

# The Magic Trick

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**John Boston**

Brian Welch was a professional entertainer. He was a stage musician. He wasn't the best, or most innovative, but he wasn't the worst either. The problem with being a magician is that there isn't any room for second best. It was a constantly evolving field that required you to innovate and be the best or you fell off everyone's radar in a short amount of time. It was a very unforgiving field that did not take kindly to those not willing to devote their life to it.

He had a good run for many years, he even headlined a major casino in Las Vegas for over a year, but he lost out to others who were constantly upping their game. His understudy five years ago was now more famous than he was. He had an accident on stage one evening and it had cost him dearly. Somehow, his stage girl, or stage skank as he called her, had gotten burned. How in the hell she got that close to the flame he had no idea. They had rehearsed the act for days. She never should have gotten hurt, let alone hurt as badly as she did. She screamed so loud, people in the other theater could hear her. It was a nightmare. The casino canceled his show the next day. They had to pay him out the remainder of his contract, but as far as Vegas went, he was done, at least for the big casinos, where the big money is. His name was mud in this town.

He had gotten work a year later in Atlantic City, which was sort of like going from a professional sports team to their minor league affiliate. He had devoted years to his craft and it was ruined on one evening because he hired an amateur with big boobs. He was screwing her within a week, but he knew she didn't belong on stage. She might be gorgeous and have a great stage presence, but his act called for perfect timing and rehearsal, something she just wasn't very good at. She sued him and tied him up in court for a few years, but he had wisely made her sign a liability waiver before she started that was held up twice in court. He agreed to pay her astronomical medical bills even though it was her own incompetence that caused her injuries, not his.

At 40 years old, he was headlining a small casino in Atlantic City, the Paradise Casino. The clientele was almost always senior citizens and foreigners. People his age just didn't have the money or desire to gamble. He never understood the appeal of gambling. He worked far too hard to just throw his money away at a slot machine or craps table.

His pay was almost a quarter of what he made in Vegas. He had to sell everything, his house, his cars, even many of his old collectibles, many of which were worth far more than what he got for them online.

He also hated the great State of New Jersey. If there was a way to tax oxygen, they would do it. He made all the money and the state took almost half of it for taxes and fees. He was renting a house in the city that cost more than what he was paying in Vegas and was half the size. The property taxes were nearly double what he paid in Vegas. He could see why so many people left the state as soon as their pension checks started coming in.

His act was good, as far as professional magicians go. It was good, but not great. He was like the GM of a professional sports team that is always just one player away from having a championship team. Brian had tried several types of acts. Hypnotism, fire-eating, even clairvoyance. They were most suited for dinner parties and small groups, not large audiences that paid good money to see him wow them. He also had a giant boat anchor around his neck. Her name was Merriam.

They had met seven years ago and had a very intense, very sexual fling that turned into a very intense, very sexual courtship that turned into a train wreck of a marriage.

She was six weeks pregnant when they married. She lost the baby three months later. It almost killed her. She had survived, but their child had not.

It was brutal for both of them. Not the way either of them wanted to start their lives together. She developed an addiction to pain pills. It wasn't too long after that, she was downing two bottles of wine a day. She had gained weight. She looked older than him, even though he was eight years her senior. Things just got steadily worse from there on in. Sometimes the two of them would go days without speaking to one another. He didn't know why she stayed with him, they made each other miserable. As much as he just wanted to move on with his life, he knew a divorce would break him. His agent begged him to make her sign a prenup, but he just couldn't go through with it. He never thought things would ever get this bad. No one ever does, until it's too late. He would be ruined if he divorced her. Divorce is expensive, in New Jersey, it's borderline suicidal. He'd love to meet the idiots that wrote these laws they now have to live under. He'd like to find their corpses and dig them up, just so he could yell and scream at them. Wouldn't change a damn thing, but at least he'd feel better. Poorly written, poorly thought out laws had ruined this country and countless others. Why people with room-temperature IQs were allowed to write laws, he had no idea. IQ tests should be mandatory at all levels of government.

Every night when he went on stage, he was like the coach of a team that he knew was going to lose. They did everything right, they just weren't good enough to win. It was the same way with his act. It was good no doubt, no one in the audience ever asked for their money back, but it would never cut it on a grand stage. He was waiting for the day when the big casinos would come groveling to him, begging him to sign. Instead, it was pretty much the other way around. He was probably lucky to be working in this dump. The pay was barely enough to cover his bills. At one point, his friend had offered him a chance to manage his car dealership and he had been tempted to take it. He had devoted so much of his life to his craft, he just couldn't turn away now. This was his chosen profession. He just had to get better, somehow.

Magicians, at least the big ones, usually had a small army of lawyers that would threaten anyone who even looked like they were copying their act. It didn't mean much, you can't patent a magic trick, but it meant court time and lawyers, who usually did nothing but take your money and smile. Brian hated seeing a piece of garbage fleece you and know there isn't a damn thing you can do about it.

He got the call one afternoon from some foreign guy, who said his name was Reyansh or something. Bryan had no idea how the guy even got his number. The man said he had a very unique magical prop he would like to show him. Brian knew the guy wanted money. He was

about to decline, but you never knew what people had stashed away in their attics and garages. It might be worth his time. He gave him his address and told him to come on over. An hour or so later, the moving van arrived in his driveway. A small Indian man climbed out and shook his hand. He had been down this road before. Everyone thinks their junk is valuable. The truth is it's only worth what somebody else is willing to pay for it. Still, you never knew.

The man took him to the back of the truck. He lowered the ramp and he got on, then raised the ramp and slid the door open. There were two large crates strapped to the side of the truck, with some weird-looking symbols on them.

"Mr. Welch, I would very much like to show you what these two boxes can do," he said.

He told him to bring one of them into his garage, which was now his workshop. He looked at the boxes. They were made out of wood, but it was unlike any wood he had ever seen. It was hard, like a rock. It looked almost *petrified*. The old guy might have something here. Bryan offered to help, but the old man refused. It took him about fifteen minutes, but he finally got one of them off the truck and used a giant dolly to move it into his garage. It was tall, about seven feet. It had a lever on the side. It almost looked like a small outhouse. He was now curious. He had dabbled in antique magical props in the past and could spot a fake a mile away. He had never seen anything like this before.

"Well, Mr. Reyansh, what exactly is this thing?"

"It is magic Mr. Welch. I don't know exactly what other word to use."

"There's no such thing as magic. Everything has an explanation."

"True, I just cannot possibly imagine what that explanation is."

"Look, everyone from Houdini to Thurston to Blackstone to Blaine have done this act. It's not magic, I can assure you."

"True, perhaps a practical demonstration is in order. Please give me an object.....any object," said Reyansh.

Brian walked over to his counter. He had a small melon sitting on the edge he had picked from his garden. He walked back and gave it to the man.

Ryan put the melon inside the wooden container. He closed the door and pulled the lever. He opened the door and the melon was gone.

Naturally, Brian was intrigued. Normally one would need a stage with trap doors and a lot of prep time to make that trick work.

"You're no amateur sir, I gotta give you that."

"Sir, I'm not a magician. I just put an object inside and pull the lever. That's all. Now follow me, if you would."

He followed the Indian man out to his van. They lowered the ramp and climbed up. Reyansh opened the door and there inside was the same melon. Brian even noticed the same imperfection on its side. Now, he was impressed, which rarely ever happens anymore.

"Not bad. I must admit, I have no idea how you did it, but we both know, it's not magic. Just give me a little time and I'll crack this nut."

"Take all the time you wish sir. I spent a year trying to figure it out and I have a degree in mechanical engineering from New Delhi University. To this day, I still cannot figure it out."

"Look, man. I'll be the first one to admit, it's a good trick. A damn good one. Your setup was brilliant. But, we both know, there ain't no real magic involved here."

"Well then, perhaps you would like to prove me wrong?"

"Look.....what exactly do you want here? You want me to tell you're a good magician. I admit it, you are. This one has me stumped and I can usually bust a magic trick within ten minutes."

Reyansh just laughed to himself.

"I am no magician sir. I am only a collector of rare and usual things."

"Where did you get these things?" asked Brian.

"They were acquired by my father at the end of the second world war. India was in a state of chaos at the time. He was only told that these two boxes are very old, many thousands of years. I have painted them and restored them as best I can. I restored the mechanism that controls the lever."

"So, what do you want from me?"

"I want to give them to you," said Reyansh

"What? Why me?"

"Well, to be honest with you. I saw you act the other night at the Paradise Casino and quite frankly, I think you need some help."

"Oh, come one. I don't think that's the real reason you're here today. Come on, why did you want to show me this?"

"Because I am dying. I have brain cancer. I do not know how much longer I have to live. I want someone, anyone to keep these boxes and protect them. They are very unique."

"I see that. What kind of wood are they made out of?"

"It is wood from a date tree."

"What? I didn't know date trees have this much wood."

"They do in Iraq and Syria. I believe that is where they are from."

"Look, sir....I'm sorry about your situation here, I really am. But, these things belong to you. I just couldn't take them from you. I wouldn't feel right about it."

"They aren't going to do me much good when I'm dead. I have any family here in the United States to give them to. There is no telling where they would end up."

"Alright.....just do me one little favor. One more little test of your magic boxes here, if you wouldn't mind."

"Not at all."

"Okay. If they really are magic like you say they are. Drive down to the end of the street. There's an empty lot down there. You park there and wait. I'm going to put something else in that box and pull the lever. We'll see what comes out in the other box, fair enough?"

"If you like. I just drive straight down this street?" he asked

"Yes. Just drive there and wait. I won't be long. Don't do anything until I arrive, okay?"

"Okay," he said. He closed the van door and backed out into the street. He watched him go down the street and pull off into the empty lot.

He went into his house and looked for something. He laughed and went over to the table and took the wedding photo of him and Merriam. He walked back to the garage, opened the wooden door, and put the photo inside. He quickly discovered that the lever would not move if the door was open. He closed the door and pulled the lever. He opened the door and could see the photo was gone. He looked and looked for a trap door, but couldn't find one. He got in his car and drove down the street to meet Reyansh. The two of them went around to the back of the vehicle and he pushed the door open. They walked over to the other box that was strapped to the side of the van and opened the door. Brian's jaw nearly hit the floor when he saw his wedding photo.

"Reyansh, if you're a magician, you're the best one I've ever seen. That is one hell of a trick."

"So, do you want them or not?"

"Yeah, yeah I do," he said still in shock.

They unloaded the boxes into his garage. Reyansh still wouldn't take any money. He said it was up to Bryan to guard and protect the boxes.

"People think there is no magic left in this world, it is up to you to make them think otherwise," said Reyansh.

"Oh, yes, one last thing and it is very important. My father told me and now I will tell you. See the side of the box here? You see how there is a notch in the middle of the lever mechanism?"

"Yes."

"Well, should you ever move the lever and it stops on the notch, whatever is inside the box will not come out on the other one. It will disappear from this world forever."

"Disappear? Where does it go?"

"I do not know. There is no way to get it back. Once it is gone, it is gone forever, so be very careful."

"Okay, thank you Reyansh. Is there some way I can get in touch with you?"

"I will most likely be dead within a few months. Once the disease enters its final stages, it will be very quick."

"I'm sorry. Well, thank you, sir. I'll make sure they're well taken care of." said Brian.

"That is all I ask of you sir, take care."

He watched Reyansh pull out of the driveway and vanish down the street. Brian figured he had just been conned, except he didn't lose any money. Don't cons usually involve someone losing a lot of money? He just gained two very old, magical props. Maybe they were stolen and this guy just wanted to unload them?

He sat in front of them for two hours and tried to figure out how Reyansh pulled this off. He repeated the same test five times. Each time putting a random object in one box, pulling the lever and the same object would appear in the next box. It was impossible, but it had happened. He knew there was no such thing as magic, but he was up against a brick wall. He spent the next two days trying to figure it out, but each time, he came up empty-handed. He had to call in the big guns.

He called his friend Sal, whom he had known for nearly twenty years. Sal lived in New York, which was about an hour and a half away from his house. He told Sal he had a good one for him. Sal made his living not as a magician, but as a debunker and skeptic, exposing everyone else's magic tricks and explaining how they were done. No one in the industry liked him, but he made everyone a better magician.

"You figure this one out and I owe you a steak dinner," he said

"You owe me a few steak dinners," said Sal.

"I wouldn't waste your time Sal, this one is the real deal," said Bryan.

Sal agreed to drive out in the morning and meet up with Brain. He figured he'd have this mystery solved and be back on the road within the hour. That's what he thought, anyway.

Sal phoned him back an hour later and told him he couldn't make it.

"Jack Touch wants me in London to help with his new act. I guess he's going to be entertaining the Queen."

"Magic Touch wants your help? What's going on? I thought you two couldn't stand each other?"

"We can't. He figures if I can pick apart his act in five minutes, he needs to step it up. I guess it's a case of keeping your friends close, but your enemies closer." said Sal over the phone.

"When will you be back?"

"Next week sometime. I'll stop by as soon as I get back."

"Ok, well good luck. Touch hole can be kind of a dick."

"Tell me about it. Take care,"

He was back to square one. He had two shows to do tonight, so he had to be ready. He would usually arrive at around four that afternoon to check the equipment and set up. The casino workers and stagehands were the ones that did the actual setup. He called the Casino Manager and asked him to stop by his residence. It was do-or-die time for him. He knew it was risky to have this act on his show when he couldn't even figure out how it worked. Maybe it was very risky. He had spent a few hours with it and put over two dozen objects through it. He discovered that if he left the door open on the receiving box, the object wouldn't transport. It would just stay inside the other box, even though he had pulled the lever. It was as if one box knew what the other box was doing, as impossible as it sounded.

The more time he spent with it, the more puzzled and intrigued he became. On any level, what he was doing was physically impossible. You can't magically transport objects from one box to another. It didn't make any sense, yet he had done it, repeatedly.

The Casino Manager liked to act as if he were a CEO of some major organization. In reality, Bria made more every year than he did. He also drove a nicer car than the manager did. His name was Chris Farnsworth. He and Bryan had been sniffing each other out for the past few months since he started at the Casino. His agent had gotten him the contract. He didn't even have to audition. They had only met briefly. His act so far had been a major success, but he knew he was going to have to step it up and hit one out of the park if he wanted to headline Vegas again.

Chris showed up about half an hour before Bryan left for the casino. He looked like he had just come from the beach.

"Hi Bryan," he said, extending his hand.

"I see you found the place alright. Driving in this state is a nightmare. I've never seen so many side streets in my life."

"You'll get used to it. So, what did you want to show me?"

"Right this way. I've been working on a new act. I wanted you to see it first, before anyone else."

"Okay, fire away," said Chris

He led him into his garage. He showed him the two large wooden boxes. Chris seemed rather intrigued. Not just in the act, but in the boxes themselves.

"What kind of wood is this?" he said, running his hand down the side.

"It's from a palm tree or date tree."

"No shit? Boards this size must have cost a fortune. I worked with palm wood once. Stuff is like rubber. This stuff is as hard as a rock." he said

"Well, in a nutshell, here it is: I place an object or person in one box, pull the lever and they appear in the other box, no matter where it is. It could be on top of the casino roof, it doesn't matter."

"You can put anything in there?"

"Yup. Try it out for yourself."

Chris walked over to his bookshelf and pulled out a magic book Brian had since he was a teenager. He gave it to him. He put the book inside the box and closed the door.

"Abracadabra," he said and pulled the lever.

Brian walked over to the other box and opened the door. The book was laying inside. He could tell Chris was impressed.

"How'd you do that?"

"Magic.....at least that's what we tell the audience."

"Yeah, this could definitely work. We can do it with an audience member or something. Okay, try me next."

Chris climbed inside the box. Brian was nervous. He had never actually transported a person before. He was hoping for a dog or cat first. What if something went wrong?

Brian pulled the lever after the door was closed. He walked over to the other side and opened the door. Chris was inside with this very confused look on his face.

"You okay?" he asked nervously

"Yeah.....for a split second there, I thought I was....."

"What?"

"Never mind, see I told you this wasn't....."

Chris stopped in mid-sentence when he saw that he was in a different box. He looked around the box for any clues or wires. He was stunned.



"How the hell the hell did you do that?" he asked

"I can't tell you that. So, what do you think? Can we work it into the show?"

"Absolutely. I'll call the boys and have them bring over the truck. We'll load it up and bring it over to the casino. Can you be ready to go tonight with it?"

"Sure, no problem."

Chris was already talking on his phone, barking orders at somebody to get over to Brian's house. Chris told him, he would take care of everything. Brian knew better. He would make sure nothing was damaged by the movers and stagehands. He also figured Chris was trying to figure out how the trick worked. Good luck.

There were half a dozen workers at Bryan's house within the hour. They had a large moving truck with them. They carefully loaded the wooden boxes into the truck and secured them. It took less than ten minutes and they were on the road again.

"I'll see you back at Paradise," Chris said

He was kicking himself for being so impulsive. He should have waited until he knew more about the boxes. There had to be some kind of trickery involved. There was no such thing as magic. Everything had a logical explanation. Everything, except these two wooden boxes it seemed. He just couldn't figure it out. The trick was supposed to stop once the curtain fell and the show was over. This trick didn't. It worked all the time.

He was sweating now, more than he usually does. His show lasted for nearly an hour with a dozen different acts. Tonight though, he would incorporate the magic boxes into his show. He would put one of them on stage, the other box would be suspended on a platform in the back of the auditorium. It wasn't a big room, it could only seat five hundred, but even five people can unnerve someone on stage. He had to remove a few people in Vegas, one of which required casino security and tasers. The guy was drunk and ruining the experience for everyone else. When he started swearing at him, he stopped the show and asked the man to please leave. It just escalated from there, as the drunken man came up on stage and tried to attack him. A few members of the audience helped Brian restrain him for a minute until security arrived. That was one of the longest minutes of his life. You could never assume anything about a crowd. In his twenty years as a professional magician, he had learned that every crowd was different than the one before it. Don't treat them like your friends, you're just there to entertain them. These days with internet porn and mass communication, it was getting harder and harder to keep people's attention for more than a few seconds. That's why these boxes were so unique. They could get someone's attention and hold it.

He and Chris, along with another floor boss, watched the stagehands set up. Brian would wait to use the boxes for his very last act.

"Not to piss on your parade here, but I've seen hundreds of these shows every night. Disappearing and reappearing. If you think the crowd is going to be wowed by this, you're crazy.

You might get a few ohhs and ahhs, but for the most part, this thing has been done before a million times." said the floor boss.

"Not like this, it isn't. If you were paying attention, you would have noticed that the other box is always on the stage. The other box won't be. Don't worry, I'm building up to something much bigger. Tonight is only the first stage. Wait till you see stage two or three.

"If you say so."

"Chris, just so we are both crystal clear on this: I and only I will ever be the one pulling the lever on that box. If I ever see anyone but myself pull the lever on that box, you and I are done here. You can sue me if you want. I don't give a shit. I'll never play in this casino again. No one but me touches that thing, got it?"

"Sure. I'll let all of the stagehands know right now," he said and headed off to the stage where the workers were taking their lunch break. Chris thought it was an unusual request, but he had dealt with a lot of crazy requests from his patrons and guests over the years. He found it was best just to indulge them, no matter how ridiculous it sounded.

Brian headed back to his dressing room. He lit up a cigar and waited for his stage girl to appear. He had a regular, but tonight had decided to change it up and asked one of the casino workers, one of the more attractive ones if she'd like to fill in.

"Sure, I'd love to, but I've never even seen your show. I wouldn't know what to do," said Sue.

"Don't worry, just play along and smile," he told her.

She would get a hundred dollars from the show plus tips. Not too bad for an hour's worth of work. He called her and asked her to come back to his dressing room. She knocked at his door a few minutes later. She was dressed in the outfit wardrobe had given her. She looked incredible. He could see she was nervous. Smart people usually are.

"Sue, I'm going to incorporate a new act into my show this evening. I'm going to put you in a wooden box and make you re-appear in a different one. It's sort of my piece de resistance if you know what that means."

"Your best magic trick?" she said

"Correct. Now, I kind of had to rush things here to be ready for tonight. You just go into the box, and the door will close. You will then reappear in the other box in the back of the room. Stay in there until I open the door, understood?"

"Yes, understood. Anything else?"

"No, just be ready to go in fifteen. Don't be nervous, I'm sure you'll do great."

"Okay, see you then," she said.

The show went exactly as planned. The room only had about fifty people in it. Pathetic, even by the casino's standards. Sue was magnificent. She almost stole the show. It was as if she could read his mind. When it came time for the last act, he knew if this failed, he might as well pack it in and go sell life insurance. He made sure the DJ and light crew really built it up. The crowd was eager. He could see it on their faces. They were expecting to be wowed. He would not disappoint them.

"Ladies and gentlemen and transsexuals, I want to direct your attention to the back of the room. You'll notice a large wooden box. Now, most magicians will never allow anyone to inspect their magical props because if they did, they would quickly see how the trick is done and the magic would disappear. Well, I welcome you to look at it. Go ahead, please, take a good look. You will also notice that the box is on a wheeled platform. It can be moved at any time. You will quickly discover there are no trap doors or hidden compartments. In fact, I ask that one member of the audience move the box anywhere they like before me opening the door. What you are about to see is real magic. The kind done by Houdini and Merlin. Now, if you will direct your attention to the stage, the lovely Sue Ellen will step inside the first magic box on her maiden voyage through the unknown.

Sue slowly stepped into the box. He closed the door behind her.

"Now, in the back, please move the box anywhere in the room you would like."

Brian watched one of the audience members push the box along with two ushers about twenty feet.

"Now, sir, is the box completely empty?" asked Brian.

"Yes, yes it is?" said the audience member into his microphone.

"Thank you, now would you be so kind as to close the door behind you and make sure it shuts completely."

The audience member closed the door. He stepped away from the box and walked back to his seat.

The lights flickered and he went to work.

"Abracadabra....abracadabra!" he said

He pulled the lever and opened the door. The audience clapped when they could see the box was empty. He calmly walked up to the back of the room and stood next to the door.

"No trap doors, no boxes, no mirrors, just real magic," he said and opened the door.

Sue stepped out of the box. She had this very confused look on her face, but quickly came to and waved to the audience.

It took a few seconds, but once they started, they did not stop. They were truly amazed.

"Real magic can indeed be found in the Paradise Casino," he said.

Sue followed him back to the stage. They both took their bows and the crowd gave them a standing ovation. He'd get one every once in a while, but mostly, they just quickly clapped and filtered out of the room. Not tonight, tonight was something special.

He and his stage girl normally shook hands and took photos with the audience members after the show. He noticed an elderly man waiting to speak to him after the crowd had thinned out. He came over a minute or so after the last patron had left.

"Sir, I must ask, how on Earth did you do that last trick, it was incredible!" he said.

When Brian can make someone this old smile, he knew he had done well.

"Well, sir a good magician can never reveal his best trick."

"Well, honestly...most of your routine was pretty average. I mean it's fine for dummies gambling away their social security checks in here, but I'm an amateur magician myself and I was blown away. I figured this show wouldn't be worth my time, boy was I ever wrong. I'll be sure to let all my friends know to stop by. They're going to go nuts when they see it."

"You mean the magic boxes?"

"Yes, I looked them over myself. I have no idea how you did it, but you did. Well done sir!" he said and shook his hand.

He put his arm around Sue Ellen.

"You were great in there kid. You're a natural."

"I was so nervous, I thought I was going to crap my pants."

"But you didn't. You owned that crowd. How'd you like to be my regular girl?"

"Really? What about the other girl?"

"She wasn't working out. I'll call Farnsworth in the morning and let him know.

"Thanks, Brian.....I mean The Amazing Brian," she said.

He watched her walk away. He liked her. He really liked her. She was way too young for him, not that it mattered. They were attracted to one another like opposite ends of a magnet. It would just be a matter of time and they would be far more than just co-workers. He would have given just about anything for a night of wild sex with her, but there was Merriam, there would always be Merriam. No matter what he wanted, it was Merriam that got the final say and he doubted she'd let him have a mistress. He could ask, but she'd just say no. she just couldn't stand to see him happy.

He arrived home and found her drunk, passed out on the couch.

"I made dinner," she said and turned over.

He walked into the kitchen and found a frozen pizza still in the box on the counter.

*"Right.....I bust my ass all day and you get drunk. Hell of a team we make here Merriam."* he said quietly.

He put the pizza in the oven and opened himself a beer. He was personally congratulated by Chris and the rest of the staff of the casino. Clearly, the magic boxes had been a big hit. He knew he had to play his hand carefully here. He had something special. Hell, he had a gold mine on his hands. He just wasn't certain what to do next. He knew that word of the boxes would eventually get out. He's had every amateur magician and debunker in here, trying to figure it out. That was not what he wanted. If the crowds got too big, he would lose control. The secret might get out. The secret of course is that there was no secret. Whatever these boxes were, they were no ordinary boxes. He thought about what Sue had told him when he mentioned that she seemed to hesitate before stepping out of the second box.

"It was so weird," she said

"What was so weird?"

"Well, for a second. After you pulled the lever. I thought I saw something. I thought I was in this other world. It was bright and warm. It looked like a giant forest. It was the strangest thing I've ever experienced."

Brain knew she would inquire about it. Any reasonable person would.

"So, just how exactly did I get in that other box?" she asked in his dressing room.

He knew he had to play it cool. He didn't want the secret getting out.

He just handed her two hundred dollars and told her he'd see her again tomorrow night. That was double what she was supposed to be paid. It must have worked. She hugged him and left. He knew this was going to be trouble. He had to keep her quiet. He had no idea how he was going to do it, but he had to. She could ruin everything.

He looked back at his wife who was now passed out drunk. She would pop some Vicodin and wash it down with a glass or two of wine. She would be out cold in 15 minutes. Then, she'd wake up four hours later and be up the whole night. She had gotten a job at a pretty well-to-do jewelry store as a salesgirl, but got canned for calling in sick or showing up late. She had brains. She was no dummy. She had just accepted this pathetic existence of hers and figured the depression was always going to win. If he only knew then what he knew now. She was just getting worse and worse by the day. Some days he came home and had no idea what he was going to find. She took off for two days last month and never even told him where she was going. He really didn't care

where she was, she was out of his hair and he had the house to himself. It was a nice vacation. He spent as much time as he could at the casino, just to avoid being around her. She had taken notice. She was now calling him several times a day. Some days he would just turn off his phone and when he turned it back on he'd have fifty or sixty messages. It was getting ridiculous. She was still attractive when she wanted to be. Weeks would sometimes go by before her crazies kicked in. She was almost normal for a few months, then one night in a drunken fit, she attacked him. He shoved her so hard against the wall, he thought he hurt her. She just sat on the floor and cried. He picked her up and carried her off to bed.

He thought about leaving her several times. In the end, he just couldn't her, not when she needed him the most. He knew she was sick, she knew she was sick. Maybe, they were just sick of each other.

He put the blanket over her and turned off the light. There was a time before she got pregnant when she was downright gorgeous. A real knockout. It had been months since they last had sex. Some days she just revolted him. You just never knew with Merriam. Some days she was a nurturing breeze and other days she was a hurricane. It was usually one or the other.

He wasn't sure when it happened, or how exactly, but one night a few weeks later, he kissed Sue Ellen. She kissed him back and the two of them had sex in his dressing room, twice before the show. It was like he was 18 and in love again. Sue was everything Merriam was not, mainly stable and had a good attitude. Of course, when they first got together, Merriam wasn't crazy either. He couldn't stop thinking about her. She knew he was married, but she was as attracted to him as he was to her. Even on stage, in front of a large audience, their attraction was undeniable. He even bought another disposable phone so they could text and keep in touch. She was 15 years younger than he was, but when they were together, you would have never known it. They just clicked together, in every way imaginable. They even liked the same foods and drinks. He was falling in love with another woman. He knew at some point, he would have to tell Merriam. As painful as it would be, he knew it had to be done. Kind of like ripping off an old band-aid. He told Sue Ellen one night after they went out to dinner together.

"When are you going to tell her Brian, I'm tired of sneaking around like this," she said

"Sue, I love you. I love Merriam too, just not in the same way. I love her like I love my other family members, you've never been in this position. It sucks. It sucks bad, just let me handle it in my own way. I just don't want her to do something crazy, like try and hurt herself again."

"Again?"

"Yes, again. She tried to kill herself last year before we moved. Thank God I found her in time. You can see why we have to proceed with caution here."

"I don't want to be someone's mistress Bryan. I'm wife material, not mistress material."

"I know baby. I will tell her. Please, just be patient with me. I don't want her to take me for every penny I've got. We have to start our lives together. We can't do that if we're both broke."

"Everybody nowadays is broke," she added

"Yeah, and just about everybody is pretty damn miserable nowadays too," said Bryan.

Over the next few days, he thought about just how exactly he was going to do this. It had to be done, it was just going to suck for everyone. As much as he despised Merriam, he could never forgive himself if she hurt herself over the breakup.

He walked onto the sound stage in the auditorium, where he did his show every night to inspect the magic boxes. He had put a giant chain around both of them just to make certain no one would try and get inside. You can never be too paranoid around here. The last thing he needed was some amateur playing with these boxes. He still had no idea how they worked. He knew he was playing with fire and he could very well get burned, but right now, he was enjoying the show, just like the audience members were.

He was glad to see the chains and lock were still in place. Chris thought it absurd, but Brian insisted. Eventually, Chris backed down.

"It's your show, I just don't understand all the secrecy Bryan, I mean it is just an act, right?" he said after last night's performance.

"Yeah, just an act, but it's my act and we do it my way." he countered.

Sue Ellen was getting restless. She knew the magic boxes could put them on the map. She wanted to invite a local TV channel to drive around in a truck with the other box loaded inside. She would step inside, he would pull the lever and no matter where they were stopped in the city, out she would come.

"Honey, it would be epic! Everyone would want to know how you did it. It would be good business for the casino as well."

Brian knew he had to play it cool. He didn't want anyone to know about the magic boxes. He wished he never brought them to the casino. They were his magic boxes, to do what he wanted with them. He didn't want to share them with anyone. As incredible as they were, they were bound to draw attention from the wrong kind of people. That's not what he wanted.

Sue Ellen was indeed getting restless. One night after the two of them screwed their brains out, she asked him point-blank how in the hell the boxes worked.

"I'm not an idiot. I know somehow you are switching the boxes, I just have no idea how you're doing it. It's driving me crazy."

"Baby, I love you but don't ever ask me to reveal the secrets to my tricks. Please, don't ever make me tell you how it's done," he said almost hysterically.

"It's just that when I'm inside and you pull the lever, for a split second, it's like I'm in another world. I know it sounds crazy, but that's what it feels like. A bright, sunny world with these giant trees. It seems so peaceful. Why do I keep seeing the same thing?"

"The boxes have a different effect on everybody. Who knows why. You come out the other end, that's all that matters.

"It's just so weird. I can't put it into words. For a split second, I really think I'm in another world. A beautiful world, not like this one. Sometimes I just wish I could stay there for a while and never come back. It kind of scares me, honey."

Then, he remembered what Reyansh had told him that day when he brought the boxes over, about pulling the lever halfway. What if this world is where you went? What if he put Merriam in the box and pulled the lever halfway? Would she disappear? It might be worth a shot.

He figured in this other world, she might be happy. She might be free of all of her problems. Maybe in this world, there are no crazy people. Maybe, she could find the peace that has eluded her in this world.

He went over to the soundstage that same night to test his theory. He unlocked the boxes and put a small chair inside the 1st box with the lever. He closed the door and pulled the lever halfway. He opened the door and was stunned. The chair was gone. He had no idea where, but it was definitely not in the box. He tried it again with a small box and got the same result. The old man was right. He checked the other box and neither object was inside. They had vanished! He was excited now. He finally had an out. Light at the end of this dark tunnel. She would be out of his life forever and he would be free of her. She could have a brand new life in this other, magical world. He just had to figure out how to do it. It was not going to be easy. Neither Sue nor Merriam could ever know. It was getting difficult to keep the box's real powers hidden from Sue Ellen. She was a smart girl, eventually, she would figure it out. He would just have to cross that bridge when he got there. Right now, he had to get Merriam out of the picture.

He got a text from Chris. They met in his office ten minutes later.

"What's up?"

"Well, Brian I just got the numbers for the last month of your show."

"Ok, how'd I do."

"The numbers are flat. Pretty much unchanged since the start of the year. I thought your disappearing boxes would make more of an impact on the audience. Problem is, most of them are just here for a few days, then they go back home. This is a one-hit-wonder for them. The gambling business just isn't what it used to be. Neither is the entertainment business. I can remember when a show like yours would have packed the house. We'd be turning people away. No one cares about magic anymore. It's too bad. I still for the life of me cannot figure out how you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Put that girl in one box and she appears in the other one. I've checked them out myself. No trap doors or anything. It's almost like they're really magical, like those Transporters on Star Trek."



"So, why am I here Chris?"

"Brian, we have to get these numbers up. Your show takes up our best time and space here in the casino. There's a hell of a lot of competition for that time slot and room. I've got people calling me from all over the world wanting to perform in here. You have to get more people in here."

"I thought that's what the slot machines and crap tables did? I was just an extra cherry on top."

"There are ten casinos in this city. We have to give our customers a reason to choose us over the competition. We're family-owned. We can't absorb huge losses like the others who are owned by giant corporations. If you don't start selling more tickets, we won't be able to renew your contract in a few months."

This was welcome news. His boss was basically telling him to get rid of the magic boxes. He could take them away and he would have a very good reason. He'd tuck them away and they would quickly be forgotten about. That was just what he wanted. He wanted them to be forgotten, as soon as they made Merriam vanish.

"Ok, I was going to change the format of tonight's show. Instead of having Sue pop out of the other box, I was going to switch it up and have my wife take her place. She was my stage girl for a few years, she knows the act inside and out."

"Ok."

"If you want me to pull a 180 here, I'm going to have to live in the casino for a few days. New acts take time and I have to re-train everyone, including the stagehands. Can you comp me a room while I stay here? Nothing fancy, just a regular room with a bed."

"Yeah, sure. I'll call the front desk and let them know not to charge your account. I've seen a lot of acts come and go through these doors over the years. I know you're good. I know you have another level you can get to. I just don't know why you're holding back on us." Chris said.

"Okay, Chris. I appreciate your honesty. Just give me a few days." He said and he left his office.

He knew his movements might be scrutinized if the police were to investigate. If he never left the casino, then how could he have killed Merriam? How did he kill her and get her body out of the casino without anyone seeing him leave?

This was playing out perfectly. He just had one more stop to make. It took him a few minutes to get into character. He needed to make this one count.

He stopped by a local police station and asked to speak with an officer about his wife. He was met by a uniformed officer who didn't even look old enough to have hair on his balls. He told the officer that he was very concerned about the mental state of his wife.

"She just takes off for days and won't tell me where she goes. Sometimes I wonder if she'll ever come back at all. I'm really worried about her. I caught her packing last night. I changed her mind about leaving, but I'm not sure for how long."

The kid explained to him that unless she committed a crime, there wasn't a whole lot the police could do. Getting someone declared mentally unfit in this state was a difficult process. If she committed a crime and was incarcerated, it was much easier to get her evaluated and declared mentally unfit. He gave him the number of a local attorney and sent him on his way.

He went home and found the hospital report for Merriam after had tried to kill herself last year. He made certain that the part about "probable suicide attempt" was highlighted. He figured he now had enough ammo to keep the cops off his tail. Merriam's mother was all she had left. Her father had left the family when she was three and she had only spoken to him a few times since then. The mother was going to be a problem. She and Brian had never really gotten along. She would suspect he had something to do with her daughter's disappearance. He hated having to put her through this, but she would be happier where she was going.

The room rental made certain that his movements after the show would be carefully tracked. He would not leave the casino for days after. He'd make certain the casino workers saw the inside of his car and trunk, so the cops wouldn't think he put Merriam's body in there. It was all falling into place. He just had to convince Merriam to be his stage girl and he was in. Much to his surprise, she was completely sober.

"Please Merriam, I'm desperate. The boss wants me to change up my act. My regular girl can't work tonight. Please!"

"Fine, I'll do it this one time. You don't think I know about you two. You think I'm an idiot?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, come on. I've seen the way you two look at one another when you're on stage together. If you aren't fucking her now, you will be soon."

"Merriam, you're being ridiculous. If you don't want to help me fine, but don't go making ridiculous accusations."

"I would have thought you'd at least have the decency to divorce me first before you started screwing around," she said and stormed out of the room.

She promised him that she would be on stage at 7:00 pm for his first show. He had to hope she kept her word. He wasn't sure if he would ever get another chance. It had to be tonight.

He called Sue and told her to take the night off.

"I'm going to tell her tonight baby," he said

"You'd better, or we're done. I don't want to be seen with a married man, that's not the way I was raised," she said

"I just want us to be together. I've got big plans for us."

"Well then prove it. Tell her," she said.

It had to be perfect. He told the stagehands to be ready with the trap door. He would position the box over the door. His wife would fall below onto a large cushion, then leave through a small door on the floor. When she didn't come up to take her bows after the show, it might look suspicious. He told the lighting crew just to turn on the lights. He had to make some changes before his second show of the evening. No one even questioned him. They actually trusted him. It almost made him chuckle.

Merriam showed up precisely at 6:59 PM. She seemed sober. A little annoyed at the wardrobe lady who fitted her, but she was dressed, ready to go.

"Okay, I'll pull the lever and you will fall through a trap door onto a large cushion underneath the stage. It's simple."

"I can't wait." she sighed.

Truth is, as screwed up as Merriam was, you would never know it by her stage manner. She loved working the crowd and was all smiles when the spotlight was on her. No one would suspect anything was wrong between them. It was like clockwork.

He was nervous as the crowd came in and took their seats. The show went well, everyone seemed to be having a good time. When it came time for her to disappear in the box, she didn't even hesitate.

"Now, for my next act, I will make the lovely Merriam here vanish, right in front of your eyes. Keep watching!" he said and Merriam climbed inside.

"Abracadabra, I love the group ABBA!" he said and pulled the lever halfway. He was nearly shaking as he opened the door. Merriam was gone. Everyone in the audience applauded. The show ended and Merriam still had not returned. He knew it had worked. She was gone and out of his hair forever. She was now someone else's problem. He knew he had to play things very carefully. He had to make it look like they just had a big fight and she stormed off.

The spotlight was still on him. He was supposed to shake the audience members' hands and greet them after the show, but he just went back to his dressing room. He asked two stagehands if they had seen his wife. They both shook their heads no.

He then bumped into a casino worker a few minutes later. He made a big deal out of it, yelling and screaming. He stormed off and went back to his dressing room. He found the same worker a few minutes later and apologized for his behavior. He wanted to make certain the worker remembered him and what they talked about.

"I'm sorry, I just had a big fight with my wife. She stormed off, have you seen her?"

"What does she look like?"

"She was the stage girl tonight."

"No, I haven't seen her. Wait, I think I did see her, yeah, I think I passed her going out to the main floor. I'm not sure, it might have been someone else."

Perfect. Now he just had to do something with Merriam's phone and he was home free. He grabbed it and powered it off. He wiped it down and then threw it in a large dumpster outside. He threw it away with his dinner, just so it wouldn't look suspicious. He kept her clothes exactly where she had left them in his dressing room. He then called Sue Ellen.

"I told her. She didn't take it well. She just left. Didn't say a word. Just left right after the show. Jesus, I hope she's okay." he said

"You really did it honey?" she said, sounding somewhat surprised.

"Yeah, it's done. It's time to start thinking about you and me."

With that said, he went directly up to his room on the top floor of the casino. He made certain his car was parked right in front of a security camera. He closed the door and stayed there until tomorrow morning. He desperately wanted to see Sue, but he knew it would look suspicious if the two of them were seen together in his hotel room, at least for the first couple of days. Everything was going smoothly. His plan was going off without a hitch. If the cops did investigate, they'd find nothing but dead ends. Without a body, his story was all they had to go on.

He pretended to be working around the casino for the next few days. He finally went home on the third day. The house was empty. Merriam had not come back. He put his feet up on the couch and opened a beer. Life was good. Things were looking up. He had a much younger girlfriend and had more sex in the past month than he had all of the previous three years combined. Let the cops investigate him. Who the hell would ever figure it out? Even if he told them the truth, they would think he was crazy. Magic boxes that make people disappear? Who was going to believe that?

He called Merriam's mother the next day and tried to sound frantic, but believable.

"Well, where is she? I haven't seen her in almost four days?" he said

"Brian.....I'm sure you're aware, but my daughter has not been well lately. I'm sorry, I should have been more frank with you when the two of you got married. She has severe bipolar disorder.

*"Yeah, no shit, lady."* He thought to himself.

"I'm so worried about her. She took off last month for days and never told me where she was. I just assumed she was with you." he said, trying to sound sympathetic.

"She wasn't with me. I don't know where she was. Are you going to report this to the police?"

"I already did, a few days ago. I was hoping they could do something with her. We had a big fight after my last show. I haven't seen her since. I'm going to report her missing. Maybe the police can find her."

"I'm sorry I wasn't more upfront with you about her condition. I figured you wouldn't want to marry a crazy person."

"Will you please call me as soon as you hear anything? You have my number."

"Of course I will. You do the same for me."

He hung up the phone and just had to smile. He had pulled off the perfect crime and was going to get away with it. Sherlock Holmes and the FBI wouldn't be able to figure this one out. He had pulled off the perfect crime.

Maybe he should have been a criminal instead of a magician.

If Sue Ellen was suspicious, she never let on. He knew she might already know the secret about the boxes. She pretty much refused to get inside the boxes. He didn't like leaving loose ends with her. Maybe she knew and maybe she didn't. She could ruin everything for him.

The next day, he went down to the police station to report his wife missing. He spoke with a detective, who still had the report he had filed last week about her. He even brought along the hospital report about her failed suicide attempt. On paper anyway, she looked like someone who was very mentally unstable and had left abruptly before now. He gave the detective a picture of her and her mother's phone number. He said he could call either one. It was all part of the act. He knew the first thing the detective would do would be to call her and ask about him. Her mother couldn't say much. She would confirm everything he had said. Right now, she was just a missing person. The state would have to stand on its head to bring criminal charges against him. No one ever called her mother. They had bigger fish to fry.

The detective called him the next day and got a copy of the psych evaluation done on his wife in Nevada, where the authorities can declare a "Legal 2000" against an individual and have them hospitalized. New Jersey didn't have anything like that. He was unaware that such a report even existed. It was perfect. The two investigation psychiatrists found her to be mentally unfit and recommended hospitalization. They were overruled by someone at the state level and Merriam was returned a few days later. This was gold. No one would even bother looking for her at this point. To the cops, this was just a simple case of a missing person. A mentally unstable, mental person.

Brian just soaked it all up. He kept up his routine and made some calls to Merriam's increasingly distraught mother. He knew the old bag might try to hire a PI to find her, but good luck, he wouldn't get anywhere either.

He kept up his routine at work. His show was eventually moved to a different time slot and Brian could see the writing on the wall. He already had the house up for sale before his contract was up. He called him into his office and informed him that the casino would not be re-signing him. He pretended to be devastated. Chris took the bait.

"Brian, you're a damn good magician, you really are, the problem is nobody cares about magic anymore. Every show nowadays has to be bigger and better than the one before it. It's a tough field, it really is. I signed a Russian circus act. They've been getting great reviews in Europe and Asia. It's nothing personal, I hope you understand.

Nothing personal at all. He could now leave this goddamn state and would have a perfect reason to. It all looked perfect to someone who was looking in on his affairs.

"Well, thanks for everything, Chris. I'm just sorry we couldn't make this work," he said and shook his hand.

Chris patted him on the back and saw him downstairs. If he had any suspicions about the boxes, he didn't let on either.

He and Sue Ellen were still seeing one another, but he had to play the part of the grieving husband. It was important to keep up appearances. In the end, it was becoming too much for her. She told him she loved him, but she couldn't be with him. She needed someone with less baggage.

He was pissed, but he understood. At this point, he couldn't have cared less. He was now seeing someone else. He was taking it slow. He checked in with the detective who was in charge of the case. He made a bunch of excuses and Brian knew he hadn't done a damn thing, which was just what he wanted to hear. He didn't want the police doing anything but sitting on their hands until a dead body appeared, which in her case, never would.

He was back to enjoying bachelorhood again. He was now seeing two different ladies and was working on a third. Almost a year had passed by since her disappearance. The house had sold and he had been in the process of moving everything and selling most of what he had. The house was almost empty except for a couch he slept on in the living room. The only things he held onto were his magic boxes and some other magical props in the garage. He hadn't worked since he was fired by the casino. He was working on a new act at a casino on the gulf coast. He had an audition next week. The magic boxes could cinch the deal for him, but he wasn't going to take them. They would be his little secret. He had just gotten home one night from a big party and was just about to pass out on the living room couch when the doorbell rang. It woke him up. It was almost one-thirty in the morning. Who the hell could be at his door this hour? He nervously walked over to the door and looked out the peephole. He saw what looked to be an old woman. He figured she was lost or something. He was, after all, a gentleman. He unlocked the door and opened it.

The old woman standing in front of him was beaten badly and had several cuts and lacerations to her face. She could barely hold herself up.

"Oh, shit....are you okay? Come on in, I'll call an ambulance," he said and ran over to the phone.

"Don't you recognize me honey?" asked the old woman. The hair on the back of his head stood up. He turned around and looked at the old woman once more.

"No.....it's impossible. It can't be.....Merriam?"

"I'm home baby. Did you miss me? How long have I been gone?" she asked smiling.

"About a year.....what the hell happened to you. You can't be my wife.....you're too old!"

"I've been in that horrible place for fifty-three years. I made marks on the trees. I filled up two trees worth with marks from my knife they gave me."

"What, who gave you a knife?" he asked

I was wrong Brian.....it's not a peaceful world. It's a horrible world, filled with these small men with fangs and claws. If you don't pick the fruit fast enough, they hurt you.....they hurt you real bad."

"What the hell are you talking about?" he said in shock.

"I escaped honey. It took me fifty-three years, but I finally did it. I found the other box. You think they are magic, but they're not. Back in the days of Ancient Sumer, they used to send their criminals and bad people away in those boxes. Send them away and let them pick fruit every day, for the rest of their lives.....that was my fate, but I escaped.....I finally escaped that horrible place." said the old woman with a raspy voice.

"I thought I was sending you to a happy place, Merriam, I really did. I would have never sent you there if I thought that....."

"I know baby, it's alright.....get me a drink, would you. Haven't had a vodka tonic in fifty-three years. I've got a lot of catching up to do."

"Yeah.....I'm sure you do," said Brian still in shock. He poured one for her and one for him. He was going to need it. It was going to be a very long night.