

The Trick

A

a short story for English
reading and speaking

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Introduction

Have you ever seen a card trick?

How are they performed?

Is it magic?

Or just a trick?

The Trick

It was a quiet day at Tom's Toy Shop.

Tom sat on a stool behind the counter. He was going through all the sales for the last month. Things were not looking good.

He had promised his wife that it would work out. Since being made redundant, he had put all of his time and their savings into the shop.

It will work, he told his wife. Please believe me.

And she did. She always believed him.

After the first few weeks, the number of customers dwindled down. Now he was lucky if anyone came in at all. He had no idea what to do.

Tom tapped at more keys on the computer. He took a sip of the near-cold coffee and let out a long sigh. This was hopeless.

Lost in deep thought, the bell above the door pinged and brought him back to the present.

A man came into the shop. He was dressed all in black. A large felt hat on his head and a pair of tinted glasses.

The man raised his hat in an old-fashioned style. The way

people would greet each other many years ago.

“Good day to you, sir,” said the man. “My name is Orloff. May I come in?”

Tom nodded. “Yeah, sure. Come in, take a look around.”

One look at this man and the way he had greeted Tom, and he knew he was not a customer.

The man approached Tom at the counter. He had a broad smile on his face.

“You seem like a very busy man,” he said. “I hope I am not troubling you.”

Tom shook his head. “No, no trouble.”

He closed the lid of his laptop and returned a smile to the man.

“Are you looking for anything in particular?” Tom asked the man.

The man raised a palm. “I am not looking. I am here to offer you something.”

Tom’s stomach tightened a little. A salesman. Just what he needed.

“I’m very sorry, Mr Arkov...”

The man smiled back at Tom and shook his head. “No, please don’t worry. I am not here to give you trouble.”

Tom shook his head. “It’s just that I’ve recently restocked and I’m not looking...”

The man put his hand inside his coat pocket and produced a pack of cards.

With one deft movement, he pulled the cards from the box and began to shuffle them. His hands moved with great speed.

The cards flew from one hand to another, a blur of flashing white and blue.

“I want to show you these cards,” said the man.

He had a heavy accent.

Tom could not place it. Eastern-European?

And his mannerisms and gestures — they were like something from long ago.

He continued shuffling the cards. He flicked them through his fingers and fanned them out before closing them again and flashing the cards from one hand to another.

“Tell me,” the man said. “May I know your name?”

Tom moved his mouth, unaccustomed to being asked who he was in such a respectful manner. “Tom. My name is Tom.”

“Tom,” said the man. “It is a good name. Tell me, Tom. Do you like card tricks?”

Without waiting for a reply, the man fanned the cards out.

“Pick one,” he whispered.

Tom took one.

The man raised a hand. “Don’t tell me the card. Now put it back.”

Tom did as he was told.

The man shuffled the cards again, this time at lightning speed.

Then he pulled out a card with a slight flourish and laid it on the counter in front of Tom.

“Is this your card?” he asked Tom.

Tom, slightly embarrassed, saw that it was not.

“No, that's not my card,” he said and offered the man a tight-lipped smile.

The man raised his eyebrows in surprise.

“Oh. Then it must be this one.”

He placed another card down.

Tom shook his head. “No. Not that one.”

Tom tried to assess whether this was part of the trick. Or the man was just an oddball that had walked in off the street.

The man went through all the cards one by one, like a child, picking one off the top of the pack and then placing it on the

counter.

“This one?” he said, turning a card face up. “Maybe this one?”

Tom shook his head again and again each time.

The man continued, and each time he was wrong. Finally, he stopped.

“Oh well,” he said. “I think I have forgotten how to do this trick.”

He pulled a handkerchief from his coat pocket and wiped his face. “I think I am getting too old.”

He nodded to the shelf behind Tom.

“May I know? What is that?”

Tom turned, and there, on the shelf, balanced between two action figures collecting dust, was Tom’s card. He snatched it from the shelf.

“How did you...”

The man smiled again and shook his head.

“Never ask a magician how he performs his tricks,” he said. And wagged his finger.

Tom gazed at the card. Back at the man.

He had never seen such a thing before. On TV, of course. That was all the special effects.

But this. Right under his nose.

“That’s incredible,” said Tom.

The man pulled a few packs of cards from his bag.

“I am selling some of these special cards,” said the man. “Good price. If you want.”

“I don’t know,” said Tom. “I have some cards already in stock...”

“Just a little,” said the man. “I give you a good price.”

Tom stared back at him. He felt sorry for the old man, wandering from shop to shop. Performing tricks that could easily be explained.

There had to be a perfectly good reason why that card was on the shelf.

“How much are your cards?” Tom asked him.

The man told him a price. They were cheap. Next to nothing.

Tom thought about it. He could pay the man for two packs of cards, maybe three, then get rid of him. He needed to figure out what to do to get real customers in the shop.

“Hang on then,” he said. “I’ll take three packs of cards.”

He opened the till and pulled out some money, handed it over to the man. The man passed three packs of cards to Tom.

“Tell your customers,” he said. “You met the Great Ordov.”

Then he tipped his hat at Tom and left.

Tom smiled to himself. A magician. Such nonsense.

No such thing.

He spent the rest of the day going through the sales, the things he had spent money on. All the incomings and outgoings. None of it added up to what he wanted.

Time drifted by and Tom's stomach complained to him. It was lunchtime. The sandwich shop down the road beckoned.

Tom grabbed his jacket and pulled it on. He opened the till to take some money for his lunch, but he could not believe his eyes.

The till was empty.

Every last note and coin gone.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Who is the main character in the story?

Where is he?

What is Tom doing at the beginning of the story?

What does it mean—things were not looking good?

How much money has Tom invested in the shop?

Why had Tom invested a lot of his time and savings in the shop?

Does he have many customers?

How did Tom's wife feel about his efforts to make the toy shop successful?

Why did Tom's shop start to have fewer customers after the first few weeks?

Describe the man who entered the shop. How was he dressed?

How did the man greet Tom when he entered the shop?

How did Tom feel about the man's intentions when he first saw him?

What does he bring out of his pocket?

What does he do with the object from his pocket?

How did Tom react when the man asked if he liked card tricks?

What does the man show Tom?

Can you describe how the man performed the card trick? What did he ask Tom to do?

Did the man successfully identify Tom's card during the trick?

How did Tom react to the card trick?

Why did the man claim that he had forgotten how to do the trick?

Where was Tom's card? How did it get there?

What did the man offer to sell Tom after performing the card trick?

Why was Tom considering buying the special cards from the man?

How did Tom feel about the man's offer to sell him the cards?

What was Tom's plan for using the special cards in his shop?

How did Tom pay for the packs of cards?

What is the man's name?

What does Tom want for lunch?

What did he find to his surprise?

How did Tom react to the disappearance of the money from his till?

Essential Vocabulary

Toy	Busy	Tight-lipped
Shop	Trouble	Eyebrows
Counter	Sorry	Surprise
Sales	Palm	Oddball
Redundant	Trouble	Shelf
Savings	Pocket	Incredible
Customer	Cards	Selling
Computer	Movement	Price
Coffee	Hands	Cheap
Sigh	Fingers	Money
Bell	White	Customers
Man	Blue	Nonsense
Dressed	Good	Special
Hat	Tell	Effects
Glasses	Back	Right
Greet	Lightning	Nose
Name	Speed	Hang on
May	Whisper	Till
Look	Embarrassed	Jacket
Around	Smile	Eyes

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Toy — *A toy is an object designed for play, amusement, or entertainment, typically intended for children.*

Busy — *An adjective that describes a state of being actively engaged in tasks, work, or various activities, often resulting in a lack of available time or attention.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

My wife often gets angry with me every time I buy our son a new toy.

I am so busy these days; I seem to have no time for myself at all.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help

improve all your English skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Discussion Questions

How would you describe Tom's situation at the beginning of the story? What challenges was he facing?

Why did Tom's wife believe in him even when things were difficult for the shop?

Who is the man, do you think?

Is he a real magician? Or just a con- man?

What did you think of the mysterious man who entered the shop? What made him stand out?

How did the man try to impress Tom with his skills?

How did he get the card onto the shelf, do you think?

Why do you think Tom agreed to buy the special cards from the man?

Why is the till empty?

How did the story's ending make you feel? Did you expect the money to disappear from the till?

Was the man really from an Eastern European country, as Tom imagined? Where do you think he was from?

What would you do if you were in Tom's situation at the end of

the story? How would you react?

If you met this man in real life, what would you think of him?

Why was he dressed the way he was? Was this part of the trick?

What do you think Tom did next in the story?

What would he tell his wife? How do you think she would react?

Do you think the police are looking for him? Will they catch him? Why/why not?

Do you believe in magic? Why/why not?

Have you ever seen a magician perform a trick? How did you feel when you watched it?

Have you heard of any clever tricks like this in your own country?

Have you ever watched a magic show? What kind of tricks did the magician perform?

How do you think magicians learn to perform tricks? Are they using real magic?

What's the most impressive magic trick you've seen or heard about? Can you describe it?

Do you believe that all magic tricks have a logical explanation,

or do you think some might be truly magical?

Why do you think people enjoy watching magic shows? What feelings do these shows evoke?

Have you ever heard of con tricks or scams? What are they, and why do people use them?

In your culture, are there any traditional magic tricks or stories involving magic?

Would you like to learn how to perform magic tricks? Why or why not?

Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

Police Investigation and Identification

Choose **ONE** of the following exercises to write.

Part 1: Police Report

Imagine that the police have apprehended the man who performed the magic trick in the story. They suspect that he might be involved in some sort of illegal activity.

Your task is to write a short police report describing the events leading up to the man's capture and arrest. Use the information from the story and your own creativity to write a clear and concise police report.

Include details about the man's appearance, his interactions with Tom, and any evidence the police have gathered.

Part 2: Tom's Identification

In this exercise, imagine that Tom is asked to visit the police station to identify the arrested man.

Write a short paragraph or dialogue where Tom talks about his experience at the police station.

Describe his feelings, thoughts, and any uncertainty he might have about identifying the man.

Does he recognize the man?

Is he confident in his identification?

Use descriptive language to convey Tom's emotions and reactions.

Remember to use appropriate vocabulary, sentence structure, and details to make your writing engaging and accurate.

Tips:

Use past tense for the police report and Tom's identification account.

Describe the man's appearance.

Talk about the man's accent. Not East-European, but actually a strong London accent.

Include information about how the police arrested the man.

Add details about Tom's emotions and thoughts as he identifies the man.

Be creative and add any additional elements to enhance the story.

This writing exercise will help students practice their narrative and descriptive writing skills while also reflecting on the events of the story and its potential continuation.

Write your piece.

When you have finished, you can read out your piece of writing in front of the class.

Or hand it in to your teacher for review.

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