

MINIATURE “SAWING A LADY IN HALF” ILLUSION
PLANS BY
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[Demo video](#)



Introduction

Thank you for downloading my miniature illusion plan! I designed this miniature illusion to be an approximate replica of an old fashioned Sawing in Half stage illusion. One may ask why it is even a good idea to make a miniature stage illusion, as stage illusions are for large audiences and employ real human women victims. I think it's a very neat display piece, conversation starter and, importantly, can be made to be fully functional for parlor setting shows. While I don't think this illusion will actually fool anyone, if performed correctly, it won't be immediately obvious that the doll is gimmicked, and the illusion will at least visually surprise and delight. This illusion could even also be made into a diorama for a magic museum.

When I created this, I was unaware of any other miniature sawing in half illusions. The only other doll themed illusion I had heard of was the Barbie Ashra levitation. However, when I posted the unfinished pictures of this illusion on the Magician's Only Facebook page (link to the post [here](#)), David Baxter commented that he has been making a Barbie sawing in half illusion for many years. I encourage everyone who wants a ready to perform illusion to contact him and purchase his version. I do not own it, but it looks fantastic and you will be saving yourselves a few hours of work by buying it. However, there is great pride and satisfaction upon completing your very own handmade illusion and that's why I have decided to publish my own plans.

This is actually a scaled down version of a real illusion, and I see no reason why one couldn't make this work with a real person if it was built to size. The assistant would have to draw her legs up to her chest in the head half of the box, and fake legs and shoes would have to be in the other half.

Note: while I have supplied the materials list and instructions, some troubleshooting and experimentation will be required. You may want to use different wood than I used (I recommend it if you have access to a jigsaw), and I encourage you to experiment with unique decorations. Also, the measurements I provide may not work with your particular doll, but as you will see, it is extremely simple to make the necessary adjustments when we get to the blade guide section.

I hope you enjoy this miniature illusion! I have ideas in the works for more miniature illusions. Stay tuned. If you have any issues or suggestions, please email me at NickFisherMagic@gmail.com. Thank you again and good luck! Stay magical.

- Nick

Tools Needed

Jigsaw or crosscut saw

Craft knife (razor blade) if using balsa/bass wood for trimming/cutting

Scissors if balsa/bass wood is used

Clamps to assist with cutting wood (optional but recommended)

Sandpaper

Materials Needed

Bass and balsa wood is very soft and can be cut with razor blades, or even scissors if the pieces are thin enough. It is durable enough for this illusion. However, if you have the necessary tools (jigsaw, table saw) I do recommend using plywood, as it's more durable and still very affordable. The plaque I used can be found [here](#). Any 9x12" or similar sized board will suffice, but I like the way this comes with stylish edges. The wood I bought for the box can be found [here](#). It's 9½x3". You will need 4 boards, for a total of about \$7. All other wood for the "blades" and box trim was in a whittler's bulk pack from Hobby Lobby for about \$12. Link for that can be found [here](#). It is optional. You can use tin scrap or cardboard for the blades. Trim for the box isn't needed either, but I think it adds a little personality.

I also used a 1/2" square "dowel" for the legs. They cost roughly \$2. You can get one almost anywhere, or use another material for the legs. In fact, you can make a low riding illusion and skip the legs altogether. I recommend mini castor wheels if you go this route.

Walmart, Michael's or any other craft store will probably all carry similar wood for crafts. I happened to use Hobby Lobby but I am not affiliated with them in any way.

1x Wood glue and super glue (\$3-10)

I used only super glue for the prototype as it is very quick to dry and does not add volume. Super glue is needed for the doll.

4x small hinges. (\$5) You can either get them from a craft store, on Amazon, or do what I did and go to Walmart, buy two mini blackboard easels and salvage the hinges.

1x Spray paint (\$7-10)

I used black gloss; you may use whichever color/finish you want. You may also want silver spray paint for the "blades" if you're using wood for them. You won't need much spray paint, so get a small can for about \$3.

1x Gloss or flat enamel clear coat spray depending on the desired appearance. I used gloss. (\$7-10)

8x wheels. I tore off the wheels on 2 \$3 miniature shopping carts from Hobby Lobby. Link [here](#).

Bend them back and forth until they come off. Wooden wheels may be used, but will need to be painted and you will need to find a way to securely attach them to the bottom of the illusion table legs. Axle and pin, bolt and washer, or bent coat hanger pieces may work nicely. If this is just a display piece, merely gluing the wheel onto the leg may be the easiest solution. The illusion can be made without any legs at all, and mini coaster wheels can be purchased on Amazon for very low prices.

18-20x 5mm x 1mm magnets. You can find these very cheap at Amazon [here](#) for \$9. These will be used to secure the two halves of the table together while allowing for easy separation to complete the illusion. If you would prefer to use latches instead, you may experiment with hook and eye latches, or even spring latches or slide and bolt systems. The only important thing is that the two half align and stay together securely and that they don't come apart until you want them to.

2x 1" strong ceramic refrigerator magnets for the doll. Walmart carries the ones I used.

Preparing the Doll

I used a generic \$10 doll from Dollar General. A Barbie will work fine as it's about the same size. Preparation of the doll: Saw or otherwise cut the doll neatly above the leg pivot joint. This will ensure the doll will appear natural, as the legs will be able to move normal. Super glue 1" magnets to each half. See fig 1 and 2. They should be sufficiently strong to securely hold the doll together, while also not being too strong to pull them apart. I used 2 1" ceramic magnets.

Depending on the outfit the doll has, you will want to cut the dress shorter to aid in putting it back together at the restoration phase of the illusion. The dress cannot go beyond the blade guide in the head half of the box or the blade won't be able to fully descend. Cut out the back of the dress to allow easy attachment of the legs to the torso. Glue some of the excess fabric you just cut off onto the torso magnet to mask the magnet but also to muffle any potential clicking sound when the magnets attach during presentation. Again refer to fig 2.

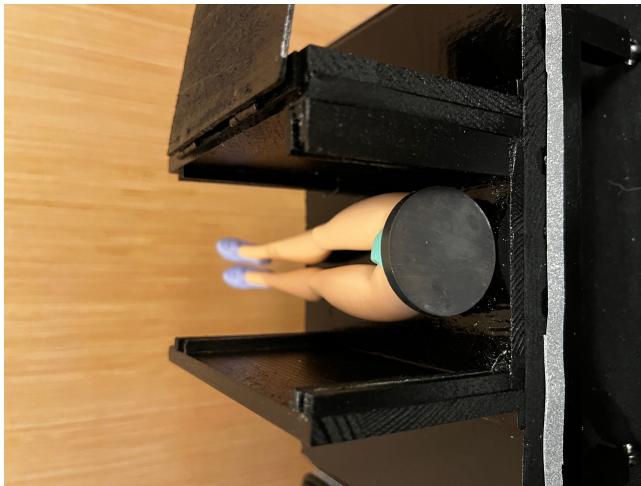


fig 1

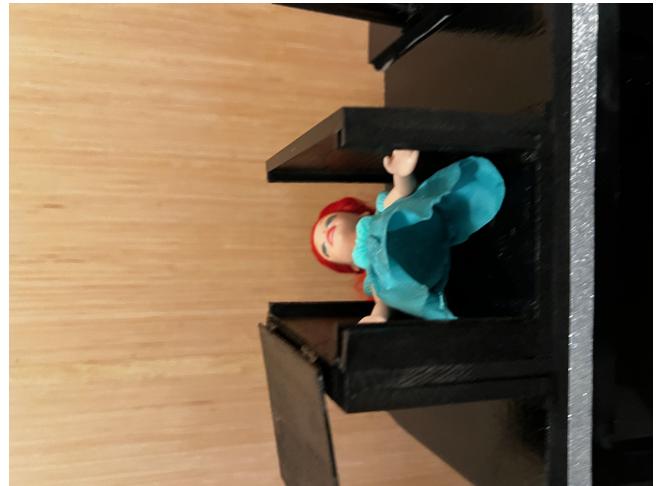


fig 2

Constructing the Illusion

NOTE: if you are using magnets to secure the two table pieces together, as I did, you will need to attach them before you do the next step so that there won't be a visible gap between the box halves. If using another method to secure the table together (such as latches or hooks), ignore only the next paragraph.

Apply 9-10 equally spaced dabs of super glue to one inside edge of a table half, and carefully push 2 attached 5 mm magnets onto each glue spot. Allow it to completely dry before applying glue in the corresponding areas of the opposite board. Then, using a very flat surface, push the two halves of the table together, making sure that the sides of the table are flush.

Cut the 9x12" board and the four 9½x3" boards exactly in half. Sand any rough edges. Center the halves of the smaller board onto the center edges of the larger board as shown in fig. 1. Glue them in place and allow them to dry completely.

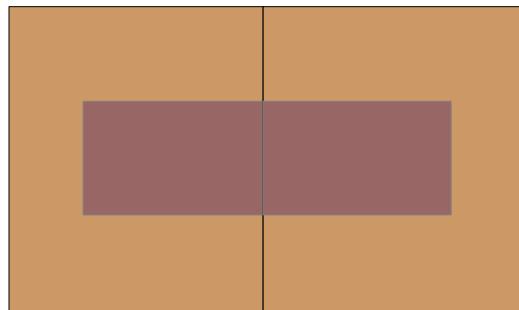


fig. 3

Continue to build up the box, gluing the sides at right angles to the base and letting them dry. It is important that the center edges are flush with each other to prevent the audience seeing into any potential gap.

Since the doll won't need to fold its legs up like the real life version, you may opt for a "thin model" version. Check YouTube for a reference video. In the version I'm basing these instructions on, I used 2 more 9½" x 3" boards all cut in half to match the base of the box.

The next steps require patience to understand as they are more complex than the table assembly. It's the most intricate and tedious section, so once you're past this part, it's all sunshine and rainbows.

Cut thin strips of wood to act as the guides for the blades as seen in fig 4. You will want the blades to be able to slide between them easily, but you also don't want them to be loose. I highly recommend using the doll, in the two separate pieces, to act as guides. You'll want the head part of the box to have its guides exactly where the neck of the doll will be situated when the blade is inserted. The doll should be positioned so that the very bottom of her dress just touches the inner blade guide near the center of the box where the two half meet. I cannot provide exact measurements as your doll will likely be different than mine, and you may want the guides to be thinner than the ones I used. Just experiment with positioning before gluing the guides in place.



fig 4

Next is to make the plates to secure the head and feet. Balsa wood is easy to cut. Make the hole for the neck as narrow and small as possible, as this will keep the head firmly in place and prevent anyone from seeing inside the box when the doll is separated in half within the box. Likewise, the feet will need a hole in their securing plate, but this will have to be wider. The leg magnet should be slightly below the blade guide when you insert it, so make sure to cut the appropriate size hole. Calves are thicker than ankles, so this is important: if you make the hole too loose it will allow the legs to move around which is not ideal while performing. Refer to fig 5 and 6.



fig 5

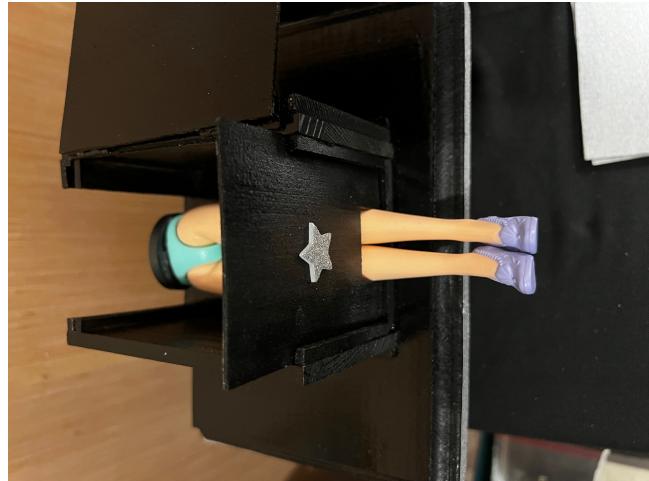


fig 6

I used a balsa sheet cut to size for the lids. You want them to completely cover the doll while allowing the blades to still freely enter the box so I suggest having the restraints and blades installed to measure the exact size for the lids as it will vary between builds. I added another duplicate support on the hinge side of the box to act as the base of the hinge. I attempted to use screws but this split the wood, so I glued the hinges instead. I will admit this is one of the trickiest parts so be patient and take your time. I added thin strips of wood from the variety pack to act as trim at the base of the box and further stabilize it. This is optional.

The blades themselves are just a single thin sheet of balsa wood cut to size with scissors or a razor blade. You may use tin if you have tin snips. I wanted my illusion to be made almost entirely from wood (minus the wheels) so that's why my blades are wooden.

I used a $\frac{1}{2}$ " "dowel" to make the table legs. Exact height and positioning is a matter of personal preference. Shorter legs have a certain modern appeal, but I opted for an old fashioned classical appearance. Just make sure they are exactly the same length as any deviation will cause the table to wobble in performance. Glue them into place on the bottom of the table base and allow them to completely dry.

Painting and Decorating

Congratulations on completing the construction of your very own mini illusion! This is the fun part. I spray painted the entire unit in sections. Bottom first, allow to dry, then the top. Be careful not to overspray, as any extra paint will run and cause beading! I suggest multiple light coats. You may wish to paint the box a different color. Hand painting is also an option, but it will take more time. I recommend painting the whole thing black and then decorating as desired. Sequins, glitter paper (which I used for the table border) and foam stars all work well and look great. Feel free to go wild on this step and make it truly your own! After everything is decorated to your satisfaction, you probably will want to clear coat your illusion with clear flat or clear gloss enamel coat. This will provide a nice finish, prevent any glitter from coming off, and preserve the paint from minor chips and scratches. I also recommend applying a few coats of clear coat and allow it to fully dry in between coats. The spray I used dries surprising fast to the touch after only an hour or so. It will sometimes take more than 24 hours to fully harden and cure. Check your spray can for details. Be careful not to press too hard to avoid imprinting fingerprints and smudging the coat until it fully cures.

Performance

I was going to make a tutorial video, but the operation is extremely simple. This is only my suggestion and it works very well for video. Feel free to experiment with angles and motion.

1. Rotate the table so that the head end is facing the audience. Starting with the head, lay the doll in the box. This will help prevent any length discrepancy from being obvious.
2. Close the lids and attach the head restraint. While you are doing this, pull the feet away from the body, detaching the magnets. Because you are touching the head end, any movement and sound will be ignored and unnoticed. Continue to pull the feet to the proper position, that is until they have cleared the lower box blade guides completely, but not too far as to look comically long.
3. Attach the foot restraints, and only after doing this rotate the box so that it is horizontal to the audience. Now slide each blade dramatically into the box halves. Separate the table and display the gruesome outcome.
4. Slide the table back together, remove the blades one at a time, and rotate it once again so that the head is now at a 45 degree angle to the audience. Remove the foot restraints and, as you reach to remove the head restraint, immediately slide the feet back towards the torso until the magnets attach. A smooth flick should accomplish this.
5. Remove the head restraint and remove the doll from the head end first, in an upwards motion to reveal that it is fully restored! In my demo video you can see that the back of the dress is missing, so you may want to use your other hand to cover this fact.

Final Thanks

While I did not invent this illusion or even make the first doll-sized sawing in half illusion, I did make this prototype and the plans for it all on my own without any help.

I'll mention David Baxter again who as far as I know is the first person to make a miniature sawing in half illusion, or at least he's the only one who currently manufactures them for sale. Although I didn't know about his version before creating my own, I highly recommend anyone who wants a fully functional, ready made illusion to purchase one from him. I have opted not to manufacture these myself, as I have a full time job. Between the cost and time to make them, I don't think I'd make much profit.

I'd like to thank the community at Magicians Only, not only for their high praise of my creation, but for their support and encouragement to produce these plans you see here so that others can make their own illusions. Producing the plans on their own took almost as much time as making the illusion in the first place!

Thanks also to my wonderful girlfriend and my mother for their tireless support and being my practice guinea pigs. Without them I sincerely think I would have given up before completing this.

And lastly, thank YOU for reading the instructions, and for any feedback that you think would help other builders in the future. I will continue to update this plan as I get feedback.

I will never charge for my plans, either this one or any others I may make in the future, but I do hope that if this helped you in any way that you'll send me a buck or two my way.

My PayPal is koolmagicguy@gmail.com. Only donate if you are able!

Enjoy!

- Nick

