ALISA: I guess so.

KING: Aw, come on. It's no good without you. I know that. Tell me what you see.

ALISA: I don't see anything, King.

*King slips his hands around Alisa's waist.*

KING: What do you say, deary?

ALISA: Don't.

KING: Be nice to King.  
 ALISA: Get out of my carriage.  
 KING: This is my carriage. These are all my carriages.  
 ALISA: I've got nothing for you.  
 KING: I'm asking nice. Don't make me beg.  
 ALISA: Get.  
 KING: I'm not a dog. Don't talk to me like I'm some kind of mutt.  
 ALISA: What are you then? Come here in the middle of the night, sniffing around like—  
 KING: I got you something.  
 ALISA: I don't want it.  
 KING: You don't even know what it is.  
 ALISA: I know what it is, and I already told you, no.  
 KING: How you know what it is?  
 ALISA: (*Nodding at the crystal ball.*) I wouldn't be much good at this if I didn't.  
 KING: Alright. I'll bet you you can't tell me what it is.  
 ALISA: (*This is what she wants King to bet. It is not her guess.*)...A hundred dollars.  
 KING: A hundred—?! Alright, alright. One hundred dollars.  
 ALISA: Well?  
 KING: "Well" what?  
 ALISA: (*Meaning "show me the money."*) Let me see it.  
 KING: Oh, come on. I'm good for it. You know I'm good for it.  
 ALISA: If I let every man who said they were good for it be good for it, I wouldn't have a dollar to my name.  
 KING: Cynical. I like that in a woman. (*King takes out five twenty dollar bills, lays them out. Alisa tries to seduce the five twenties away from King.*) That's more like it. (*Alisa tries to pluck them away. King pulls*

them back.) Un, un, un. And what do I get if you guess wrong?  
 ALISA: What do you want?  
 KING: You know what I want. And I'm not even gonna make you show it to me. How do you like that? Now. Tell me what I have in my pocket.  
 ALISA: That's easy.  
 (*She goes over to the crystal ball. Makes a show of gazing into it.*)  
 KING: Of course. It'll tell you now.  
 ALISA: I see something. Ah. Just as I suspected.  
 KING: What is it?  
 ALISA: (*Quickly, emphasizing that she was right about what he had in his pocket in the first place.*) Something I don't want.  
 (*She grabs the hundred dollars.*)  
 KING: Whoa, whoa, whoa! Not so fast there, deary! *Grabs her by the wrist.*  
 ALISA: I guessed right.  
 KING: Says who?  
 ALISA: Let me go.  
 KING: You got a pretty low opinion of my intelligence, huh? Well look here. (*King turns out both his pants pockets. Then he turns out the rest of his pockets. All are empty.*) You were wrong. That hundred dollars was the only thing you wanted, and the only thing I had in my pockets. (*King has won the bet! The thing in his pocket was indeed something she wanted, the hundred dollars!*) Do I know you?, or do I know you? (*Alisa throws the money back in his face.*) I bet you haven't seen money like that in a good long time. That's alright. You keep it. There's more where that's from, as you well know. Oh, there's plenty more. Just you wait.

I know the one thing you want, more than anything in the world. And I can give it to you. You just be nice to me, that's all I ask. Just be nice. That's not asking too much now, is it? You and me, we could get along. We could get along just fine. Oh, don't cry. King can't bear it when a pretty girl cries.

ALISA: You're laughing at me.

KING: Well I ain't laughing at the wallpaper.

ALISA: Don't laugh at me.

KING: I'm the king of this here kingdom, and I'll laugh when I damn well want to. And no fake with a crystal ball is gonna make me do any different. Oh, does that surprise you? That I know what you are? Oh, I know what you are. I seen you coming a mile away, deary. Maybe I should be the one with the crystal ball. I know I'm no prince—I know it—but at least I'm not what you are, which is a hell of a lot worse, according to that book. At least that's what they tell me. Save your tears. Have I done anything that's so terrible? Or have I done my best to take care of you? Of all the girls? You ask them. You ask any of them. If they're not better off with us than they were at home with their fat mothers and grubby-fingered fathers. You see the country. The whole country. The good and the bad. The best and the worst. The beautiful and the ugly. From sea to shining sea. And that's because of me. Of the opportunity. It's because of me.

ALISA: (*Ironically.*) You're a saint.

KING: (*King chuckles.*) A "saint." I like that. I like that. I like that a lot...(*Cozying up to her.*) That ball tell you anything about me?

ALISA: Don't touch it.

*King teases her, wiggling his fingers over the ball.*

KING: Oh, come on. It must say something.

ALISA: I said, "Don't touch it."

KING: It's gonna lose its mojo? Ha, ha, ha. The voodoo gonna vanish? Ha, ha, ha.

ALISA: You've been with us all this time, and you haven't learned a thing.

KING: Educate me.

ALISA: There are things in this world that are different from what they look like.

KING: (*Amused.*) Like what?

ALISA: Like things around here.

KING: (*Gesturing around.*) Like these things?

ALISA: And the people that keep those things the way they are.

KING: You people?

ALISA: That keep the things around here from losing their magic.

KING: I'll tell you what I have learned. That things like this don't lose their magic. Because they don't have no magic to begin with. How do you like that?

ALISA: You'll never learn.

KING: Take this for instance. What happens if I touch this?

ALISA: (*A warning.*) King.

KING: (*King puts his finger on the top of the crystal ball.*) Nothing. (*An electric moment. Did something happen?*) See? Just a dime store knock off juke up real pretty. This whole world is dime store knock offs done up real pretty. How you make it work is your business—getting people here to see it, that's my business, see? (*King lifts the ball off of its stand and hefts it into the air.*) So, tell me how this works. I seen you do it, but I can't figure it out. I know it ain't magic. I know you're reading me, I know that. But how do you make me see what I think I see?

ALISA: If I told you that, you wouldn't have much use for me, now would you?

KING: No, I guess not.

*A long pause as King looks at the base of the crystal ball. A questioning look. King reaches into the base and takes out a handful of money, large bills. He looks at the bills; he looks at Alisa; a realization.*

*Dead silence. He counts them. Slowly. A hundred and ninety dollars, to the penny.*

*A very long pause. A staring contest. In that moment, he knows she was the one who took the money. And she knows that he knows. And he knows that she knows that he knows. How to proceed?*

KING: (Finally...) Not enough money doing this shit. I know it. But this...? You're gonna have to answer in front of everybody.

ALISA: ...Don't, King.

KING: By rights, isn't it? Isn't that Circus Real? I'm pretty sure I got that right, don't I? As the offended party?

ALISA: They'll go easy on me.

KING: I'll make sure they don't.

ALISA: King, look into my eyes.

KING: Don't get any romantic notions now.

ALISA: I'm trying to—

KING: What?

ALISA: (Slowly. Shaking her head. Disappointed in him?)...Do what you want.

KING: My father told me about women like you.

ALISA: You've never met a woman like me.

KING: You all think that. (Alisa grunts in frustration.)

Now you look into my eyes. (King pulls Alisa close, eye to eye.) I may be young, but I've lived enough life for two men. I've been out in the middle of the wilder-

ness when men with guns come to tear us down. I've been in a camp of freed slaves, wanted to steal every cent we had. I've looked goddamn Indians with arrows aflame right in the eye. I've seen sirens like you rip the hearts out of other men. So, I'll tell you this, if you think I'm afraid of you or anything you can find on this damn continent, you've got another thing coming, deary. You gonna pull a knife on me in the middle of the night, do it. You gonna poison my whiskey, do it. But, you gonna take off into the night and leave me here alone, good luck. You better be fast, that's all I've got to say. You better be fast. Cause you've got a debt with me, as far as I'm concerned. So you better be very fast.

ALISA: Don't take me in front of them.

KING: "Don't take me in front of them." Ha, ha, ha. "Don't take me in front of them."

ALISA: King.

*King pulls his suspenders back up.*

KING: Ha ha ha ha. Well, I gotta go make those tigers eat, "Circus Real." Seeing as I won the bet, I'll be back in ten minutes to claim my prize. (Long, heavy pause.) I expect that money to be right there where I left it...And I want you to be in bed. (Pause.) Or, they'll take your magic for sure, deary. You'll be just like this old ball here. Old and cracked and useless. And that'll be something to see.

*King starts to exit.*

ALISA: You gonna take me?, take me.

KING: You're finally catching on.

ALISA: That will stay with you for a long time, King. A long time to come.

KING: I hope so.

ALISA: You walk around here and take what you want.  
 KING: I don't need your permission for that.  
 ALISA: Oh, you may take for a while, King, but you won't take forever. *(Alisa waves her hand over the crystal ball. Something happens. She looks into crystal ball.)* I see the day that you crawl off into the woods, like a sick animal, alone, and I see the vultures circling up there, smelling your stink. And I see the smiling faces of the Circus Real. And I am there amongst them. *(King, eyes a little wider, moves towards the crystal ball. Alisa slams her hand on top of it, shattering the moment.)* You think I would run away from them?, from my people?, from my family?  
 Your stories don't impress me.

Slaves and Indians. Sirens. You lack magic, King. We're nothing without you? We should be grateful to you? You should be grateful to us. You're nothing without us. They don't come for your filthy tigers or your damned sleepy elephants—they can damn well open a picture book. They come for us. They come for what they can't explain but what they know is true. You can't have that—because you're just like they are—you see what they see. Oh, you want to see more. Of course you do. That's why you came here. That's why they all come here. That's why you came to me tonight. You don't see what I am, but I see what you are, King. You're a scared little boy who wants to know what's before him. A terrified child walking in a field of corn.

*A very tense pause.*

KING: *(Then...)* Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha. That supposed to scare me? *(Alisa's lips curl up in a tight smile.)* What's so damn funny? *(Alisa smiles a full smile.)* You forget, you stole from me.

ALISA: You think this is for me.  
 KING: Ain't it?  
 ALISA: It's for them.  
 KING: You're a liar. You're a damn liar.  
 ALISA: Are you going to tell them?, or should I?  
 KING: About what?  
 ALISA: The children. And the old ones.  
 KING: What are you talking about?  
 ALISA: The cheats you run.  
 KING: You're out of your—  
 ALISA: I've seen it with my own two eyes.  
 KING: You haven't seen shit. *(Alisa glances at the crystal ball. King realizes she may indeed have seen it, in the crystal ball.)* Look now, the children and the old ones, that's not just me. That's—  
 ALISA: And the cheats you run on the women.  
 KING: You think anybody cares about that?  
 ALISA: And the cheats you make on the men.  
 KING: Alright now, you just hold on a second. I'm just taking a little bit back from what they take from me. That's justice.  
 ALISA: Justice?  
 KING: That's my money.  
 ALISA: That's taking money out of their own mouths...as I see it...They are my people. They'll do what's right.  
 KING: *(Tense pause.)* Aw, hell, then. What do you say we just call it even?  
 ALISA: We are well past that, King. You're going to take yourself in front of them, and you're going to tell them what you've done.  
 KING: You're crazy if you think I'm gonna...*(Alisa runs her hand in a circular motion over the crystal ball. Something happens inside of it. A beat. King moves towards the ball. King looks into the ball. Slowly, his*

face drops. King has seen something he cannot reconcile with. What has he seen?) How...? How? ALISA: (A long moment, as Alisa waits.) Don't you ever come near me again. (King looks around the room, stunned by what he has seen, uncertain what to do.) Go feed your tigers, (Mockingly.) King.

King shakes his head, "Yes."

King moves slowly to pick up the money, then decides to leave it. He is stunned.

King exits. A pause. Alisa releases the knife from in her dress. She breathes.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

CLOWN ALLEY  
By GINO DIORIO

Gino DiIorio's plays have had productions at theatres all over the US including New Jersey Rep, Luna Stage, Arclight Theatre, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theatre, Custom Made Theatre, Urban Stages, Seven Angels, Penguin Rep, The Garter Lane Theatre, and the Virginia Stage Company.

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CHARACTERS

PHINNY: Classic Pierrot "Harlequin" clown. 50's  
ADELINE: A Hobo Clown, his sidekick and partner.  
Also 50's.

TIME: The Present

PLACE: Clown Alley at the Bollinger Circus

Clown Alley, the backstage area of the circus.  
In the darkness we hear the ringmaster's call "Whoa, what happened to that rabbi? That's not the way it's supposed to go?! That's magic for you! Let's give em a big hand folks! We hear tepid applause. PHINNY and ADELINE enter Clown Alley.

PHINNY: That was bullshit.

ADELINE: Oh come on.

PHINNY: It was. This Rodolfo does not know when to keep his mouth shut.

ADELINE: He's a kid.

PHINNY: He's been with us for what, four months? He doesn't have it by now?

ADELINE: The gag went fine!