

Again, many thanks to those who responded to my call for help in finding Mart canon scenes to write. This one was inspired by two Julies (jstar8 and macjest) and Amygirl (Moms!), who all love Mart's magic show in *Blinking Eye*. There's also a mention of a Mart scene from *Marshland Mystery* that my Moms loves. A big Bob-White thank you to Susan—who edited this instantly after I mentioned in an email that I had just completed this. I was not going to ask any of my editors to edit *this* last minute, but since she volunteered...*veg* Awesome Bob-White that she is, she had it back in an astonishing 25 minutes!

As always, this story is dedicated to the lovely Mary Carey.

**Mart Belden in:
Mart, the Mysterious Manipulator of Magic
by Dana**

It wasn't but a few months after our adventures in Happy Valley that we got to host a few of the friends we met in Iowa. It was a lot of fun to show Ned Schultz and the Hubbell twins, Barbara and Bob, around our bustling metropolis.

What? No, Sleepyside isn't a bustling metropolis! But New York City *is*. You know, the Big Apple. The Big City. The City That Never Sleeps. The Empire City. Gotham. And we Bob-Whites—all of us, including Dan for a change—were on hand to entertain the Iowan trio. We entertained in style, too! Honey's parents let us stay in their swanky Central Park West penthouse apartment, with Miss Trask acting as chaperone. It was always exciting to go to the City, but throw in a penthouse and out-of-town guests, and it had all the makings of a grand time!

Of course, Trixie *would* have to get us neck deep in a mystery, as she always did during vacation. This mystery was a pretty hairy one, too! There were definitely some tense points during that week, but I, natural-born entertainer that I am, am thrilled to say that I was able to provide a lighthearted, mystifying, astonishing, and amazing diversion one evening during our trip. It was the day that the thieves who were after the ugly little Incan idol that Trixie had bought broke into and trashed our apartment. It was pretty cool to be able to distract my friends and family from that unfortunate event by mystifying and astounding them with my extraordinary showmanship and mesmerizing prestidigitation skills.

That morning, Brian, Ned, Bob, and I had visited Lou Tannen's Magic Shop, the oldest operating magic shop in New York City. It's a venerated and famous spot, and the four of us spent a happy afternoon browsing around the store, constantly exclaiming to one another about the magic treasures that we were finding around every turn. Moms had given us some spending money for our extended visit to the City, which is what Trix had used to purchase that blasted idol, and I admit that I used up all of my parental-provided proceeds and then some of my own money to purchase the materials for quite a few magic tricks.

I had already promised Dan, Jim, and the girls—who were going to explore the grocery stores and delicatessens on Fiftieth Street and Second Avenue to scare us up some eats—that I would put on a magic show for them if they turned out a dinner we could choke down. I had even gone so far as to gloat, “Mart, the Mysterious Manipulator of Magic’—that’s me.”

Now that I had thrown the gauntlet—about my skills as well as their ability to cook—I really needed to put my money where my mouth was and deliver!

As we shopped, I could tell Ned was pretty stoked about all of the magic stuff, too. He bought some of the same junk I did, declaring that he was going to be “Neddo the Necromancer” when he got back to Iowa. It was fun to kinda bond with someone over magic stuff. Brian, Jim, and

Dan liked it well enough, but they definitely didn't feel about it the way I did. What can I say? I'm a born entertainer!

And so, while the others cleaned up the dishes from a really fine meal (they had definitely risen to my bait and exceeded my expectations) everyone had helped to put together, I was getting ready with my faithful helpers, Ned, Bob, Dan, and Brian, for a magic show that I hoped would knock their socks off.

Wow. Now I'm thinking about that meal we had instead of the magic show! It was something else. Like I said, everyone helped out. Trixie made her beef stroganoff, and although I like to tease my sister about her culinary abilities, she actually *is* a good cook, and her beef stroganoff is out of this world. But don't tell her I said any of that! The lovely Di made Chinese fried rice (I'm still trying to figure out how she knows how to make that particular dish), which was yummy, too. My mashed potatoes *avec fines herbes*, cribbed from the chef at a French restaurant Honey's family had taken me to, were pretty good, if I do say so myself. Oh, and the tossed salad Jim and Brian were in charge of wasn't bad, either. Salad being salad and all.

But I digress. I was supposed to be telling you about my magic show! Oh well, I like talking about food, too.

I have to admit that I was a bit nervous about the show. Yes, I was surrounded by family and friends who would (mostly) be forgiving if I didn't pull off all of the magic tricks perfectly. But I hadn't had a lot of time to practice them, which would have been nice. As I was getting ready to perform, I looked down at my crisp, white button-down shirt, light blue tie, navy trousers, and brown loafers and decided I looked pretty sharp. Not exactly a professional magician's black-cloaked ensemble, but neat and clean. Clean because I had changed into it *after* dinner! For some reason, no matter how careful I am while I eat, I still manage to get food on me. I was forever being fined for having ketchup on the sleeve of my Bob-White jacket.

And let's not even go into the time that I managed to spill blueberry pie filling all over a clean white shirt Moms had just laundered. She would have killed me because I wasn't supposed to touch it until school the next day. Trixie had come to the rescue—even though I spilled the blueberries wolfing down *her* piece of pie—and taught me a neat trick to get it out. Who knew boiling water poured through a taut shirt would get out blueberry?

So, anyway, there I was, dressed to impress with no signs of food stains anywhere and hoping to astound my friends with an evening of magic. Soon, everyone was done with the dishes and settled into the living room, made cozy when Miss Trask lit the lights of the electric fireplace.

To set up the first trick, Ned brought in a small table, covered it with a black cloth, and then set a bowl, a black box, and some other props on it.

Bob and Barbara took up their guitars and ran some eerie chords up and down the strings for fanfare. I took a deep breath, trying to calm my nerves, and bowing and smiling, stepped out on the "stage" and tapped with my magic wand for attention.

I decided that to hide my nerves, I was just going to go for broke and pile it on. "Ladies and gentlemen, you are about to be entertained by the world's most famous magician. But if this trick works, I'll be more surprised than you are. Watch carefully. You may be able to find out how to do it. If you do, let *me* know."

I took out a Coke bottle—a trick one that I had purchased that looked just like the real thing (see what I did there?)—and put it in a paper bag. Staying in character as a "world-famous magician"

and not at all ironically, I said, “This is the favorite beverage of a lot of kids, but some may prefer another kind. Anyone for root beer?”

As planned, Dan came to my side and said, “I’d like one.”

Okay, here was the moment of truth. I had to make this good. I snapped my fingers, mumbled some magic words, reached in the paper bag, and drew out the same Coke bottle!

That was all right, though, as it was part of the trick. I pretended to be flummoxed.

“Something must have gone wrong,” I said, screwing my features up into exaggerated worry. “I must have said the wrong word. Who wants lemon soda?”

Brian appeared at my other side and said, “I do.” Because Brian is a lemon soda kinda guy, don’t ya know?

“You’ll have it, sir. Abracadabra!” I snapped my fingers again, reached in the bag, and brought out the very same bottle of Coke.

Pretending to be frustrated, I said, “Well, so much for that trick.” I put the bottle of Coca Cola back in the bag, slapped the paper flat, rolled it up, and threw it over my shoulder.

I was gratified upon hearing Barbara’s amazement. “Heavens, Mart, where did the bottle go?”

“That’s the trick!” I said gleefully, happy to have pulled off my first hoax and earning an amazed comment to boot. I couldn’t help but crow, “I made it disappear!”

My nerves had completely disappeared—like the Coke bottle!—and I could feel that entertainer’s high washing over me as I went on, “Now, friends, whenever I do this trick—and I learned it from a famous magician—bands play, people shout, and ushers walk up the aisle with bouquets of flowers for me.”

Why not lay it on thick for my audience? I thought.

“Watch carefully. It puzzles me more than it will puzzle you. I have here a five-dollar bill. I borrowed it from Miss Trask. I’ll tear a corner from it, see? I’ll give the corner to Honey. Anyone knows that a torn corner can only be matched to a bill from which it has been torn. Do you see that envelope Dan is holding way across the room? You will agree that I haven’t touched that envelope, won’t you?”

The members of my fascinated audience nodded in response. This is where I had to get tricky. Before the show, I had torn off the corner of a five-dollar bill and palmed it. Then, when I tore off the corner of the bill here on stage, I palmed that corner and gave Honey the one I had torn from the bill in the envelope. Trickery, yes, but it would astonish and amaze my friends and family, I was sure!

“Well, then, if Miss Trask will please take the envelope from Dan’s hand, and open it, she will find a five-dollar bill with the corner torn. Right, Miss Trask?”

“Yes, I have it here.” Miss Trask held up the bill.

“Now, if Honey will hand the corner I tore to Miss Trask, she will see if it fits. Does it Miss Trask?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

“Perfectly! How *did* you do it? I was watching you all the time!”

“I held that corner all the time, too,” Honey said, amazement apparent in her voice.

I beamed, pleased that I had been able to astound my friends, but I tried to act modest. “It’s nothing. I even amaze myself.” Of course, I had to show a *little* swagger, so I swelled out my chest for effect.

I continued to prestidigitate for my appreciative audience, telling funny stories and keeping up a continuous patter that left all of my watchers baffled, if I do say so myself. One of the keys to a successful magic show is distracting your audience just the slightest bit so they don’t see your sleight of hand. I went through the usual garden variety tricks as I kept up my patter, like knotting silks and then shaking the knots out of them, striking metal hoops together in a chain and shaking them apart, making a bowl of water disappear (although, if I’m being completely honest, I spilled some and had to try that trick twice), and performing a card trick I had done for Brian’s birthday one year.

I felt gratified as I bowed to great applause and left the stage. All in all, the show had been a swimming success, and I was a little high on the attention. When Miss Trask asked me how I did my tricks, I was so bold as to reply airily, “Sorcery, occultism, necromancy, wizardry, black magic...you couldn’t possibly understand the feats I have performed.”

Fortunately, Miss Trask knew my words were meant as a joke and all in fun. And, of course, I did come clean about all of my tricks, even the five-dollar bill trick (which Trixie admitted threw her—ha!), to the assembled group as we feasted on soft drinks and cheese popcorn.

I’ve been the center of attention many times in my life—sometimes good and sometimes bad—but this will always reign as one of my favorite moments.