

GIFT WRAPPING

by pwatson1974

Dell sits cross-legged on her bed, folding red paper lined with snowmen around the box. Tape rips between her teeth before she presses it against the paper to seal it. She hums a Christmas tune to herself as she folds the paper over the other end. A knock at the door pulls her out of her revelry and she slams the box under the covers with a rustle. "Whazzat? Who's there?!"

"S'just me, Apprentice. Can ah c'min?"

Dell glances at the covers, pulling them to completely cover the box, "Sure, sure. I'm not doing anythin'."

The door opens. "Ah toldja, ya has gots ta get better at lyin' if'n ya're gonna do so damn much of it."

"I wasn't..."

Anne raises her eyebrow.

"I'm not doing anything, nothing really..."

"Better." she sits down on the bed, "So, as ya're just busy doin' nothin', howsabout we find somethin' ta do?"

"I..." she glances at the shape under the covers.

"After ya got that there present wrapped, obviously."

"What?! How did you?"

"If ya're a good pupil, maybe ah'll tell ya eventually."

"That's not fair!"

"Nope. Sure ain't. What is? But, when ya get it all finished up, ah'll be waiting with a surprise."

"Uh-huh."

"A good surprise."

"For...?"

"So cynical, so young."

"You taught me well."

Anne smiles, "Taught ya summin', at least. It's a trick we ain't done an' ah think it'll be fun."

"For...?"

"Fer the both of us."

Dell looks up at her with the full withering force of teenage scepticism.

"Guess ya'll just haveta trust me on that."

"Yeah, sure."

Not long afterwards, Dell stands beside a mirror, a two-foot wide cube sitting on the padded bench in front of it. "Ya know what this is?"

"A box?"

"What have ah said about cheekin' yore teacher?"

"Plenty."

"Ok. This here is the origami illusion."

"Uh-huh."

Anne starts unfolding the box until it is twice as high and three times as long, stretching back towards the mirror. "Well? What'cha waitin' for?"

"A clue what you'll be doing to me?"

"As if that matters. Fine, fine, ya get in an' ah fold this back up."

"Not much of a trick."

"Well, sure, that's why the mundane version shoves swords through each side a' a box even ya'd have to really bunch up ta fit in."

"Uh-huh. There's what I was expecting."

"Course, that ain't what we'll be doin'."

"So what will we be doing, oh, wise one?"

"Well, oh, wise ass, ah'll just keep on foldin'."

“And how is this fun for me?”

“Ya want ta learn yore stuff, right? Well, if ya can get yaself outta this, that'll be somethin'.”

“Uh-huh. And if I don't you'll just keep me in there.”

“Ya're startin' ta understan' mah teachin' methods.”

Dell rolls her eyes. “Fine, let's get this over with.” she crawls into the box, crouching down. “And what's the mirror for apart from giving perverts a great view of my ass?”

“Well, one, yeah, that's pretty much what it's for, and, two, it's so they can see around the box at all times so the assistant can't escape.”

“Sure. Even I can figure out ways around that one.”

“Well, ain'tcha smart, now get down.”

“Yes, sensei.” she replies impishly before she ducks under the lip of the box.

Anne begins to fold up the box, shrinking it back down to a cube two-feet across. “Doin' ok in there?”

“Yeah, I mean, I expect to shrink? Or squish? But it's like I'm floating? Like I'm in the van, you know?”

“Uh-huh. That's what ah was goin' for.”

“Going for?”

“Tricks like this got options, so ah could've done any or all that. Ah just didn't want ta have ta deal with a vengeful gremlin runnin' around causin' more havoc than ya normally do. Anyway, 'bout this size is where the mundanes stop an' just start shovin' swords through. An maybe ah'll do that ta ya later. But for now...” she presses on the top, folding it down in half and continued to fold until the the box is only a foot across. “Still good?”

“I'd give you a thumbs up if I could, but, you know, someone stuck me in a box without openings.”

“Everyone's a damn critic around here.” she folds the box down again, and keeps folding until the box is a mere two inches across. “Still doin' ok?”

“What if I say no?”

“Ah'll know ya're lyin' an' ah'll keep ya in a few more hours.”

“In that case, everything's good, ma'am.”

“Ma'am? Ma'am?! Ah might just keep ya in anyway for that.”

“I thought the point was for me to get out?”

“Sure. If ya can...”

“You just watch me.”

Anne smiles to herself and leaves the room, waving over her shoulder at the tiny box. “See ya in a few hours.”

Inside the box, Dell floats. The world around her is dimly lit from everywhere and nowhere, diffuse twilight surrounding her, “Well, how do I get out of here? I mean, some clue would have been nice.” she reaches out to find emptiness in all directions, the same grey nothingness all around her.

“Ok, great, wonderful. Well, I guess I've got a few hours to come up with something.”

Time passes slowly. Dell tries swimming, or walking, or flying through the emptiness. But with no landmarks, she's not even sure she's moved at all. She reaches out in all directions, turning herself upside down to see if that helps. It doesn't. She spends hours, or at least minutes, visualising a way out, but the void inside the Origami box doesn't seem amenable

“God, I'm bored. How am I supposed to find a way out of here when there's no here? Next time I'm going to insist on a book! A magazine, at least.” She stares down at her palm, letting the illusion she now maintains almost automatically fade. The gleaming black stone pulses, but doesn't do anything to actually help. “Well, thanks for nothing to you, too. Ok. There's a way out. There has to be. Anne wouldn't have just dumped me in here if there wasn't. Probably. I mean, I haven't pissed her off for days at least. So, what would she think I could do to get out? Veils won't work. And there's nothing around here to possess, so what?” she sits cross-legged on nothing, chin resting on her fist and tries to think.

More indeterminable time later, "Nothing works! Might as well go to sleep in here!" she closes her eyes, curling up, "That was your cue, universe, just so you know."
The universe doesn't seem to respond. Dell sighs and rolls over.

Later still, but not long enough to actually go to sleep, definitely not, she feels a fuzzy nose bump into her face. She blinks slowly awake, a giant white fuzzy face filling her vision, purple sparkles dripping around it. "Oh, Harvey. It's just you." she reaches out, scratching between Harvey's ears. Harvey nuzzles her hand. Dell closes her eyes, and snaps them open again. "Harvey?! How did you get in here?!" she sits up, which doesn't actually move her hand relative to Harvey. Harvey wrinkles his nose without answering, "Is this where you run off to when you vanish? Going to show me the way out?" Harvey's nose twitches. He slowly turns and lopes across the emptiness, disappearing in a shower of purple sparks. "Hey!" Dell floats over to that spot in the grey nothingness, feeling around for any sign of Harvey's exit, without any success. "Phooey!"

Outside, "Well, well, well, what do we have here?" Sam approaches the folded box, "Someone's been playing, have they?"

"Oh, what do you want?" Dell replies from inside the box.

"Oh, it's you. I won't feel too bad about this, then."

"Feel bad about what?"

"Helping you wrap this present up."

"Present?!"

"What else would a box like this be doing just lying around before Christmas? Someone must have rushed off and missed one. I'd only be helping them out." She pulls out some snowman-covered wrapping paper.

"Don't you dare!"

"Sorry. Can't hear anything. Must be pregnancy brain turning my ears off." she starts to wrap the box up, muffling the voice from inside.

Inside, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no way am I letting this happen!" she scrabbles around, trying to find any way out. But the void around her remains as blank and unyielding as ever.

Outside, Sam hums to herself as she tapes up the parcel. "Perfect. Now, just one little thing." she smiles to herself, taking up a marker to write 'do not open til Xmas' on the paper. "There, that should shut the little..."

"Nah. Nothin' shuts her up, specially when she's grousin'." Anne replies, leaning arms folded in the doorway, "Speakin' of, seems ta me ya're tryin' to get rid of mah assistant for a few weeks. Right before Christmas. An', ya know what? That kinda makes me a mite irritated."

"Oh, really?"

"Uh-huh. So, as ah'm such a nice person who ain't tryin' ta cause no trouble here, if ya'll just let her out now, ah won't have ta take mah earrin's out."

"You won't do anyth..."

"Sure ah won't. Not right now, with ya in such a delicate condition, no ways. Otherwise, well, ya'd be joinin' that wrappin'. But ya ain't always gonna be pregnant, an' ah can be real patient when ah haveta be. So, we can take this as a cute li'l Christmas prank, no harm, no foul. Orrrrrr, we can take it as the beginnin' a' real hostilities 'tween us. An' ya know no one does feudin' quite like a Dixie gal."

"Fine." she tosses the wrapped box across the room. Anne snatches it out of the air.

"Good choice."

"Whatever." she pushes out the doorway.

"Now, let's be gettin' ya outta there." She slides her finger under the folded paper, tearing it open.

"For me, me? Ya shouldn't have."

"You're hilarious, you know that."

“Ah do indeed, Apprentice. An' it looks like ah'll haveta keep a real close eye on ya, don't it?”

“I didn't do anything!”

“Whatever. So, do ya wanna be let loose? Or shall ah let ya figure things out a mite longer?”

“I want to be let out. I can't do anything to that bitch in here.”

“Uh-uh. Ah ain't lettin' ya out ta get revenge.”

“But she...”

“Just a bit 'a pre-Christmas fun.”

“But...”

“A course, if ya just happened ta be let out an' start makin' plans for whatever ya wanna do ta her the next time ya an' she butt heads, well, ah couldn't predict that, now, could ah? So, do ya promise ta be your version 'a good if ah let ya out?”

“But...fine, I promise.”

“Ah accept that totally sincere promise.” She starts unfolding the box, releasing Dell. “But we'll still be tryin' ta get ya out on your own.”

“But...”

“Ah might even try teachin' ya how next time...”

“Really?”

“Consider it mah Christmas gift, if ya can keep off the naughty list 'til then.”