

Cards

Greg held the deck of cards out for the woman to witness. He shuffled through them time and time again. "Do you see your card?" He asked after pulling three cards from the deck.

The woman nodded. "Yes."

Greg carefully drew one of the cards. "Is this your card?"

The woman gasped and laughed. "Why yes, yes it is!"

He bowed and smiled. "You may return to your seat." Turning his attention to the clapping audience, Greg smiled. "I'm afraid that's all for tonight folks. I'm here all week."

Stepping behind the curtain, Greg set the deck of cards down on a nearby table. He grinned from ear to ear as he walked towards his employer.

"Great work." The man wearing a top hat said. He was dressed to the nines as it were.

Greg took off his jacket, still grinning. "Thank you sir." He wanted to know the reason his employer had showed up. Greg had been performing for well over a month and the man had never been to one of his performances until tonight.

"Greg," the man said. "What if I told you there was more to life than cards and tricks?"

Greg could feel his legs about to give way. He was getting fired for sure. Something didn't go right. His mind raced as he tried to figure out where the man was going with his question.

The man gestured to a chair. "Have a seat dear boy, have a seat."

Greg sat down. Sweat rolled down his face. His blue eyes staring at the employer who had his attention.

"My goodness man, you seem like you've seen a ghost. What's the matter?"

Greg shook his head. "Nothing sir, please continue."

The man nodded. Grabbing a shot of whiskey he downed it. "In my day, an act like yours is what the house wanted. It was all anyone could do. It kept business going and butts in the seats." He paused, offering Greg a drink.

Greg declined the offer.

The man shrugged it off. "Nowadays, people want something more than just a simple magic show. They want... real magic."

Greg's mind raced. *Real magic?* What did the man mean by real magic! It had been years that Greg had been polishing his act. It was popular. It brought people in and kept people entertained. At least he thought it did. Now this man wanted "real magic".

"Real Magic," Gred repeated. "What does that even mean?"

The man smiled. "That's what I need you to figure out Greg." He turned and walked up a nearby staircase leading to street level. "That's what you need to find out."

With the door closing shut behind the man, Greg paced the floor a bit. He had an assignment. A task as it were. To find out what real magic was. Greg stopped pacing mid thought. What would happen to him if he didn't complete the task at hand?

Greg went home that night with what felt like the weight of the world on his shoulders. He needed to figure out an act, and figure it out quickly.

He didn't sleep much, tossed and turned a lot. About four am, Greg got out of bed and roamed the streets looking for something, anything to help him. What he found was little of much importance. He doubted a hooker would help him in his search. They seemed to be the only other creatures out that early in the morning.

Passing by an allyway, an old woman peeked her head out. "Young man" She said. Her voice was barely there. "Oh young man, can you help me?"

Greg stopped walking and looked her direction. "Yes ma'am?"

"Oh good, you can help me." She responded.

"What's wrong ma'am?"

My cat, she seems to have run off, have you seen her?

Greg shook his head. "No, I haven't seen a cat. What does it look like?"

The woman smiled. "Oh you'd know if you saw ol' Rusty. He's been through a few fights in his time."

Old Rusty. Greg thought. What an odd name for a cat. He bowed his head and tipped his hat. "I'm sorry ma'am, I haven't seen any cats wandering about tonight, but I will keep an eye out for him."

The woman nodded. "Thank you young man. I best be getting home." She watched as Greg walked out of sight, and whispered to herself. "You'll find ol' Rusty I just know you will."

Arriving home, Greg went to bed. Perhaps sleep was what he needed. He was dead tired from walking around all night.

Later that morning, Greg woke up to a purring sound. Opening his eyes, he saw a cat. Oh it was a horrific looking animal. Missing an eye, part of an ear; and what he assumed was a partial tail. At least that's what it looked like to Greg. The cat was orange in color with white stripes.

"You wouldn't be ol' Rusty would you?" Greg asked half expecting the cat to answer.

The cat nodded its head as though it understood what Greg was saying.

Greg did a double take at the animal. "You understand me?"

The cat nodded again.

"We best be getting you home to your owner. I think I know where the old woman lives."

The cat walked up the bed towards Greg's head. Putting a paw on his chest, it hissed at him.

Greg smiled. "Don't want to go home eh?" He paused. "I can see that."

Hopping out of bed, Greg went into the kitchen to get Rusty some milk. Putting a saucer down, the cat ran towards it and drank eagerly.

"Someone's thirsty." Greg said.

Stepping away from the saucer, the cat licked its paws.

A glow illuminated the cat. White then to yellow. The cat transformed into a woman. A very naked woman.

Greg's smile dropped.

"Oh thank you sir." The woman said.

Turning away quickly, Greg shielded his eyes. "Um, miss, uh... Rusty?"

The woman stood from the floor smiling. "Well that's what the old bat calls me." She said. "My name is Elsa."

Greg exited the kitchen and brought back a towel. "Hurry, put this on miss."

Wrapping the towel around her body, the lady smiled. "Thank you Greg. It has been so long since I've been in my human form, I don't know what it feels like anymore. Being a cat is weird. I'm always getting into fights."

Greg nodded. "I could see that. Did that old woman change you into a cat?"

Elsa shook her head. "No, an old wizard did around two hundred years ago. The old woman found me in an allyway begging for food and took me in. She won't let me have milk and doesn't know my true form."

Greg shook his head. "I don't know what to say." He admitted. "Will the milk keep you a human?"

Elsa shook her head. "Nope, I'll be a cat again when the sun goes down."

"A shame."

Elsa ran her fingers through her long red hair. "Why is that? Don't you like cats?"

Greg smirked "It's not that. It's just, you deserve life to be more than being a cat."

"The wizard didn't think so." Elsa replied. "I was hungry one night, and I didn't have much to eat. I was living on the streets getting by here and there. Until I ran across the wizard." She explained. "He caught me stealing from his garden and punished me into cat form. To be a cat for eternity. I imagine he's long dead now. It *has been* 200 years."

Greg nodded. "You're welcome to stay with me." He said, as a light clicked on in his brain. Elsa could be the magic trick he was looking for. But to exploit her in such a way, as to garnish money for her curse? No, he thought, that would be cruel.

"Are you okay Greg?"

Greg paused. "How did you know my name is Greg?"

"There are papers with your name on them silly man."

Greg laughed. "Oh, yes that would make sense."

She looked around the kitchen, "and by the looks of things, you need help."

"What kind of wizard are you?" Elsa asked.

Greg shook his head. "I'm no wizard, I just play tricks here and there."

"I see." Elsa said. "Well, I could be your next big thing." She smiled. "Think about it. A woman that transforms into a cat and vice versa. I bet no one has seen that before."

Greg blinked. Was she actually offering herself to be part of his act? Why yes, yes she was.

"I would be a fool to turn you down."

Elsa smiled. "Then it's settled. When is your next performance?"

"Tonight." Greg said. "After sundown."

Elsa nodded her head. "Good, I'll give me a chance to buy some clothes for the occasion."

"I have some pants and a shirt you can wear until we find suitable clothing."

"Great!" Elsa said.

Elsa went shopping for some clothes while Greg practiced what he would say during his act. Over and over he rehearsed his lines until they became second nature to him.

As night approached, Elsa turned back into the cat.

Greg stepped out onto stage. "Ladies and Gentlemen, I have only one trick for you tonight. I am going to turn a cat into a human being."

He looked out as the crowd gasped and cheered. One man's gaze caught his attention. It was his employer. His employer was in the audience.

Greg smiled and nodded to the man. "This is going to be great." He muttered under his breath. "And now, for what you've been waiting for."

Elsa in cat form came out from behind the curtain.

Greg petted the cat and smiled. "A normal ally cat." He said.

Elsa purred.

Grabbing a container of milk, Greg pourd some into a bowl. "Now, with normal milk, we shall turn this cat into a human."

Placing a towel around the cat, Greg urged her to drink. Elsa drank the milk and turned back into a human.

The audience gasped and roared. They loved the trick. No one could explain how it occurred. They just loved it.

Greg helped Elsa up from the floor. "There you go ma'am." He said. "Now would you like to tell the audience of how you became a cat to begin with?"

Elsa nodded and spoke to the audience about her life as a human 200 years ago, how she became a cat and has been living on nine lives since. The audience ate it all up.

Greg looked to his employer who seemed to have vanished. He was no longer sitting in his chair. Maybe he went backstage, Greg thought.

As the house lights lowered, Greg hugged Elsa. "You were amazing!" He said grinning from ear to ear.

Elsa nodded. "Thanks."

Walking backstage, they ran into Greg's employer.

"There you are!" Greg exclaimed. "What did you think? Was that magical enough for you?"

His employer simply stared at Elsa. "I thought I had gotten rid of you."

Elsa did a double take. "No, it can't be." She said.

"Oh but it is. I am the wizard you stole food from."

Greg threw his hands up in the air. "Are you kidding me?" He said. "You're the wizard?" He sighed. "I suppose the old woman is working with you too?"

The wizard shook his head. "No, the old woman is just someone who happened upon Elsa, nothing more."

"I suppose you are going to punishg me more." Elsa said to the wizard.

The wizard shook his head. "No, I think 200 years has been enough. I release you from your curse." He said. "You are free."

Elsa smiled and turned to Greg. "I guess you'll have to find a different act."

Greg nodded. "Yes I suppose so."

The wizard smiled. "I will teach you some more tricks as you call them. I doubt you'll run out of any material anytime soon."

Greg looked to the wizard. "I'd like that."

The End