



Encore

By Deucevi *The Village Girl*

ACT 1

Try to remember now... how did it all begin?

To solve the Down clues, you must modify one word in each of them, using these transformations six times each:

- - the section of the word between "t" and "e" must be gutted.
- - the last letter of a word must go back to the beginning.
- - a letter that appears exactly twice must be buried deeper.
- **ENCORE** - an "encore" must be created in the word, replacing something else.

A letter on a stormy night...

If the change is from puzzle *n*, circle the *n*th letter of the clue in this puzzle **and** underline the *n*th letter *from the end* of the corresponding clue in the corresponding puzzle.

This script is controllingly captivating... and this encore follows it to the letter!

Two of the rows in the finished grid will spell out what you need to do to keep this crazy play going.

ACT 2

"Did the play stop / because you made a mistake?"

"Must you alone / try it again? / To spin the tale of the perfect night?"

Tonight, we've been tamed by the world, and become "slaves" to the lead role's play...

I'm the only one who notices: this world is just a fake!

Wait, some of these Down clues are fake! It looks like 11 of the Down clues you should solve have been disguised as Across clues, and replaced by a fake Down clue! The enumerations may be misleading, but you don't need any of the transformations from Act 1.

How might the play come to an end?

How might I be able to save everyone?

The diagonal of the remaining 9 Across clues spells a word fitting **this exact moment**, helpfully translated ^{below.} _{above.}

ACT 3

Tonight, so that the world shall be tamed, shall we become slaves to the lead role's play?

If you apply the four transformations (in the order given by the circled letters at the starts of the clues) to my word, you'll see **a certain object** I needed in each of the previous three cycles.

The script is controllingly captivating...

This object can be found in each of the previous three puzzles, with a different meaning each time. (One of these meanings is more commonly pluralized, and another may make more sense if punctuated.)

Each of these appearances is somewhere in the clues, but has been 'damaged' in some way; the letters you've underlined in those puzzles (top to bottom on the page) will tell you how it has been damaged.

...and this encore follows it to the letter!

Two of the rows in the finished grid will spell out what you need to do with the final answer you got from each puzzle, letting you modify the answers to those three clues.

In the protection of kind "lies", forget everything and go to sleep! And "once again", we shall perform...

On to the ~~Encore~~—

Assembling these three pieces (in puzzle order) will produce a two-word phrase. This phrase is both "real" and "fake", for both the source series and this puzzle:

Interpreted one way, it gives a description that is unfortunately not accurate to the overarching plot; interpreted another way, it gives a description that is accurate to this last song. Yet another way, it gives an inaccurate description of these four puzzles' grids; and the fourth and final interpretation gives an accurate description of this whole set, especially this puzzle!

Across

1. Space is free: engineered heading to go as hotel becomes inflamed (4, 7)
12. Moderate state leadership (4)
13. Cutting down plants and people's origin, along with shortened character in Greek (4)
14. "Energetic character" ore picked up architect's first (4)
15. For amigo, is exploded steam missing apparatus at the end? (4)
16. Sister married to cold Latin (for now) (4)
18. Primarily, a school containing aristocratic people, as a group bringing about part of music (5, abbr.)
20. Catch a group of sixteen from France (5)
21. Extremely outlandish spacewalker in acknowledgement; showing concern (2, 3)
23. Did submit flat about detective (6)
24. New automaton that learns to be near plugs for IO, and so on (6)
25. Noisy baron disrobed to win gambling game, principally (5)
26. Illica's piece (with murder involved in hollow melodies) coats drops in the wrong place (5)
28. Simian missing one side: one with others (2, 3)
32. "I don't know... a famous soccer player adopted Mike, for one?" (4)
35. NYT owner once read out beef (4)
38. Small battery size found in odd parts of Alabama (4)
39. Fleece patch-applied item that's held by manila (4)
40. Friend of a large group said "Perhaps Capone, as the first person" (4)
41. Throws away drunkard's returned letters near beach (admitting bit of shame) (6, 5)

Down

1. Admitting limits, Father chose to absolve (4)
2. Homemade bombs from last riot of bloodied soldier vanguard (4)
3. Tussles after scams' frontrunner is mutinied (5)
4. Machine of the 40s created using mean finance: banking unevenly (5)
5. Topic in Uri Geller's second bunco (4)
6. At riddling snack, showed more posies (3, 2)
7. Lead to "berries" found using narc's rules that had been overturned (4)
8. A flawless remedy, when presented after horns, is something up your sleeve (2, 3)
9. Notify the cops after "peanut" altercation, catching your breath (7)
10. In Rennes, be benign, concealed by quiet resort (4)
11. Stationed over the ocean, taxmen concealed cook (6, 2)
17. Continue to add to it, shifting around back row (4, 4)
19. It sets up a count as "vandal"? That's undue (3, 1)
20. Heel of "Mistress" to slam rear (4)
22. Scripture books with prayers for AIDS defense (7)
27. Oscar replaces database through African country's turmoil (5)
28. Once: Dodges nonomniscient anger (5)
29. Deals the final blow for intruders, the Spanish nuts (5)
30. Infection that might cause some gauge to be green when above 51 (1, 4)
31. A good sign in alley when ultimate player charges to oust leader (4)
33. In ugly game, one who may fight gorges (4)
34. Rock cartooned by comic artist (4)
36. Those in charge of "Head of Development" to secure lither intern (4)
37. What's in rashest learner's eye problem? (4)