

DEADLY PERFECTION

By Patrick Gabridge

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CAST: LISA and DIANA

SCENE: A home office, with a set of shelves and a desk and chair.

AT RISE: DIANA sits in the chair, waiting impatiently. SHE gets up and pokes around in the shelves. SHE finds a small wooden box, maybe ten inches square, ornately carved. SHE examines it, shakes it, but does not open it.

(LISA enters and freezes in alarm when SHE sees what DIANA has in her hands.)

LISA: What are you doing?

DIANA: Sorry. I'm sorry. You were taking so long to get ready, so I got bored and... I was snooping.

LISA: You're a grown woman. You should know better. Some people never change. Just put down the box.

DIANA: What's inside?

LISA: It doesn't matter. Just put it down.

DIANA: Why are you so upset?

LISA: It's actually something very dangerous.

DIANA: Inside this little box?

LISA: So if you'd just put it down...

DIANA: Stop being the big sister and tell me what it is. **(beat)**
Poison?

LISA: No.

DIANA: It's so small. A bomb?

LISA: Nothing like that.

DIANA: A mystery. Tell me.

LISA: An enchantment.

DIANA: Like magic?

LISA: The worst kind.

DIANA: How did you get it?

LISA: It was given to me, long ago, by a dear friend.

DIANA: Not much of a friend, to give you something so deadly.

LISA: Bequeathed it to me, actually. Along with an explanation. I'm glad to have it, most of the time. But maybe someday, I'll give it away, before it's too late. It was too late for her. It killed her.

DIANA: You're telling tales.

LISA: I wish I was. She thought she was strong enough. From what she wrote, there were many others before who'd convinced themselves of the same. I like to believe that I am different. I'm almost certainly wrong.

DIANA: So what's inside?

LISA: A vision. The most beautiful sight you can imagine. More impressive than the most fantastic mountain vista, more sublime than the greatest masterpiece painting. More perfect than the most perfect diamond, the clearest starry sky. Everyone sees something different.

DIANA: It doesn't sound dangerous.

LISA: Our minds do not have an infinite capacity for beauty.

DIANA: How do you know what's inside if it's so deadly?

LISA: I've opened it. Anyone can look inside once, and survive. But if you close the lid and so much as glance again... That's the end for you. That's what happened to Sheila. Mark Robertson before her. Keith Lamarr. Walter Jackson. Cecil LaFleur. The list goes on.

DIANA: Why do you still have it? You should keep it far away. Lock it up and throw away the key.

LISA: I kept it locked up for a long time. And you're right, I still should. But to know what's inside... The image never leaves me. And I just after it even to this day. I can't stop thinking about it. I don't want to stop thinking about it. In some religions, Hell is merely being deprived of God's presence. That's how I feel, Diana. I had it, I witnessed perfection, ultimate beauty. And now I'll never see it again.

DIANA: It's just a little box. It can't be that amazing.

LISA: Not a day goes by when I don't plan to open it again. Even though I know the price.

DIANA: I'm going to look inside.

LISA: No. You can't. You don't want to, really. Please. Listen, it's mine, and I say no.

DIANA: Share the wealth, Lisa. It won't cost you anything.

LISA: Don't expose yourself to the risk. You live a life that at least occasionally offers a little peace and contentment. Don't throw that way. Some actions can't be undone.

DIANA: You just don't want me to see. You're greedy.

LISA: Please. If I thought it was safe, I'd be happy to share. But even though it's a precious experience, it's dangerous, and opening that box cannot be done lightly.

DIANA: You've warned me and I accept the risk. I think it will be worth it. Ultimate beauty.

LISA: Give it to me.

DIANA: I'm doing it. Turn your head.

(SHE opens the box and stares inside, transfixed. LISA averts her eyes, covers her face, and wails in anger.)

DIANA: Oh, Lisa. So perfect. So much to... Enough to stop my lungs from drawing breath. If only all the world... All the world, forever and a day. The love and peace and joy... Never before. Not if every moment... added all together and multiplied. Never. Here, here in my hands. Impossible to fit the goodness of the universe in one box. Oh... Oh, love...

(With her eyes closed, LISA jumps forward and slams the box shut and wrestles it away from DIANA.)

LISA: Stop! Stop! ***(DIANA stares angrily at LISA)***

DIANA: How could you? My one chance to experience... You took it away.

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