

ORIGAMI

The scene is an office Christmas party for a small computer company, held in a private room of a local bar. The company has generously decided to pick up the tab for the drinks (within reasonable limits). One of the employees, a developer called Peter, has managed to gather a small knot of people around him. His colleagues are not attracted to Peter for his good looks, as he is tall, thin and usually unkempt. Tonight he has made an extra effort, ironing his clothes to avoid his perpetually rumpled look, shaving for longer than a minute and brushing his hair until it lies flat rather than letting a few of the knots and strands hang loose. And he still looks unkempt. It also isn't for his lively personality, as most of his colleagues would describe him as a dull geek, and be fairly accurate. But Peter still has the crowd, and the reason is that Peter is an amateur magician. The crowd is watching him run through a few simple card tricks, making cards disappear and reappear, predicting audience choices. He does his best to tell the story of the four Jacks, but the evening is wearing on and the crowd is getting smaller. Those who remain are also getting drunker and louder. Peter eventually packs up the cards and takes a small sip of his beer. The crowd drifts away, a few heading towards the door, some the toilets, most the bar and a couple towards the karaoke machine, alcohol finally wiping out the fear of humiliation.

Soon only Peter and one member of the audience are left around small table. Her name is Lisa. She works in marketing, an area completely unfathomable to Peter as it involves regular contact with other people. She sits down beside him. Peter starts sweating nervously. Lisa is tall and slender with long copper hair and a dazzling smile that makes her emerald eyes sparkle. She smiles that smile at him now. "Do you know any other tricks?" she asks softly, just as the karaoke starts up Bon Jovi's 'Livin' on a Prayer' with commendable enthusiasm and less commendable talent. Peter nods, his throat dry, his tongue suddenly filling up his mouth. "Can I see one?" Peter doesn't nod for that one. He needs to actually get words out.

"S-s-sure." He stammers, pulling out the cards. He looks around carefully, but everyone is having far too much fun heckling the karaoke stars to pay him much attention. He takes her hand and places it flat on the low table; clear of beer residue thanks to the fact that he's been performing on it most of the evening. He pulls out two cards at random, the king and queen of hearts and places them face-to-face, leaving the red backs showing. He takes a deep breath to steady himself. "Okay, first off, do you trust me?" he asks, slipping into the role of magician.

"Course." Peter shakes his head, completely upsetting his hair.

"Wrong answer. I'm the magician. My job tonight is to lie, cheat and trick you. But you can trust me not to hurt you. Unless I'm lying to you now." He flashes a quick, sinister smile owing a lot to black-and-white moustachioed villains. If he had a moustache he'd twirl it now for effect.

"It's just a card trick. Paper cuts won't kill me." Peter smiles.

"Is that your final answer?" he takes up the pair of cards and lays the long edge against her wrist, between a pair of silver bracelets. "Now, what's about to happen is completely impossible. Remember that. What you're about to see cannot happen. Oh, and it might feel really weird. Still want me to do the trick?" he glanced around. 'Livin' on a Prayer' was winding down, but he noticed a large number of women on stage, more than a few swaying and he reckoned 'I Will Survive' should keep people busy for a while. Lisa nods, but slowly, looking down at the cards nervously. Peter gently puts his finger on the top edge of the cards and whispers "Calm." under his breath. He pushes on the cards, pushing them down between the bracelets and through Lisa's milky skin. She stares at their soft passage, feeling the leading edge as a tingle through her arm. She looks a little shell-shocked, but her eyes are bright. Peter looks around again and decides to push things a little more. "Ready for part two?" Lisa tears her gaze away from her wiggling fingers and the cards severing her wrist.

“Part two?” a slight tremor passes through her voice.

“Yup. Ready?” she hesitates. Peter waits as she struggles between obvious curiosity, excitement and fear.

“Ready. But quick, before I change my mind.”

“As the lady commands.” He executes a short bow and gets a nail between the two cards. He pulls, separating the cards, and Lisa’s hand from her body. She gives a little yelp as he picks up her wriggling hand, with a card attached to the wrist. She holds up her arm, staring at the queen of hearts. She reaches out to take the card. Peter grabs her other arm quickly. “I wouldn’t do that. It could be messy.” Lisa looks up at him.

“Can you put me back together please?” she asks in a small, frightened voice. Peter pushes the cards together and quickly whips them out of her arm. Lisa stares at her reattached hand for several minutes before she feels between the bracelets. The skin isn’t even bruised, but her touch makes it tingle pleasantly. “Is there anything else you can do?” Peter shrugs.

“Not here. I don’t like doing things properly in public, and most of the good stuff is back at my place, anyway.”

“Oh.” She sounds disappointed, and relieved.

*“I am never, ever going to have another chance this good.”* Peter thinks. He takes a really deep breath, his heart threatening to break out of his chest, “Would you like to come and try some of them?”

“When?”

“Tonight, if you feel like it. Or sometime after work. Whenever really.”

“OK, how about right now?” Peter very nearly faints.

“OK. Sure.” He squeaks. “I’ll just get your coat.”

They leave unnoticed into the chill of the night, accompanied by the last chorus of ‘I Will Survive’, and the cheers, claps and catcalls of the audience.

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Peter suggests walking to his place, as it was only half-a-mile away. To his amazement, Lisa agrees. Most people at the company thought him mad for walking the mile and a half to work every day. They talk about nothing while they walk and are at the door before they knew it. Peter fumbles for his keys, his palms sweaty. He pushes the door open and reaches around the doorframe for the alarm keypad. Then he flicks on the lights and closes the door behind Lisa, taking her long black coat and beret and hanging them both up. The room isn’t anything to look at, just a small hall with a couple of doors off each side. Peter walks her down the hall, pointing at the doors. “Kitchen, without much food. Bathroom, which may not be hygienic. Bedroom, which almost certainly isn’t. Lounge.” He stops at a black door in the end of the hall. “And Merlin’s Magical Accessory Storage Space.” Lisa giggles. He opens the door, revealing inky darkness behind. “Shall we?” he gestures at the darkness.

“It’s dark in there.”

“Oh, right.” He reaches in and flicks on the lights. Lisa gapes into the room. The storage space, which she expected, at best to be a spare bedroom looks like a large warehouse, crammed with boxes of varying sizes, costumes, blades and a lot of things she can’t put a name to at the moment. “Pretty neat, isn’t it?”

“It’s, huge! How can you afford this much space?”

“I can’t. It’s not really here, it’s magically attached, I guess you’d say. According to the plans, this is just a closet, and if someone else had opened the door, they’d find a vacuum and broom.” Lisa still stares around the room. “Do you have any preferences? Sawing in half? Guillotine? Twister? Stretcher? Origami?”

“What?” she looks at him, still a little dazed.

“The Origami Box. It’s the one where the beautiful assistant, in this case you, gets into a box which is folded up into a much smaller box and has swords shoved through the back, top and side, before coming out completely unscathed. Sometimes the assistant switches costumes inside for added effect. You up for that, or a variation of it?”

“Variation?”

“Yeah, I don’t use the swords, just fold the box up a bit more so that it’s physically impossible to fit a person in it.”

“Oh, OK. Do I need to do anything? A special costume or something?”

“No, you just wait here and I’ll get the box.” He disappears into the collection, and emerges with a black box about a foot and a half on a side. The edges are crimson, silver diamonds in the centre of each side with a small slit for the swords. He folds the box up and out until it is almost twice the original size, open at the back and top. He holds out his hand, helping Lisa inside. He starts to fold the box back up, gently helping Lisa to fit into the tight space. “All right in there?” he asks as he closes the final panel.

“Fine. Just a bit cramped. Don’t take too long.”

“Okay.” He pushes on the back half of the two side panes and they swing into the box, locking together, and making it 9x18x18 inches in size. He pulls off the back piece and folds the top and bottom flaps together before putting the back over them all. He repeats this for the sides and top, halving each side of the box to 9 inches, and making the whole thing an eighth of its original size, but still with a silver diamond in its centre. “How about now?”

“Still cramped. And I tingle all over. Are you done yet?”

“Bit more?” he folds the box over in half again, making the sides four and a half inches long. He grabs hold of the sides of the box and presses, pushing them in an extra half-inch so that the box is four inches cubed. This happens twice more, leaving the original one and a half foot box an inch on a side. Obviously no one could fit into the box. A small mouse would have had difficulty. “OK. That’s all done. How do you feel?”

“Tingly.” she replies with a lot of smile in her voice, “Can I come out now?”

“Nearly. Let me just set a few things up.” He picks up the tiny box, laying it flat on his palm. He digs a nail under the lid and flips it open. “Come on out.” Lisa clambers out of the box, and gasps as she stares up at him, all four inches or so of her.

“What did you do to me?” she squeaks, obviously shouting, but still only just managing to be heard.

“Helped you lose weight.” Peter replies, smiling down at her. “I presume you don’t want to be this size anymore.”

“NO!”

“OK, let’s see what we can do.” He reaches into the air and pulls back a black top hat with a crimson band and silver diamond set into the centre. He carefully puts the hat onto the floor. “I’m just going to put you in the hat, and when I tap it three times, you’ll be your proper size again.”

“Mmmm.” She mutters, still checking out her tiny body. Peter gently lowers his hand into the hat and leaves Lisa and the box inside the warm darkness. He turns the hat over, and taps it three times. He steps back as smoke bubbles up around the rim of the hat, pushing it into the air. The smoke thickens and swirls of colour appear, before it vanishes in a flash. Sitting on the fully sized Origami box is Lisa, wearing the top hat and a traditional magician’s uniform: black dinner jacket over a white shirt. A black choker is around her slim neck, a red cummerbund around her waist, both with a silver diamond in their centre. A black skirt runs around her thighs, her long legs clad in fishnet stockings.

“Hey! What’d you do with my clothes?!” Peter points at the box. Lisa clambers off and pushes open the lid, finding her clothes neatly folded inside. She looks up at him, a lot calmer, her eyes sparkling. “So, is there anything else you’d like to do with me?” she purrs, sidling up to his side and kissing him on the cheek.

“A few things spring to mind.” Peter replies, “Any preferences?”

“Well...”



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