



The Glorious Deception: The Double Life of William Robinson, aka Chung Ling Soo, the "Marvelous Chinese Conjuror"

Jim Steinmeyer

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In a biography woven from equal parts enchantment and mystery, Jim Steinmeyer unveils the secrets behind the most enigmatic performer in the history of stage magic, Chung Ling Soo, the “Marvelous Chinese Conjuror”—a magician whose daring made his contemporary Houdini seem like the boy next door. Soo’s infamous and suspicious onstage death in 1918 mystified his fellow magicians: he was shot during a performance of “Defying the Bullets,” in which he attempted to catch marked bullets on a porcelain plate. When Soo died, his deceptions began to unravel. It was discovered that he was not Chinese but a fifty-eight-year-old American named William Ellsworth Robinson, a former magicians’ assistant and the husband of Olive Robinson. But even William Robinson was not who he appeared to be, for he had kept a second family with a mistress in a fashionable home near London.

Here is a look at the rough-and-tumble world of turn-of-the-century entertainments, the West’s discovery of Oriental culture, and Soo's strange descent into secrecy as he rose to stardom—written by the foremost chronicler of magic’s history and culture. Due to the scandals surrounding Robinson’s death, this is the first time his full story has ever been told.

Photographs are included.

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