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Abracadabra!

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Abacadabra!
Ashley Allred

I heard glass breaking. Without turning around I knew exactly what it was: our family portrait. It hung between the front door and window. My mother always touched the corner of the frame on her way out. I remember the day we took that picture. It was right before Christmas two years ago and we sat under a tree in the back yard. I usually avoided the camera, but it was important to her.

You should have seen how upset she was when my father spilled coffee on his newly starched shirt and had to wear one of his old ones. I didn't really see the big deal; it was just a stupid shirt. He told her it was an accident, but I still thought I heard her crying in the laundry room as she tried to get the stain out.

I walked through the lawn (something my father hated) but today I didn't care. I found myself stomping down the sidewalk without a destination in mind. All I knew was that if I stayed in that house a fraction of a second longer, I was going to burst.

The sun was beaming down on me so hard I had to wipe my forehead every few steps, and soon my shirt was soaked with sweat. I could feel it trickling down my back, pooling just above my waistband. My heart was running a marathon inside my chest. It was suffocating me, making it hard to breathe. I could feel it bouncing off my eardrums and radiating through my entire body. The pounding was so loud that for a second I thought someone behind me must have his iPod turned up too loud. I looked around; I was alone.

My legs could not keep up with the rest of my body and began to ache. I could feel my muscles twitching under my jeans. I almost stopped to catch my breath, but thought it better to walk it off and keep going. The pain began to fade, or maybe I just stopped feeling it.

Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a small shadow trailing slightly behind me. I tried to ignore it, but he was still there.

"When are you going to show me the dollar trick?" His chubby freckled face was sticky from the ice cream he held that was melting more quickly than he could eat it.

"Not today, Tommy." I tried not to look him in the eyes.

"But, you promised!" He stomped his foot and I watched the jiggle travel up his leg.

"Yeah, but I didn't promise I'd show you today. Now go home."

"But..."

"Go HOME, Tommy!"

I walked away and left him standing on the sidewalk a couple doors down from his house. I caught a glimpse of him in the reflection of a parked car as he ran back to his porch. He was probably going to cry and tell his mother. I felt bad for being so mean to him: he was just a kid, but today was not a good

day. I made a note to apologize to Tommy and show him the damn magic trick as soon as I got back from wherever it was I was going.

I sat on the bus bench, my back leaning against some realtor's plastic smile. I had no idea when the next bus was coming or where it was going, but I was getting on it. Reaching into my left pocket, I pulled out a brand new deck of cards.

I loved opening fresh cards. They sat perfectly flat against each other, and it was my job to break them in. I would shuffle the cards over and over again until they felt comfortable in my hands. But now, it was a chore. I took the first card off the top of the deck and stuck the rest back in my pocket. I flipped the card from one finger to the next, faster and faster, without thinking about it.

Ouch!

Paper cut. The card sliced through the web of skin between my fingers. At first it was just a faint red line on my skin but the blood slowly began to pool. I squeezed my hand until I thought I felt the stinging fade, but as soon I let go it came rushing back.

The bus came to a screeching halt in front of me, kicking up a cloud of dirt. I could feel the tiny specks landing on my skin. The doors slowly creaked open and the bus driver gave me a look that told me she, too, was having one of those days.

"You comin' or what?" she hollered as she popped her gum.

I lifted myself off the bench, stepped into the front of the bus and looked at all the faces staring back at me. There didn't seem to be a single open seat on the entire bus. Great, I'm going to have to stand or scrunch in with some weirdo.

"Dollar fifty," she demanded.

"What?"

"You deaf, kid? Dollar fifty," she said as she slapped the toll machine.

Right, money. You have to pay to ride the bus. The thought of paying had never crossed my mind. How embarrassing. I was going to get kicked off, and I would be right back where I started. I fumbled around and reached in my pockets, praying that I would find a couple of lonely dollars I may have forgotten about.

"I, um, the thing is ..." I was panicking. I don't know why, but I was nervous. It was humiliating to get kicked off the bus because you can't scrounge up a measly dollar fifty.

"Check your shirt pocket," some lonely old man called out from the third row.

"Huh?" I had no idea what he was talking about.

"Check your shirt pocket. I saw you put your money in there from the window," he replied, as he tilted his head towards the window and rapped on the glass with his fingernails.

Oh well, might as well humor the poor old shmuck. I reached into my shirt pocket and felt the familiar crinkle beneath my fingers. I pulled out a crisp five-dollar bill and held it up in amazement. The bus driver impatiently held out her hand, waiting for her share.

After I took my change, I proceeded to the only available seat, next to the weird old man. I sat down next to him, trying to keep my body from touching his. He smelled like Bengay. Old people always smelled like ointment.

His curly white hair was spread sparsely over his pink spotted head. He was wearing faded black slacks, a wrinkled white button up shirt with yellowed armpits, checkered suspenders and a red bowtie.

We stayed quiet for the first couple of blocks, but soon I was too curious to keep my mouth shut.

"How did you know about the money?" I asked without looking at him. I was once again flipping the card effortlessly through my fingers.

"I told you, I seen you put it there."

"That's impossible. My money's at home, I know exactly where I left it."

"Then how did it get there?"

"You tell me!"

The old man shook his head as he let out a little giggle, and we stayed quiet for a few more blocks. I could feel myself getting angry. It was welling up in the pit of my stomach. First my parents and now this guy. There were lies swarming all around me. Why couldn't anyone just tell the truth, for once?

The old man continued to talk, but I had stopped listening. I was still flipping that card furiously from finger to finger as I read all the graffiti on the back of the blue leather seat in front of me.

"So, you like magic?" the old man said as he turned his body to face me.

"What makes you say that?"

"You're flipping that card pretty fast. Those are the hands of a magician."

"Being able to do a few dumb tricks does not make someone a magician. Besides, I don't do that stuff anymore." I avoided his eyes as I spoke.

"Why not?"

"You ask a lot of questions." I was hoping he would give it a rest, because I really didn't feel like talking. But he gave a look that said he wasn't giving up anytime soon.

"It's just a bunch of lies, is all. I used to think I was amusing people with my stupid little tricks. But now I realize all I'm doing is lying straight to their faces." I stopped flipping and started at the intricate blue pattern on the back of the card in my hands.

"Don't you think it's good to have a little mystery in life? What fun would it be if we knew everything about everything?"

“No. I’d rather have the truth. It’s the only thing that matters,” I replied, as I sat up straight and looked him in the eyes to show him I knew what I was talking about.

“What about when you were a child? Do you wish your parents told you there was no such thing as Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny?”

“It doesn’t matter if they would have told me then or let me find out on my own. The point is it’s all just an illusion. They brainwash us from the start with lies. They tell us it’s not good to lie, but they do it to us everyday. She always told me the truth was the only thing anyone needed, but she looked me right in the eyes and lied.” I had to turn away from his wrinkled face to fight back the tears. I could feel them on the rim of my eyes, sure to overflow at any moment.

“I have a feeling we’re not talking about magic anymore. So, what’s really bothering you, kid?” He could pry all he wanted; he wasn’t getting anything out of me.

“Oh come on, you can tell me. I don’t know you, or your family. Don’t hold back. What have you got to lose?” He was right.

“This morning I walked in and my parents were sitting at the kitchen table.”

“I don’t see what’s so unusual about that,” he interrupted.

“I noticed she wasn’t wearing her wedding ring. I don’t think I’ve ever seen her take it off. I could see the white outline on her otherwise tan finger. I asked them what was going on. The last time I had seen them with this kind of look on their face was in the principal’s office.”

“My mom just looked down at her hands. Her eyes were all red and swollen. They always told me how lucky I was to have two parents who loved each other. Damned liars!” I didn’t realize I was yelling. The few people left on the bus were all eyeing me, including the bus driver.

The old man sitting next to me put his hand on mine. When I looked up, I saw a look of compassion wash over his face. I don’t know why I told him. It figures that the first person I tell is some stranger on the bus. But then I was glad it was a stranger because then I didn’t have to worry about him gossiping to anyone about the way the family fell apart.

“It’ll be okay,” he said in almost a whisper. I knew he was right. It would be okay. He reached up and grabbed the cord hanging just below the top of the window and the brakes brought the bus to a halt.

“Well, this is my stop. Don’t stop believing, kid. If you take a closer look you’ll see that things aren’t always what they seem.” He walked off the bus and down the street.

I turned around to face a young boy sitting directly across the aisle from me, “Do you want to see a magic trick?”