

Your Story #24: Child's Birthday Party

Parents look on in horror as a magician's trick goes horribly awry during a child's birthday party. (Writer's Digest contest, January 2010)

He arrived at the party with a small trunk he set on the TV. Catiria couldn't look forward to the magician pulling a cute rabbit out of his hat. His array of magic tricks was nothing more than colorful handkerchiefs streaming out of his sleeves and tearing a \$20 bill in half, then magically restoring it.

At least the kids liked it. They sat in a half-circle around the magician who performed in front of the small TV set. Estella, the birthday boy's mom, leaned against the doorway watching little Marco's face change with the man's every movement. Catiria stood beside her sister, waiting for any glimpse of the curious triangular pendant the magician wore around his neck. She had seen it before, but she couldn't place it. It was hidden behind the navy robe he wore. When he leaned over, the heavy piece would peek out. Near the tip of the triangle was a dime-sized red stone.

The eye of the crow.

"Stell, where did you find this guy?" Catiria asked.

"Hm? Oh, in the paper. He had an itty-bitty advertisement. Really cheap, too. I think he's just starting out," Estella said.

Catiria looked the magician over once more. His tanned forehead was as wet as an ice cube sitting on the windowsill. He fidgeted at times, his eyes darting right to left, as if he'd ran out of tricks to perform.

"He's not bad, huh?" Estella said, turning toward her sister.

Catiria opened her mouth, shut it. Finally, she said, "Yeah, not bad."

Estella chuckled. "He's *terrible*."

"He just looks...like he's hiding something."

Catiria nibbled on her bottom lip. She abruptly spun on her heel and jogged up the stairs. Her schoolbooks were spilled out across the bed in her room. She flopped down on her stomach and grabbed *The History of Caribbean Religion and Cultures*.

She thumbed through the pages, breezing through articles on cults, religious practices, and traditions. Downstairs, she overheard everyone cheering as the magician announced he was to perform his grand finale.

Catiria passed the page with the pendant and flipped back. Her eyes studied the picture. It was identical to the one the magician wore. She perused the text. A lump in her throat made it hard to swallow and she started to feel sick. She recalled her class on how the pendant was used.

Loud gasps from downstairs brought Catiria to her feet. As she raced to see what nightmare was coming to life, the adults and kids began to clap. Catiria placed a hand over her heart and took a breath. She walked beside her sister in the doorway and looked at the magician staring down at a white sheet flat on the floor.

"What did he do?" Catiria asked.

"He made Marco disappear! It was amazing. I saw him stand right there!—right beneath the sheet! Then it just...he was gone!" Estella said, still clapping.

"Stell, I think we should pay this guy and let him be on his way," Catiria said, her nerves returning.

“That was his finale. I’m sure he’ll leave now. God, what’s your problem?”

“That pendant around his neck! That’s not for show. That’s used in some serious voodoo. We learned about it in class. Sorcery...”

Catiria trailed off as silence suddenly swept over the room. Some of the kids started to stand, their heads searching for Marco.

Estella laughed. “Okay, where’s the birthday boy hiding?”

The magician was panicked. His chest pumped up and down, sweat streaming from his head like a running faucet. Estella’s face turned dour and she called, “Marco?”

Catiria pushed between the adults in front of her, stepping over the kids still sitting on the carpet. She shoved the magician hard.

“Where is he?” she shouted.

Another series of gasps erupted, this time from outside. Catiria strained to hear the tiny voice she knew was Marco’s, screaming somewhere in the distance. Estella’s head perked up like a deer, tracking the shrieks. Catiria followed Estella, who bolted outside, the rest of the family rushing behind them.

Neighbors stood in the street and on the sidewalk, gaping into the sky. Catiria turned her head up, looking to see what had made everyone go mute. She went numb when she saw Marco hovering high above the house, suspended from nothing. His arms and legs flailed wildly. Suddenly, he began to fall.

All heads quickly dropped as his body plummeted like a rock, crashing onto the roof of Catiria’s SUV in the driveway.