

SHECKY'S

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"So, magic man o' mine, are you going to tell me what's so great about this resort in Lake Tahoe, or am I gonna to have to get rough?" she grins at him from the tight airline seat.

"Well, it's sort of an exclusive resort. You have to know the right people." He smiles, "And I do."

"What's so exclusive about the resort?"

"It's sort of a holiday resort for magicians and assistants."

"And does this wonderful place have a name?"

"It's called Shecky's. I've been there before, when I was a lot younger."

"And?"

"And what?"

Lisa rolls her eyes. "And what's it like? What's there to do? Why are we going there?"

"It's a nice place. But I've only seen it as a child, remember, and any holiday looks great when you're a kid. As to what there is to do there, well, everything there is to do at a normal holiday resort: pool; bar; nightclub; and so on."

"So why are we going there when we could get the same thing on our own side of the Atlantic?"

"Because they also do critique evenings."

"And those are?"

"Sorry. Magic shows, and as all the audience are magicians or assistants, they get critiqued on their performance, originality and style when doing them. They're a lot of fun to watch."

"Watch? Peter, why would I want to watch someone doing magic when I can be in the magic?"

"You want to do a show?" Peter asks incredulously. "Without practicing, at all, you want to perform something, in public, before professionals?"

"What's the worst that can happen?"

He shakes his head. "What trick would you do?"

Lisa pauses, thinking. "I think we could put on a rather impressive light sabre fight, don't you?"

"Maybe. But we'll have to practice. And anyway, that's not the main reason we're going there."

"What is the main reason we're going there, then?"

"Well, Lise, the thing is, as everyone there's in the know, so to speak, there's nothing to stop people indulging in public."

“Indulging? What kinky things are you planning?”

“Nothing like that, Lise, honest. Well, not in public. Well, not that I’d planned, anyway. I mean, things like there’s a lot of people who go for a swim, but leave their heads on the poolside. That sort of thing. I remember Dad telling me about one woman who kept her husband flattened and used him as a beach towel.”

“You’re not serious?”

“Why not? You know what I can do to you, and how it makes you feel, right?” Lisa blushes. “Well, why’s it so surprising that when people feel good doing something, they want to keep on doing it? You like being cut up, he liked being flat.” He shrugs. “Some people are just strange, I guess.”

Lisa looks at him. “Not like us, obviously.”

“Oh, no. No one’s strange like us, Lisa.”

Lisa grins. “Too true.” She looks round the plane, “Um, Peter, given what we’re talking about, aren’t you worried about anybody else overhearing?”

“Nope.”

“Why? You’ve magiced them, haven’t you?”

“You must be joking. I’m still learning mental magic. I couldn’t affect half these people at once.”

“So what are you doing?”

“I’ve made a little pocket of silence around us. We’re the only ones on the plane who can hear what we say to each other.”

“Well, in that case...” Lisa grins, leaning in to whisper sweet and an awful lot of not-so-sweet (but very nice) nothings into his ear.

The flight touches down in Las Vegas, six hours later, where a limousine waits to take them to the resort. “Peter, how the fuck can you afford this?” Lisa asks, climbing into the back of the limo, “I mean, the flight? The hotel? This limo? How much is it costing?”

“Lisa, don’t worry about me, I can afford it. My mum left me some money as a legacy. It’s not like I spend a lot most of the time. Now I’m just spending a bit.”

“Hold on, you mean you’re rich? What the hell are you doing working as a programmer?”

Peter shrugs. “I’m not that rich. It’s not like I’m JK Rowling or Bill Gates. And even if I was, I couldn’t live like that.”

“What do you mean, couldn’t live like that? Doing nothing all day? Living like a king? How could you not want to live like that?”

“Because my Mum did. And she hated it. Besides, I’d get bored. And if I had lived like that, I wouldn’t have met you. So there’s no way I’d want to live like that.”

“Back up a second. Your mum was rich?”

“No, she was really, really rich. Or her family were. You’d like my Mum.”

“Why?”

“Because when her family found out she was going to marry my Dad, they said they’d cut her off without a penny if she did.”

“And she did what?”

“Take a wild guess. Same thing you’d have done.”

“She told them what they could do with their money?”

“Not quite. She told them exactly where they could stick their money, and then offered to help if they were having trouble finding it with both hands.” Lisa looks at him.

“She said that?”

“Well, actually, I’ve given you the cleaned up version. Dad says she taught him some words he didn’t know, and he’d been working the clubs for years. And she gave them a practical demonstration, too.”

“She did what?!”

“This was in the Sixties, time to rebel, and my mom really rebelled against her family.”

“I’d have liked to meet her.”

“Yeah.”

“God, sorry, Peter, I forgot that...” she leans against him, “Sorry.”

“It’s OK.”

“Hold on, if she did all that and married your dad, how come she can leave you a legacy that can afford this?”

“When her family got a grandchild, they softened a lot, and her brother liked her anyway. There’s a clause in the bequest somewhere that increases the legacy if I marry a ‘suitable wife’.”

“And will you?”

“What do you think? Lisa, if I marry anyone, it’ll be you. And there’s no way you’re what the family would think of as a ‘suitable wife’.”

“How much would this increase in the legacy be?”

“I’m not sure. It’s not something I really keep in mind. I think it would put it up into 9 figures.”

“9 figures? £100 million+?! And you say you’re not rich.”

“I’m not rich, because I haven’t got that legacy. I’ve only got what my mum left me. And if I have to choose between you and £100 million, it’s no contest.” Lisa kisses him

“Right answer.”

“Now, if it was a billion, ow!” Lisa punches him in the arm.

The limousine pulls into Shecky's and they check in. After taking the lift up five floors, they open the door to their room. Lisa raises her eyebrows, a single room with two beds. "Why two beds?"

"Just in case you get pissed at me while we're here."

"And will I?"

"Probably."

Lisa glares at him. Then she looks at the rest of the room. "Peter, those boxes over there? They're not what I think they are, are they?"

"Probably. This is a magical resort. All the rooms have illusions available. I asked for a few in case you got bored."

"Cool. Maybe later. But now, I think, we need some sleep." She yawns, "It's what, 9 o'clock here, which makes it, two in the morning back home. So we're going to bed."

"Yes, dear." Lisa glares at him again, "Sorry." Peter places a zipper on his neck and unzips his t-shirt and jeans, leaving him in his black boxers.

"Peter," Lisa glowers, her t-shirt halfway off, "there are times when you are one of the most irritating people I know."

"I'll work harder at it. Soon I'll be the most irritating person you know." He holds up a small brass zip. "Would you like one of these, then?"

"Thank you." Lisa pulls her t-shirt back down and fastens the zipper in place, stepping out of herself in a black lacy negligee. She turns to Peter, only to find him already asleep. "Typical. See you tomorrow, Peter." She flops onto the bed, closes her eyes and immediately falls asleep.

The next morning, she wakes up to find the other bed empty, and the shower running. She rolls over, pulling herself back under the covers. "Fine. He can have the shower first. He'd just better leave me some hot water, that's all."

Ten minutes later, Peter comes out of the shower, towelling himself down. "So, Lise, what are we doing today? Holiday or practicing?"

"Practicing?" she asks, rolling over and blinking sleepily.

"You know, for the show you want to put on?"

Lisa grumbles as she throws off the covers. Peter whistles appreciatively. She twirls around. "You like?"

"Really dumb question, Lisa. You look gorgeous."

"I know. Just think of what you missed last night." She grins as she walks past, leaving Peter to pick his tongue off the floor. The bathroom door opens a crack, "Uhm, Peter, I can't take this off."

"What? Why wouldn't you..." he stops, "That's what you chose last night, isn't it?"

"So?"

“So, it’s really a part of you and you can’t just take it off. It’ll always be attached because it’s a part of you.”

“So how do I have a shower?” Peter picks up the roll of skin and clothes.

“You get undressed the old fashioned way, I guess.”

“Great. You really could do with mentioning things like that, Peter.” She snatches the clothes out of his hand and slams the door.

Shortly Lisa emerges from the room, her head wrapped in a towel, her clothes over her arm to find Peter fiddling with the TV controls. “What are you doing? We’re in Nevada. It’s 35°* outside and it’s sunny. We’re not going to stay inside and watch...”

“Of course, we’re not. I’m just trying to get something ready for when we do the show.” *=(95 Fahrenheit to Americans)

“Which is?”

“Background music.”

“So what are you looking for?”

“The sci-fi channel. They’ve always got Star Wars on sometime during the day; I’m just trying to find out when. OK, 12 o’clock. So I’ll need to be back by then.”

“OK. So, are we going out or what?”

Peter glances over at her. “Like that?”

“Of course not.” She pulls a small green bikini from her bag and puts it on. “Better?”

“Perfect.”

“Not quite.” She pulls her light sabre out of her bag and lines it up with her chin. The blue blade flashes out, leaving her head floating above her body. “Now I’m ready.”

Peter shakes his head. “Breakfast first, or would you rather just sun yourself?”

“Oh, breakfast, absolutely. Can I go like this?”

“Sure, but you might have trouble eating. It’s going to be tough getting the food in your mouth if your head isn’t in its normal place. So unless you like the idea of smearing buttered toast over your cheek, you might want to be back in one piece.”

Lisa pouts. “I know; you could feed me. I’ll enjoy having you as my slave for a while.”

“I’m sure you would. If it was going to happen.”

Lisa pouts again. “OK, fine.” She pushes her head onto her neck, shuddering as the flesh joins together. “You’ve just become celibate, Peter. I hope you enjoy it.”

“Uhm, Lisa?”

“What?!”

He holds up a white robe. “You might want to wear this until we get poolside. We don’t want people spilling their coffee because they’re too busy ogling you, do we?”

“It might be fun, but, all right.” She grabs the robe, and reaches for the door.

“Uhm, Lisa?”

“What now?!”

“You don’t know the way to the restaurant.” Lisa’s scowl deepens.

“Come on, then!”

They have a simple breakfast before going to the pool. “Shit! I forgot the light sabre! It’s still in our room!”

“Leave that to me, Lise. Where would you like the division to be? At the shoulder or the neck?”

“Neck. How are you going to...” Peter puts a hand under her jaw, the other holding the back of her head, and pushes. Lisa feels the pull on her neck before her head rips free with a wet tearing sound. Peter lets go, letting her head float. Lisa rolls the head downwards to look at her neck, not sure what to expect, but not confident after the noise. She breathes a sigh of relief as she looks down at the smooth skin. “Thank you, Peter. But you’re still celibate. At least for the rest of today and tonight.”

Peter holds out his hand for her. “Shall we?”

“Sure.” Lisa stumbles forward. “Hey! What’s wrong with me?”

“You’re not used to walking headless, Lise. Remember the problems you had when I cut you in half at Christmas. That’s one reason why I’m holding on to you.”

“What’s the other?”

“I like it.” Lisa grins, her head floating down to kiss him on the end of his nose.

“Nice try, Peter, but until tomorrow, it’s just you and Mrs Palm.”

“I’ll cope. Just lean on me...”

“♪...when you’re not strong, and I’ll be...♪”

“♪...your friend, somebody to leeeee-an on.♪”

“Peter, you know I love you...”

“Even though I’m now celibate, yes.”

“...but if you don’t stop proving you can’t sing, I’m going to throttle you. We’re getting enough strange looks right now. I thought you said people wouldn’t mind.”

“They don’t mind. They just don’t like the noise.” They both turn. Lisa turns her body and then remembers to turn her head afterwards. They find a young couple grinning at them, the woman several inches shorter than Lisa, her blonde hair falling in curls over her hands as she holds her head under her arm. The man is good-looking with short sandy hair brushed back, a slight gap between his top two teeth, his skin bronzed. “Hi, I’m Jane.” She sticks out her hand, her head beaming at them, “This is Daryl.”

“I’m Peter, and…”

“And I’m Lisa.”

“Are you guys Canadian?” Daryl asks, shaking Peter’s hand.

“I don’t think so. Are you Canadian, Lise?”

“I’m a quarter Swedish, but that’s it.”

“Nope, we’re both pretty much English. I’m guessing you’re American?”

“Yup, Deerfield, Colorado. How’d you know?”

“Because Americans are the only people I’ve ever met who thought my accent was Canadian.”

“Oh.”

“That is so cool. How do you do that?” Jane asks, staring up at Lisa’s floating head, “I mean, I love being like this, but carrying my head around like this really isn’t fun.” Lisa shrugs, which looks really strange without her head.

“I don’t know, exactly. Magic boy here says it’s some kind of magic leakage from our light sabres.” Her head floats closer, whispering into Jane’s ear, “But I don’t really believe him.”

“So, Daryl, how did you get into this? Was your father a magician?”

“Me? Why ask me? Jane’s the magician. I’m just here to make her look better.”

“I’m sorry, Jane. It’s just most magicians…”

“…are men. Believe me, I know. My Dad took me around some places when I was learning and there was, like, one female magician there.”

“I was going to say, prefer to cut up their assistants than be victim themselves.”

“Yeah, I noticed you’re mostly control freaks. Me and Kitty always wondered why.”

“Kitty?”

“Whoops. Yeah, Kitty. She’s still sleeping. She was just so peaceful all curled up like that on the bed, that we sort of decided to leave her there and go down to the pool.”

“Curled up on the bed?”

“Uhm, yeah.” Daryl looks uncomfortable, “She loves being a cat. It’s sort of why we call her Kitty and not Kate. She’ll let me do anything to her if I turn her into a cat afterwards.” Jane smiles sweetly up at them, “Not that I’d ever take advantage of my best friend like that.” Daryl snorts, “All right, not too often, anyway.”

“Hold on, two of you know about this?”

“Uh, yeah, sure, why d’ you ask?”

Lisa’s head turns towards Peter. “Care to explain?”

“Well, Lisa, you see...”

“Maybe we should go...”

“No, stay. This is going to be interesting. You see, someone told me that only one person could be told about this, and he mind wiped my best friend because of it, and now it looks like he wasn’t being quite honest. And he’s got ten seconds to come up with a really fucking good explanation.”

“OK. There’s an explanation, Lisa. Honest.”

“Six seconds left.”

“There’s an exception for working magicians. If you’re a professional, you can tell your assistants.”

“But we’re not working magicians, we’re still in college.”

“Seems your explanation isn’t quite fitting with the facts.” Her head swoops in, stopping an inch from his face. “Try again.” She snarls.

“You two do put on shows, right?”

“Well, yeah, but we’re not full-time.”

“Doesn’t matter. You’re registered, aren’t you?”

“Well, yeah. Dad sorted it out for us before we went to college. He seemed to think it was real important.”

“It is. OK, here’s the explanation, in full. If you’re going to do shows in public, you can register with the Society of Real Magicians, SORM, for short. Then, as long as you register your assistants with them, you can tell your assistants the secret. It’s a lot easier than fiddling with their memories every time.”

“Hold on, I thought the Conclave was in charge.”

“It is. SORM’s like the trade association and the Conclave’s the government. If you’re registered with SORM, the Conclave’ll know and will leave you alone unless you do something really stupid.”

“So why didn’t you register when we started going out?”

“Because I’m not a magician, I’m a computer programmer.”

“But...”

“And if you register, you have to do a show every six months, and I really don’t want to do that. And you can’t backdate the application and you have to name your assistants, so I’d still have had trouble over what you and Ola got up to. I can register, but I’m trying to work something out that doesn’t mean putting on shows.”

“Why don’t you want to put on shows?” Jane asks.

“I’m uncomfortable doing magic in public. I was raised to keep it a secret and it’s hard going against that.”

“You were raised to keep it a secret?” Jane gasps, “How long have you been doing magic?”

“Since I was a kid, about six or so.”

“Wow. I only started a year ago.”

“Yeah. You wouldn’t believe the amount my dad had to cover up when I was young.”

“Ahem. We can discuss old war stories later. Right now, I want a few words with Peter. Alone.”

“Sure. How about we meet up sometime while you’re here? So we can introduce you to Kitty. It’s nice to find someone else here around our age. Everyone else’s old. They’re all over thirty at least.”

“Yeah, sure. How about tomorrow? I think Peter will be walking by then.”

“Walking?”

“Oh, yes. He hasn’t been honest with me. And I really don’t like that.”

Jane grins, “See you then. If he can’t make it, that’ll be cool. Come on, Daryl.” She grabs Daryl’s arm, dragging him off.

“But…”

“We have to leave them alone. That way there’ll be no witnesses.”

“Smart girl. She’ll go far. Now, what am I going to do with you?”

“Lisa, come on, what I said was true.”

“You should have told me, Peter. I mean, it’s like you don’t trust me.”

“You know I trust you, Lise. But I can’t tell you everything just yet.”

“Why not?”

“I just can’t. I swear I will, but I can’t now.”

“Why?”

“God, you’re like a little kid. I can’t because I need one of two things to tell you everything. Either authorisation from the Conclave, and they haven’t given that out for full disclosure in a generation or eight, or a marriage certificate. They don’t trust long-term relationship as valid. And I don’t think I’ll be getting either of them soon.”

“So how many other secrets are you hiding from me?”

“Loads.” Lisa’s eyes widen, “Hey, you’re the one who wanted honesty. I am still keeping quite a lot of secrets from you and some of them are fairly major ones. So, can you accept that?”

“I suppose. But I’m not happy about it. And in future, you’ll tell me as much as you can, understand?!”

“Yeah, I understand.”

“And you’re back to being celibate until we get back home, at the very least.”

“Fine. Shall we go to the pool now? Or aren’t you in the mood?”

“No, sunbathing’s good. But I think you need to be punished for this.”

“But...”

“No ‘buts’. For the rest of today, you’re my head slave.” Her head settles into Peter’s hands, her body leaning on him, “Now, onwards, slave.”

“Yes, mistress.” Peter rolls his eyes, walking slowly forward. Lisa still tramples over his feet on the way to the pool, something he’s sure isn’t always accidental.

“Ok, you can let my body go now. I’m going to get to the poolside on my own.”

“Do I have to? I like holding you.” Lisa’s head floats up, kissing him on the forehead.

“Nice try, Peter. And I know you mean it, too. But just be ready in case I fall over.”

“Yes, mistress.”

“And cut the cute remarks. You’re supposed to be being penitent.” Peter hangs his head and shuffles forward. “That’s better.” Lisa drops her head into his hands. “Now take me to the pool, slave.” Peter walks behind Lisa’s body to the poolside, watching the other, mostly headless, women and their partners.

“Hey! Over here!” they turn to see Jane’s head sitting on a sunlounger across the pool. Lisa leads them over. “I’m impressed, I thought he’d be crippled, for sure.”

“Not yet. But he might be later. Where’s Daryl?”

“Oh, he’s swimming. He doesn’t like being still for long. My body’s with him. It’s a lot easier when I don’t have to breathe and Daryl keeps me from hitting people. Come on, sit down.” Her nose wriggles, “Uhm, would you mind scratching my nose? It’s itching something fierce.”

“Sure.” Lisa’s body leans over to scratch her, and falls across the sunlounger. “Whoops. Sorry. Still not coordinated.” Jane just giggles as Lisa pushes herself up. “OK. We’ll do this the easy way.”

“What? What are you...” Jane gasps as her head slowly lifts up from the lounge and drifts into Lisa’s hands, allowing her to scratch Jane’s nose. “Ooooh. That’s good. You’ll have to teach me how you do that.”

“I’m shocked. As the daughter of a magician, I thought you knew we never reveal our secrets.” Peter grins. Jane sticks her tongue out at him.

“Oh, go away, will you?” Peter bows, leading Lisa’s body to the pool, and letting her head settle next to Jane’s.

Half an hour of swimming, or swapping stories, later, both Jane and Lisa’s bodies climb out of the pool together. “Hurry up, slowpokes!” Jane shouts.

“Well, their mistresses call.” Peter sighs, “Shall we?”

“After you.”

“Oh, no, good sir, I insist, after you.” Daryl catches on quickly.

“No, no, please, after you.”

“No, I insist, after...” Lisa’s head appears between them.

“Look, Laurel and Hardy, will you please come over? Jane and I want to discuss something with you

both.” She starts to float away and turns back, “Now! Move it, move it! Left, right, left, right...” Peter and Daryl quick march over to the loungers. Daryl flops onto a free one to one side, while Peter sits on the other. Lisa and Jane’s bodies stand to the side, each holding the other’s head.

“So, what did you wish to discuss?” Peter asks.

“Well, we’ve been talking, and I told Jane about what happened with Ola and she wants to try it.”

“What happened with Ola? Who’s Ola?” Daryl asks.

“Ola’s my flatmate back home, and we,” Peter coughs, “sorry, I cut her up and fitted her parts and my parts together to make a patchwork girl, with both our heads.”

“And you want to try this?”

“Yes!” Jane beams, her neck nodding.

“No.” Peter says.

“What?” Everyone turns to look at Peter. “What do you mean ‘no’?”

“It wouldn’t be fair. For however long you were together, one of us wouldn’t have his partner to talk to.”

“And if you don’t, your partner won’t be talking to you, anyway.” Lisa snaps, “So there’s no problem.”

“Would you be at all interested in a compromise? We can try it tonight and change back tomorrow after dinner if you don’t like it.”

“Sure.”

“Don’t agree yet, Jane. He’s a tricky bastard. What is this compromise, Peter?”

“Simple. We put you back together on each other’s body.”

“Won’t that cause a problem with, you know, sex?” Jane asks, blushing furiously.

“Fair point. How about we go back to our room, and we can make sure all the important features get retained? That way you’ll still be a bit patchy.” Peter suggests after a moment’s thought. Lisa and Jane look at each other.

“Sure.”

“Hey, don’t I get a say in this?” Jane turns and taps Lisa on the shoulder. Lisa turns Jane’s head towards Daryl.

“You want me to stop me from having fun?” She asks.

“No, but...”

“Good. Then we’re decided. Let’s go.” Her body turns and walks off.

“Hey!” Lisa shouts, “Come back here with my head!”

Jane stops and walks back towards them. “Sorry.” The head in her hands says, blushing, “I forgot I was carrying you.” She holds out Lisa’s head, “Swap?” Lisa’s head floats up out of her hands and turns round as Jane picks up her head from Lisa’s hands, Lisa settling back into her own hands.

“Now we can go.” She walks off with Jane. Peter and Daryl follow them up to their room.

“Now, do either of you have a cutting implement on you?” Peter asks.

“Not here.” Jane turns her head to look over her swimsuit, “I can’t see one, anyway. But we’ve got a tanto blade back in our room.”

“OK, Daryl, could you go and get the blade and meet us back here? Lisa and I’ll talk through what’s going to happen with Jane.”

“Go on, Daryl. I’ll be fine.”

“Are you...”

“Go!” she makes shooing gestures with one hand, the other cradling her head. Daryl starts out the door.

“Now, what do you want to talk to me about? I’ve been cut up before.”

“Rejoining with someone else is, well, it’s something else. When Ola and I joined up, we...” Lisa blushes and drifts off.

“You what?”

“We came together.”

“Wow! That is intense. And you think the same thing will happen to me?”

“It might. But I don’t think so.” Peter replies, “Lisa and Ola were cut into dozens of pieces and they all merged, plus they merged both heads onto one body, so I doubt you’ll be hit that hard.”

“Oh.” She sounds a little disappointed. “Why did you get Daryl out of the room to tell me this?”

“I didn’t. I got him out of the room to ask if you were sure about doing this.” Jane nods her head, “And if you’re sure he’s sure about doing this.”

“Huh? What’s it got to do with him?”

“If you were planning on giving your new body a test-drive with him tonight, I’d say it had quite a lot to do with him. After all, he might not like the thought of making love to you when most of you is someone else.”

“Oh. I hadn’t thought of that. But the important bits will still be me.”

“Only if you agree on what the important bits are.”

“Oh.”

“I think you should at least listen to him.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Then you might lose your boyfriend. Your choice.”

“Fine. I’ll talk to him. But we’re still going ahead with this.”

A few moments later, Daryl comes back in, a tanto blade gripped in his hand, hilt up. “Will this do?” he looks at Peter.

“Will that do, Jane?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I figured you’d like to cut Lisa up and have her cut you up, rather than have me do it. I know Lisa prefers being in control of what’s going on.” Jane beams.

“Sounds good to me. Who first?”

“I think you should go first, Jane. Lisa can move about comfortably when severed, but I don’t know if you can, and this needs fairly careful cutting. That OK with you, Lisa?”

“Fine. Where do you want to cut first?” Jane grins, placing her head on the bed.

“It’s a surprise.” Lisa glances at Peter.

“She might like being under the blade more than you, but you’re not so different, Peter.” He shrugs.

“I never said we were.” He grins. Lisa looks down, just as the tanto blade presses into her side, just above the edge of her bikini. Lisa shivers, as the cold metal slowly passes through her, leaving the cut skin a little numb behind it.

“What? Peter, this doesn’t feel right!”

“It’ll be fine, Lisa. Different magicians’ magic feels a little different. Mine, and Dad’s, tends to produce a bit of a tingle. Jane’s does what it does.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that earlier?”

“I didn’t think of it. It’s something I learned years ago, and never gave a second thought to it. It’s just common knowledge to me, the sort of thing you expect people to know. I’m too used to thinking of you as a full member of the community, I suppose.” The tanto blade slices free.

“Never mind. Just pick me up.” Peter lifts up under her shoulders, leaning her back on the bed.

“Ready?” Jane asks, leaning the blade just under the bikini strap.

“Thanks for asking this time. Go.” The blade pushes down, cutting along the edge of the bikini. She pushes it back up along the other edge, cutting Lisa’s legs off. Her bikini, and what little of her is in it, floats in place. Jane moves the blade towards Lisa’s chest. “Hold on, hold on. How were you planning on cutting me next?” she looks at Daryl, “I’m not putting on a strip show for your boyfriend.”

Jane looks at Peter. “Me, neither. Boys, get out of here.”

“Fine. Lisa, if you need me, just think hard. Come on, Daryl, I hear the bar calling.”

“I can’t drink. I’m only 19.”

“19? What’s the? Oh, yeah. Well, we’ll find something to do until these two are decent again. Or as decent as they ever get.” A pillow hits him on the head.

“Just go, will you? Be back in half an hour or so. And knock before you come in.”

“Yes, dear.” The door closes. Jane edges the blade closer.

“Don’t try anything cute.” Jane looks at her with perfectly feigned innocence.

“I don’t know what you mean.” Lisa grins at her as she pulls down her bikini.

“Of course you don’t.” The blade cuts through her chest, her left breast floating away to join her hips floating above the bed. The right follows, leaving two circles of skin on her chest.

“OK. That’s that done. Your turn.” Lisa’s light sabre floats up from the bed, the blue blade shining out. “Cool. Do you think Peter will make me one?”

“Maybe. I’ll ask him. Now come here.” The beam pushes into Jane’s skin, tracing a path along the edge of her swimsuit.

“Ooooooh. That feels good. It’s like someone’s tickling me on the inside.” Her leg topples over and her body starts to follow before Lisa grabs her, pulling Jane onto the bed and on top of her.

“I thought you didn’t want to try anything cute.” Jane giggles.

“Very funny. I think it would be better if you lay down, don’t you?” Jane’s leg floats up and drifts over to the other bed, “I’ll move you across as I cut bits off.”

“OK. Just hurry up. I want to get to the rejoining.” Lisa slowly inches the blade along the other edge of the swimsuit. “I said hurry up, not slow down!” Her leg separates and floats over.

“You’ll have to wait for a bit, then.”

“What? Why?” Lisa’s hips float across the room with her head and settle down onto Jane’s legs. The warm feeling rolls up through her as the flesh reconnects. “Hey! I can’t feel my legs! What are you up to?” Lisa’s head floats across the room, her hips and Jane’s legs walking across the room. “Oh. How come you’re starting without me?”

“I’m impatient.” She lines the glowing beam up with Jane’s waist.

“Stop!” Lisa’s head turns to look at her, the sabre hovering in place. Jane slips out of her swimsuit, lying back naked on the bed. “I don’t want it getting damaged.”

“Can I continue now?”

“Sure.” The blade cuts through Jane’s waist, leaving her moaning softly on the bed. Lisa floats the light sabre towards Jane’s chest, her full breasts looking plump and pale against her tanned skin.

“Could you lift them up a bit? I don’t want to miss anything.” Jane’s hands cup her chest, pushing them up. The light sabre cuts them off, filling Jane’s hands with her own soft flesh. Her nipples harden against her palm as she bites at her lip. “OK. You can let them go now.”

“What?”

“Oh, I’ll do it then.” Lisa’s head settles on Jane’s body’s shoulders. She gently lowers the breasts to the bed. Lisa’s breasts float over to her new body, fastening in place. She pulls on her bikini and lines up her new waist with her old waist, standing up, her pale skin in stark contrast to Jane’s tan.

“What about me? I can’t move anything anymore.” Lisa smiles down at her.

“Well, I didn’t want to spoil the surprise.”

“What surprise?” Lisa keeps grinning, and Jane watches as her breasts float up from the bed and settle onto Lisa’s body. “Hey! Cut that out. I can’t feel them at all now.”

“So you can’t feel this, then?” she pokes the breast gently.

“No.”

“Shame.” Jane’s hips float up and connect to the body’s waist. Lisa’s legs follow. The body gets up and starts to pull on the swimsuit.

“What are you doing? Why are you...”

“I don’t like surprises.” Lisa snarls.

Jane whimpers, “You mean, you’ll...”

Lisa grins, kissing Jane on the forehead, “Unless I get my own back, anyway.”

“So you’ll put me together?”

“Of course. You didn’t really think I’d leave you just a head, did you?”

“Yes.” Jane’s new body reaches down, picking her head up off the bed.

“Well, you might be right. One thing Peter’s taught me is: never trust anyone doing magic on you. At least not totally.” The body lowers Jane’s head down. Lisa suddenly loses control as Jane’s neck connects to her body. Back to front.

“What did you do that for?”

“It’s a surprise.” Lisa grins, “Don’t worry, Peter’s fixed me up from worse in the past. Anyway, you’re a magician, can’t you do something about it?”

“I don’t know how. All the stuff Dad taught me was using boxes and blades and props and stuff. This is something else.”

“OK, OK. I’ll get Peter back and he can sort you out.” *“Oi, slave! Get back here. We could do with a hand. Don’t panic, it’s not an emergency. Just a bit of playing that needs to be fixed.”*

“Playing? Lisa, what have you done?”

“Why assume it was me?”

“Was it?” Lisa projects an image suggesting he go forth and fornicate. *“I’ll take that as a yes. Me and Daryl will be along soon. I hope you haven’t done too much to Jane. I’m not sure Daryl’s cut out for too much magic in his life.”*

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, he is freaked by it. Really freaked. Hanging on to sanity by fingernails freaked.”

“In that case, don’t let him in.”

“Why?”

“If he’s that freaked, this won’t help. It’s nothing serious. By our standards, anyway. I just put her head on backwards. Nothing serious. I thought she could just fix it herself, but she doesn’t have any idea how, so we need you to do it for us.”

“Fine. Any idea how to get rid of Daryl for a few minutes while I put this right?”

“Can you make him need to go? Really badly?”

“I was hoping for a non-magical solution. Never mind, I’ve got it. When we come up, just start screaming at me, you should be good at that by now, claiming I’ve vanished your top or something. And I think we’ll have to talk to Jane, alone, sometime about Daryl.”

“Maybe. Hey!!!!”

“Lisa?”

“Nothing. Forget it.” She thinks, trying to keep any images of Jane nibbling her ear from getting through, “Just get here soon.” “I thought I said nothing cute.”

Jane pouts. “Come on, don’t tell me you’re not as horny as I am right now. I know Kitty always is after we do something new. It just seems such a shame to waste all that energy.” She hooks her finger under the top of her swimsuit and starts to pull it off.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

Jane turns around, her hands, formerly Lisa’s, cupping her breasts, tweaking her hard nipples. “Well, as you’re such an uptight mundy, I thought I’d sort myself out.” She rolls down the swimsuit, rubbing herself through the white cloth. Lisa turns as someone knocks on the door.

“Lisa, it’s us. Can we come in?” Lisa looks at Jane, still stroking herself and hesitates, “Lisa?”

“Someone’s made my top vanish, Peter. You’d better get in here and fix it bloody fast or I’ll...” the door opens and Peter inches in.

“So, where’s the...” Lisa steps out of his way. “Uhm, Jane?”

Jane turns around, still fondling herself. “Come on, join in. You’re not going to be an uptight mundy like your girlfriend, are you?”

“I’m afraid so. Now, hold still.” He grabs hold of Jane’s head and twists, turning her to face forwards.

“Oooooohh, that feels better.”

“Is it okay to let Daryl in now, Peter?”

“I don’t know. Think you can not molest him until you get back to your room, Jane?” Jane sighs, pushing harder against her swimsuit. She stops, pouting up at them.

“Oh, alright. Jeez, you two are no fun at all.”

“OK. You can let him in now. Daryl, Jane’s still a bit out of it. Could you take her back to your room? Let her recover?” Daryl just stares at the slim, pale figure of Jane, with her tanned face and chest looking wrong on the pale body. She beams at him, leaping off the bed and throwing herself at him.

“Come on. Let’s go, lover. This body needs to be broken in.” she drags Daryl out of the room. “See you guys tomorrow night!” the door swings closed.

“Peter, what the fuck is a mundy?”

“Mundane. It’s a derogatory term for the non-magically talented. What happened?”

“She was, she was trying to have sex with me.”

“Ah.”

Lisa’s eyes narrow sharply. “You don’t sound particularly surprised. Explain.”

“Uhm, well, some people get, uhm, highly stimulated by magic. It makes them majorly horny.”

“And that’s it?”

“Not entirely. The magic community in general is a little bit more, uhm, relaxed about sex than the regular world. It’s not that unusual for people, even people in a relationship, to, uhm...”

“To have sex with other people.”

“Something like that. But it usually only happens after intense magic, like today.”

“I see.”

“Although, for performing magicians, they sometimes have, uhm, effectively one relationship with all their regular assistants, so, I guess, she, Daryl and Kitty could be considered one relationship. Maybe.”

“And your views on the subject?”

“My relationship is just with you, Lisa. Why would I want anybody else? Besides, cheating on your partner is still bad.”

“But you said having sex was...”

“That’s not cheating.”

“What?”

“Cheating is where you have sex without your partner’s consent. Slight difference. I’m guessing Jane and Daryl have a pretty open relationship.”

“Let me see if I’ve got this straight, Peter: magicians frequently have more than one partner, they often have sex with anyone they’ve just cut up, and their partners know and accept this.”

“Not frequently, but it’s not unusual, either. Obviously people who weren’t raised in the community find it a little tough to cope with.”

“Like me.”

“Like you.”

“So why aren’t I affected like that?”

“Aren’t you? You’re usually horny as hell after magic. It hits some people harder than others. And most magicians buffer the effects automatically, making people feel good but not turning them into sex-crazed nymphomaniacs. I’m guessing, when you put Jane’s head on, you weren’t buffering the effect.”

“But I don’t know how to, so how can I buffer it usually?”

“Well, you didn’t really when you and Ola got together, did you? Not from what you’ve told me, anyway. And every other time you’ve been with me. I might have been buffering things for you without thinking

about it, I suppose. But I don't know. I do know that I think we'd better start teaching you how to buffer your magic, so this doesn't happen again, don't you?"

"I thought you couldn't teach magic."

"You can't. Usually. But because you can do some effects, God knows how, you can probably limit the effects some."

"So why wasn't I affected this time?"

"I don't know. Maybe you were too busy concentrating on Jane; maybe you've got used to being dismembered; I don't have all the answers. You shouldn't be able to do what you're doing anyway, so any question about it isn't going to get a definitive answer. Now, do you want to go outside again, or shall we start practicing for this show you want to do?"

"Is it worth doing any practice? I mean, I'm not going to do it like this, am I?"

"We can still plan it out, work out what we're going to do. Now, I'm guessing you don't want the fight to be one-sided, and just let me chop you up, right?"

"You don't really have to ask, do you?"

"Not really. So, how many pieces are we going to end up in? I'm figuring legs, head, arms, and three body pieces. We don't want the audience to get bored."

"I suppose, but that seems a bit dull. How about we have some fun with it afterwards?"

"What do you have in mind?"

"Well, I don't know, maybe get us all mixed up?"

"Maybe, but that'll be a lot of work."

"How about just a tug of war with some of our bits, then? You know, we float pieces this way and that, until we decide whose it is."

"That might work, but we need more of a visual effect. How about we leave our hands grabbing the light sabres, and then let them fight it out for our parts?"

"When did you get a sense of drama? I thought you didn't want to perform?"

"I don't. Not really. But I picked up a lot about pacing and structure from my Dad. We'll see if it helps."

"Right. So after we get my body back, we'll start practicing properly."

"And intensively. We've got less than a week to get ready."

"Great. I go to Nevada and I'm going to spend most of my time indoors."

"Only up to the show, Lise. That's why I want to start soon, so we can have some holiday left after the show's finished. So I think we'd better practice for a bit tomorrow, before you get your body off Jane." Lisa's light sabre floats across the room.

"Shall we begin then?" Peter's light sabre appears in his hand, already shining red.

"Why not? Do you think you are ready, young Jedi?" Lisa's light sabre shines blue.

“We’ll see, foul Lord of the Sith.”

“Very good. Now, do you want to do this properly first time out, or just start working out staging?”

“Let’s see how things go.”

“Very well, young Jedi.” He swings the blade at her.

Shortly, both are in pieces, scattered around the room. “Yeah. I think something like that would work, don’t you?”

“Probably. But I wish we knew what it looked like.”

“That’s what the critique’s for. To iron out this sort of thing.”

“OK. So when do we start my training?”

Peter’s body floats up, fitting itself together. “Not right now. I think we should go out and enjoy our holiday a bit more, don’t you?” Lisa’s floating head nods, her body slowly moving together. “Would you like a hand?” Peter asks, offering his detached left hand.

“No, thank you.” She stands up.

“So, do you want to start training, continue practicing or just go and enjoy the sunshine? I vote for sunshine.”

“Seconded. Let’s go.”

They spend the rest of the day lounging around or swimming, sometimes both at once. They don’t see a sign of Daryl or Jane. Obviously they’re busy enjoying themselves. Dinner is fairly quiet. Lisa still feels weird with her new body. It’s shorter than hers, so she keeps missing her glass. Peter just keeps quiet, sometimes nudging the glass into her hand without her noticing. Still no sign of Daryl or Jane, and the rest of the diners are all in one piece. “Dinner’s more formal.” Peter explains, drawing a snort from Lisa, given the amount of jeans, T-shirts and bikinis in evidence.

That night, they go to bed early, jet lag still a significant factor, and the next day dawns to leaden grey skies and rain. Lots of rain. “Peter, how come you lot can’t organise decent weather for your holidays?”

“Too big for any of us to affect.”

“What? Over one little resort?”

“Weather’s complicated, Lise. You know they keep going on about how a butterfly flapping its wings in Japan can contribute to hurricanes in America?” Lisa nods, “Well, what do you think the effect of a magician giving himself a tan when the world wants a downpour’s going to be?”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. Pretty major disaster likely. And besides which, that kind of thing will get noticed. Which is a bad thing, if you remember.”

“I remember. Magic Gestapo who really like secrets. Got it.” Peter winces slightly.

“So, you admit to having limits? That’s a first.”

“I’m hurt. I am the very soul of modesty.”

“In what parallel universe is that true?”

“You haven’t met many magicians. Trust me, I’m modest in comparison. Mostly.”

“Of course you are, Peter. So, what are we going to do now that the sunshine’s been cancelled?”

“Well, we can practice a bit more, I suppose.”

“Boring.”

“And afterward, we’ll start on your training.”

“Afterwards?”

“We need to practice. And I think bribery’s the best way to get you to do it.”

Lisa swats him on the arm. “I resent that.” Peter’s light sabre glows and swings out through Lisa’s arm. “Hey!!!” Lisa grabs her light sabre from the bed, slashing out at Peter.

Soon, once again, both are dismembered on the floor, “Well, that was fun, hey, leggo!!”

“Nope.” Peter’s severed hand continues to drag her leg along the floor.

“If you give me carpet burns, I’ll...”

“Just practicing. Come on! Get your leg back. If you can.” Lisa grabs her ankle, pulling back.

Tugging and pulling on each other the whole time, they eventually reassemble themselves. “That’s what you’re planning for the show?”

“Yup. Probably not for every piece, though. It’ll take too long, and the audience will get bored. Every third or fourth piece should be enough, I reckon.”

“So more practice then?”

“Afraid so, but I think we’ll wait until you’ve got your real body back.”

“Assuming Jane lets me have it back.”

Peter looks at her. “You think she won’t?”

“I don’t know. I mean, I’ve only just found out magicians don’t have the same view of sex as the rest of the world. What else don’t I know?”

“You got a month or two?” Lisa swats him again. “Owwww!” Peter starts rubbing his arm, “Will you stop that?”

“Will you stop teasing me?”

“Probably not.”

“Then I won’t stop punishing you.”

“Fine.” Peter grabs the edge of his t-shirt sleeve, pulling it down to his elbow.

“What are you doing?”

Peter lets go. The sleeve flies back to its original position, revealing a metal greave of armour covering his arm from elbow to shoulder. “Defending myself.” He pulls down the other sleeve, and covers that arm in metal.

“Very cute, Peter. But you don’t really think that will keep you safe, do you?”

“Not really.” He rips off the greaves, handing Lisa some torn metallic paper. Lisa giggles, shaking her head.

“I’m going out with a nutter.”

“♪You may be right, I may be crazy,♪”

“May?”

“♪ But it just might be a lunatic you’re looking forrrrrr...♪” Peter continues to murder Billy Joel, ignoring Lisa.

“Peter, stop. I know you can’t sing worth a damn, and so do you. You don’t have to keep proving it.”

“Fine. Be that way.” Peter zips his mouth shut, literally, “Imm ud medder?”

“Stop pissing about, Peter. I’m getting hungry. When do they serve lunch in this place?”

Peter pulls the zip off his face. “Now’ll probably be ok. Shall we be off?”

“Let’s.” she offers him her arm, like a Victorian lady. Peter takes it, and even leaves it attached, and they both walk down the corridors to the dining room for lunch.

The restaurant is fairly quiet, so they don’t have a problem getting anything, just a few sandwiches and tea and coffee, which Peter insists in drinking with his little finger out. “Just showing these uncultured heathens how to do things properly.” He grins, earning a swat and a grin from Lisa.

“Fine, be a snob. Now, how are you going to train me?”

“Simple. I’ll stop buffering for you and force you to learn to do it yourself. We’ll start off with me still buffering you somewhat and then I’ll gradually reduce my role until you do it all automatically.”

“Hold on, isn’t buffering all that keeps me from being turned into a sex-crazed nympho by your magic?”

“Not entirely. And I won’t reduce my influence that much, not until you’re ready. And you probably won’t be for a few months.”

“Months?”

“Afraid so. This is basically unlearning what you’ve been doing, so it’ll take time.”

“Fine.” She finishes off her sandwich, turning to the counter for some crisps. “Come on, Peter, hurry up. The quicker we start, the quicker we finish.”

“Lise, a few more minutes isn’t going to make a difference.” He swallows the last of his tea. “But, if it’ll make you happy...” he picks up his sandwich and follows her back to their room.

The afternoon passes fairly quickly in training, which amounts to much the same as practicing, only with more effort from Peter not to buffer the effects as much as normal. Which, naturally, leads to Lisa accusing him of deliberately reducing the buffer too much (which is completely untrue. Honest. No, I'm not just saying that.). Despite the accusations (which are, of course, totally baseless), Peter is still celibate when the afternoon turns to evening. And Lisa is taking a shower with the water one step above solid ice, to cool off, her third since training began, and certainly the longest and coldest. "Uhm, Lisa, no offence or anything, but we'd better get a move on. How formal do you want to be when we meet Jane and the others?" Lisa emerges from the bathroom in a short slinky red dress, which looks a lot longer given her shorter body. Peter whistles.

"I think this is formal enough, don't you?" Peter nods, "But you're not." Peter unzips his chest and steps out, wearing a black t-shirt with a design to make it look like formal evening wear and black jeans. Lisa giggles, "Well, it'll do, I suppose."

At the restaurant, they meet up with Jane, wearing a white dress that comes halfway up her shins, but looks like it should cover her feet, Daryl, in a Cubs shirt and jeans, and a slim woman with dark brown curls falling over her shoulders and brilliant green eyes with a sleeveless tiger-print top that leaves her stomach bare and low-cut tiger print leggings. "Peter, Lisa, this is Kitty."

Kitty smiles at them. "Can't we get takeout?" Kitty asks.

"She's here a bit under protest." Jane explains.

"You didn't want to meet us?"

"Oh, no, not that, but I've got to be like this to get in here." Lisa looks a bit puzzled, "They won't let me in if I'm transformed."

"Oh, right." She still looks puzzled, "Hold on, Peter, aren't Jane and I considered transformed? I mean, she's mostly me and I'm mostly her."

"True, but you're both all human and all in one piece, even if it isn't all you. Which is why you're let in like you are, but Kitty wouldn't be, if she weren't changed back. Anyway, I quite like talking to people, and cats don't usually have much to say that we can understand. Even cats that are normally people."

"I know." Kitty sighs, "But life's so much easier when you're a cat." Her stomach rumbles, "But I guess my body has other priorities." She pushes the doors open, leading the way to an empty table.

Kitty orders lemon sole, while Jane sticks to salad, Daryl goes for ribs and Peter and Lisa order rare steak and peppered chicken respectively. Eventually, they agree on two bottles of wine, one red, and one white. "OK, Petey," Jane beams as they wait for the meal, drawing a glower from Peter, "so how long you really been doing this? No one starts doing magic at six."

Peter shrugs, "I did."

"But..."

"From what my dad told me, he came from an extremely magical family, and my mum's family must have had a load of potential talent, too, because I did start at about six, levitating my pet tortoises." They all stare at him, "I didn't know tortoises weren't supposed to fly. My mum floated all the time. I thought it was normal." He protests as the others start giggling. "It's not that funny."

Lisa looks at him, her eyes blurry. "Of course it is, Peter. I mean, you at six, floating your tortoises around the..." she dissolves into another fit of giggles. Peter waits for the laughing to subside, his foot tapping softly on the carpet.

“Finished?”

Lisa sniffs, wiping her eyes. “For now, Peter, for now.”

“But I’m going to be reminded of this for a long time. Fine.” He rolls his eyes, and then turns towards Jane, his face set in a stony glare, “Your turn, Jane.”

“What?”

“How did you start out?”

“Oh, right. My dad’s a magician, a real one, and I’ve been pestering him to teach me stuff since I was nine and really had some idea what was going on. And he taught me all the little tricks, but done the fake way. I knew that wasn’t all there was to it, ‘cause I’d sneaked into his store rooms and checked once I found out how they were s’posed to be done from some TV specials. So I kept pestering him. He gave in in my last year at high school and taught me how to use his equipment. When I graduated, he gave me some of my own but made me promise to finish college before I decided if this was going to be my life. So I promised and he got me registered and I got my assistants sorted out.”

“Assistants.” Daryl mutters, “Used to be friends.”

“Oh, stop moaning, will you? You’ve done nothing but complain since we got here. What is your problem?” Peter and Lisa both take a sudden and keen interest in their dinners.

“My problem?” his voice starts to raise, “My problem? I’m not the one who thinks getting her head cut off is cool! I’m not the one who’d much rather be a cat than a person! I’m not the one...”

“Daryl, don’t make me choose between you and magic. Please. I love you...”

“But you won’t give it up.” It’s not a question.

“No. I won’t. Why can’t you let me have fun? It’s not like I drag you into it.”

“You don’t drag me into it?! Then why am I here? This is as far into it as I’m ever going to get!! A resort of magicians!!! You can’t get more into it than that!!”

“Wrong.” Peter murmurs to himself. Lisa looks at him, taking her eyes off Daryl’s rapidly purpling face. “Later.”

“If you feel that way why did you even bother coming?!”

“Because I loved you. But, I, I can’t do this anymore, Janey. I just can’t. It’s too much. Things don’t make sense anymore, and I can’t cope with that. There. I’ve said it!! Are you happy to know I can’t handle this?! Are you?!”

Jane looks away, tears welling in her eyes.

“Daryl, sit down.” Lisa snaps.

“Stay out of...”

“**Sit! Down!**” She snarls. Daryl collapses into his seat, looking stunned.

“What did you do to me?” he snarls at Lisa.

“I didn’t do anything. I just told you to sit down before I slapped you. And, as dinner’s nicely ruined now,

let's all eat up, in silence, and go to our rooms. Jane, you'd better come with us so we can get our bodies sorted first. That alright with you, Daryl?" Daryl just nods sullenly, picking at his ribs. "Well, looks like I'll have to up my estimation of your knowledge of human nature, magic boy."

"Whoopee. Now what do we do about it?"

"What can we do about it? Can you make them be in love again?" Peter seems to consider it, "You can't do that, can you?"

"Even if I could, I wouldn't. People's personalities are their own business."

The meal passes in sullen, angry silence, and the walk back to their rooms is even worse. Daryl slams the door behind him. Kitty shoves her middle finger up at him as it closes, before turning to Jane, helping her along the corridor. Peter and Lisa walk on ahead, not knowing what to say, or do, allowing Kitty to comfort her best friend. They arrive at their room.

"Uhm, look, Jane, we don't have to do this right now. If you'd rather..."

"No. We're doing this now. You're not going to suffer because I..." she bursts into fresh tears.

"Jane," she turns teary eyes towards Peter, "do you want me to put you in a trance for this?"

"No. I'm fine." She wipes the tears away. "I'm fine. Can we do this before I start crying again?"

"No problem. Lisa, stand behind Jane." Lisa does quickly. "Now step forward." Lisa takes a step forward, her body stepping into Jane's, a warmth covering her skin, alternating hot and cold. "OK, step forward now." Lisa steps forward, back in her old body, her dress barely reaching down her thighs. Jane's dress hangs over her feet, pooling on the floor. "There, both of you back to normal."

"That felt different. I was expecting something, I don't know, stronger."

"I was toning it right down." Peter explains, "I think the last thing you need right now is a strong shot of magic."

"Oh."

"Do you want us to take you back to your room now?" Jane looks up, fresh tears in her reddened eyes.

"What am I going to do? I can't go back there now. He's..."

"Do you want me to go down? I can try and talk to Daryl, make sure he's calmed down a bit." Peter offers.

"You think he might..."

"I don't know, but I'm the only one here he might not be angry with right now, so I have the best chance of calming him down."

"We're in deep trouble now." Peter glares at her, flicking his eyes towards Jane as she sits on the bed, Kitty's arm around her shoulder.

"See you guys soon." "And when I get back, Lise, we need to talk."

"About?"

"About what you did to Daryl back there?"

“What I did? I didn’t do anything to him.”

“Like I said, we need to talk.”

Peter walks down the stairs quickly, the knot of apprehension in his stomach tightening, filling up his body. Well, I’ve really done it this time, haven’t I? What the hell do I know about fixing a relationship? I’m just barely keeping mine in one piece. He chuckles. Well, lots of willing pieces, anyway. He takes a long breath and knocks on the door.

“Who is it?”

“It’s Peter, Daryl. Can I come in?”

“Why not? It’s not like I can stop you, is it? You can just magic the door out the way or…”

“I can, yes. But we don’t do that sort of thing.” The door lock clicks and swings open. Daryl no longer looks purple, but he looks very tired, and more than a little grey.

“What do you want?”

“I just want to talk.”

“About what?”

“You. And Jane.”

“You’ve done enough. If that’s all, you can get out.” Peter remains still. “I said get out!”

“No. Not until you hear me out.”

Daryl flops onto the bed. “So talk.”

Joy. This is going to be easy, isn’t it? “OK. First off, do you still love Jane?”

“Of course I do! It’s just…”

“Just you don’t like the magic.”

“Yeah.”

“And you know she won’t give that up?”

“Yeah. I love her and she won’t…”

“And she won’t give up something she’s wanted to do for more than half her life for you. Yeah, that’s selfish of her.”

Daryl looks up. “She says she loves me.”

“She does love you. But I don’t think she can deal with this, any more than you can deal with her magic.”

“So what are you saying?”

“I’m saying that if you’re going to continue to be with her, you need to accept that she will keep on doing and enjoying magic.”

“But...”

“And she needs to understand and accept that you’re not comfortable with it. Which means not flaunting the magic with you.”

“And you think that’ll work?” he sneers.

“I haven’t a clue. But it looks like the best chance I can see for you. I’m not an expert, Daryl. But I do know, trite as it sounds, that if your relationship is important to you, then you need to work at things. This is just a very major ‘thing’ to work at. And you both need to do that. Not just Jane, not just you.”

“That’s easy to say, but...”

“It’s absurdly easy to say. I know that. What do you want me to do? Wave a magic wand and make it so Jane can’t do magic? Or make you love it? This is something you and Jane have to fix, Daryl.”

“I know.” Peter lets out a long sigh.

Thank you pop psychology and relationship science. Let’s hope it works. “Okay, you ready to come up, talk to Jane? I promise, no magic. But it might be an idea to get out of Shecky’s before you try and patch up your relationship.”

“Got that right.” He takes a long breath, “Yeah, yeah, I’m ready.” He gets off the bed, closing the door behind him. “I do really love her, you know.”

“I know.” Or at least, I hope. And I really hope nothing goes wrong upstairs.

Upstairs, the first thing that happens is Daryl and Jane hug each other, (which is a good thing), both saying how sorry they are (which is another good thing). The second thing is Peter takes Lisa out (which a good thing for him, because it gets them out, and a good thing for Daryl because it gets Lisa out).

“OK, Magic Boy,” Lisa finally says as they sit outside, looking up at the Moon, “what did you want to say? What do you think I did?” Peter takes a long breath. “Peter?”

“You magiced him.”

“I what??!!”

“You made him do what you told him. When you told him to sit down.”

“So I can control people’s minds?”

“At least a bit. But you shouldn’t be able to! That’s the point. And I’m getting worried.”

“Because I can do things I shouldn’t?”

“Yes.”

“Why does that worry you? Scared I’ll beat you at your own game?”

“No” she looks sceptical, “Ok, not too much. I’m shit scared of what the Conclave’ll do.”

“Why?”

Peter shakes his head. “Don’t you see? You’re doing things that are impossible, but without any magical training, and no family history of magic. They’ll want to know how.”

“But I don’t know how! Neither do you!”

“That won’t make much difference, to be honest. They’ll find out how, and we won’t like what they come up with.”

“So what are we going to do about it? I don’t know what I’m doing, so I can’t stop it.”

“I know. That’s the problem. When you’re with me, we can pass it off as me doing it if we have to, but I’m worried things will happen when you’re on your own and someone’ll notice before I fix them, like I did with Ola.”

“You’re not going to let me forget that, are you, Tortoise Boy?”

“Not for a long time. No.”

“So, what are we going to do?”

“I think we’re going to have to register. If you’re officially recognised as an assistant, they’ll be more reasonable about magic happening around you. It does to some assistants. They just build up too much magic and it starts sort of leaking.”

“Like I do.”

“Like I hope you do. Otherwise, this is going to even more trouble.”

“More trouble? How much trouble has it been? Have I been?”

“Yes. A fair bit. I take the fifth.”

“A fair bit of trouble? I haven’t noticed.”

“You heard something of it the night I fixed you and Ola up. I just kept quiet about how serious it was. You couldn’t do anything about it, nor could I, and I didn’t want to worry you.”

“How sweet and charming of you.” She smiles sweetly. Peter swallows nervously, having learned to regard Lisa’s sweet innocent smile as a sign she’s too angry to actually shout at him, “And patronising. How dare you?! I thought you were going to trust me!” Peter remains silent, “Well, haven’t you got anything to say for yourself?”

“You’re right. I should have told you something about this.”

“Something?”

“I still can’t go into details, Lisa. I’m still not allowed. But the truth is, when I sent my, emissary, I guess, to the Conclave, he returned pretty sharpish saying they weren’t happy. Well, the words he actually used were ‘ranging from slightly annoyed to literally incandescent.’ He also said they’d be watching me, so I’m a bit concerned, particularly when someone keeps calling them the Magical Gestapo.”

“Hold on, I thought you were allowed to tell someone?”

“Tell, yes. Opinion’s still split quite heavily on the ‘do to’ front. There’s no formal ban, but it makes the Conclave more nervous. That’s why I’ve been trying to sort out a formal arrangement for our relationship with the Conclave. If that doesn’t work, I figure we’ll have to register and sort out how we’re going to fit shows in with our real life.”

“Sounds tough.” Peter smiles a thin smile.

“Well, unless you’d like to give up me doing magic on you, and the light sabre.”

“Fuck that. We’ll manage to do some shows.”

“If we have to.” He looks at his watch, “Think it’ll be safe to go back now?”

“Yeah, they’re probably gone by now.”

“Good, I could do with some sleep. The day’s been dramatic enough. Let’s go.”

They make their way back to their room, to find it still occupied, but only by Kitty, who hands them their key back. “Thanks for trying.” She gives them a small smile and kisses Peter’s cheek.

“Do you think it’ll work though?”

She shrugs. “Maybe. I hope so. Jane doesn’t deserve to be this unhappy.” She hands them a small folded piece of paper. “It’s our e-mail addies. Jane wants to keep in touch.”

“Oh, right. Do you want ours now? Or will tomorrow be…”

“We’re leaving. First thing, tomorrow. They think they need time away from here to sort things out.” She scowls slightly, “And there’s no point me staying here without anyone to play with. So now’d be good.” A pen appears in Peter’s hand, followed by a small sheet of paper. He taps the pen on the paper, and his e-mail address, phone number, work number and physical address all appear on the paper. He hands both over to Lisa, who writes out her e-mail address normally.

“If you ever make it to the UK, give us a buzz.”

“Sure. Well, guess I’d better go and pack. See you sometime, I hope.”

“Yeah.” Peter flops back onto his bed.

“Do you think they will work it out?”

“I hope so, Lise, but, Jesus, she couldn’t have picked a worse person to reveal to.”

“I thought you lot could ‘sense’ when someone was suitable. How come she couldn’t?”

“Love is blinder than we thought, I guess. Or she was right and Daryl’ll come round. But I’m not holding my breath for that.”

“So, how soon until we do this critique show?”

“Couple of days. We’re not great, but I think we’ll do.”

“You really know how to flatter a girl, don’t you?”

“Guess so. You’re still here, after all.”

“Don’t push your luck, Tortoise Boy.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.” He yawns, and rolls over, “Night, Lisa.”

“Typical. No staying power.” Lisa grabs the zip off her dresser and unzips herself into a comfortable oversized T-shirt and panties. Not as sexy as the negligee, true, but taunting Peter further when he can’t do anything would just be too cruel. Unless he pisses me off again, anyway.

The next day dawns at around 10, too late for breakfast, so they start rehearsing, interrupted occasionally by the rumbling of their stomachs, which they do their best to ignore. Which they manage for half an hour, “Oh, this is ridiculous.” Peter mutters, his head several feet away from most of his body. His light sabre turns brilliant emerald green and slices Lisa’s hips away from her stomach. Her stomach vanishes into warm nothingness.

“Hey!! Peter!” he snaps the fingers on his hand, his light sabre hanging in the air, and his own stomach vanishes.

“Peace? I just needed a bit of quiet. I’ll put them back once we’ve had something to eat.”

“Couldn’t you just magic something up?”

“Sure, if I wanted to break the rules. Magic your own food disrupts the kitchens, so you have to pay extra and give them warning, which we didn’t.”

“Maybe not then. How long until we can get lunch?” Peter looks down, and waits as his hand floats over from his pillow to let him look at his watch. “Half an hour. We can put ourselves mostly together and when we’ve eaten, I’ll bring them back.”

“Sounds reasonable. Far too reasonable for you. What’s the catch?”

“No catch, Lise.” She raises her eyebrow, “Honest.” She keeps looking at him sceptically, “Alright, this time.”

Lisa grins, grabs an arm and drags it across the floor quite a way until Peter grabs it and pulls back. They settle on fighting over a few pieces, an arm and a leg each, Peter’s chest and Lisa’s stomach. The rest they let each other pull along unmolested.

After lunch, they stop practicing and go out poolside until dinner, after which they start practicing again, and again, and again, before they eventually collapse into bed and fall asleep fully dressed.

The next day they manage to wake up in time for breakfast, after which Peter takes Lisa to a small shop in the arcade to get costumes. He settles on a black shirt and trousers, while Lisa opts for a more traditional white leotard. “Well, I am the good guy here, remember, oh, Lord of the Sith?” She grins.

“Ok. The evening begins after dinner, so we’ll have to eat early, and I think we’ll need another practice session to sort out exactly what we’re doing.” Lisa looks at him sharply, “And we can easily do it after lunch and spend the morning outside.” He adds quickly.

“That’s better. Now pay the nice lady,” she nods to the assistant, well, half of her, anyway, behind the counter, “and let’s go.”

They spend the morning doing nothing, just lying in the sunshine, in Lisa’s case in several pieces. They take lunch late and eat it quickly, at Peter’s insistence, before returning to their room to practice. Which they spend most of the afternoon doing.

“So,” Lisa says after being reassembled for the fourth time, “what exactly happens at these things? I mean, how does it work?”

“The performers perform, the audience makes notes of what works and what doesn’t which are collected after the show. Most of the reviewers leave contact details, so you can discuss things in more depth with them if you want. That’s pretty much all there is.”

“So, what are they marking us out of?”

“Out of? Oh, nothing like that. It’s just feedback, no grades. So we’ll probably find out that we’re stiff, and the timing’s a bit off, but given we’ve only been doing this as a performance for a few days, I think that’s to be expected. It might raise a few eyebrows if anyone finds out we’re not registered, though. Especially among my Dad’s circle of friends.” He shrugs, “But that’s not going to be a problem, really.”

“Your Dad’s friends? But isn’t he...”

“They still look out for me, and keep an eye on me. I’ve been so adamant about not performing that when this gets back to me, I’m going to have letters by the score demanding to know why I changed my mind.” He shrugs again. “No worries.”

“How come I haven’t seen any of these friends before?”

“How often do you see your Dad’s friends?”

“Fair point. So how quickly do you think they’ll find out?”

“Very. I expect mail waiting for us when we get home.”

“That is quick.”

“Magicians are incorrigible gossips, Lise. Nothing travels faster than news of a new arrival, and given the stunning company I’m keeping, I reckon they’ll hear about it soon.”

“And we’ll probably receive a visit sooner or later.” He nods, “Cool. So when we going to get dinner?”

Peter looks down at his watch, and jumps up. He unzips his costume and steps out in jeans and a t-shirt. “Now.” Lisa starts to pull on her t-shirt. “No time.” Peter presses the zip onto her chest.

“Oh, right.” She pulls down, rolling up her costume as she steps out in jeans and a black top. “Let’s go, then.”

They wolf down a junk food dinner and hurry to the performance theatre, where they re-dress themselves in their costumes. Peter wipes his hands dozens of times, constantly peeking out as the tables fill up. And then it’s time. The lights dim. Peter and Lisa make it to the centre of the stage as the thick curtains rise, spotlights flashing on them. Peter swallows, takes a deep breath and begins.

“Hello. I’m Peter and my lovely companion is Lisa. Thank you for coming tonight. What we are going to perform tonight is a light sabre duel.” His light sabre leaps out red while Lisa’s shimmers blue. They clash in a hail of sparks, their sabres humming in the quiet theatre, crackling as they touch. Peter counts out the hits under his breath, getting the timing they’d agreed on, and sweeps the sabre down suddenly. Lisa’s right leg falls forward onto the stage. “The Jedi are weak, fool.” He breathes, “Join me on the dark side.”

“Never!” Lisa screams, their sabres clashing again and again as she strides forward, not slowed by her missing leg at all. Peter’s left arm drops to the stage, a shivering tickling sensation running along his shoulder.

“You shall regret that, young Jedi.” He swings his light sabre out, twisting his wrist to whip it around Lisa’s sabre, almost exactly as planned. Lisa’s other leg falls away. He reverses stroke as Lisa screams inarticulately and his scarlet blade slices her hips off. Lisa slashes down wildly and Peter’s light sabre arm separates from his body. Another apparently wild slash from Lisa skips off his blade and his arm falls away, his hand still clutching the sabre in his black glove. “You are a fool if you believe this will stop me, Jedi.” His hand buzzes around her, slashing down, up and sideways as Lisa tries desperately to fend him

off. Her arm falls away, followed swiftly by her stomach and chest. The hand holding her light sabre is sliced clean off. Peter's crimson blade settles at her throat. "The Force is weak. Prepare you join your fellow Jedi, fool."

Slowly, Lisa's arm and hand rise up off the floor and cut Peter's hips off, slicing him through the thighs, "Really, foul Lord of the Sith?" she asks as Peter stumbles back, "I think you need to look again." She hacks viciously at Peter, losing her arm as she cuts through his chest. Both light sabres swing in crackling arcs, slicing each other's heads off at almost the same moment, Peter just a little behind Lisa. Their heads and separated shoulders drop to the floor, leaving just their hands in the air. The light sabres clash a few more times before they go dark, dropping to the stage.

"Let's call it a draw." Peter's head calls as the hands, one black, and one white swoop over the stage. Peter's hand grabs his handleless arm, while Lisa drags a white leg along the floor, then they swoop for Peter's other arm. The arm rises up, tugged this way and that as the hands pull at it before Lisa's hand suddenly lets go, sending the arm and Peter's hand shooting across the stage. She grabs her arm and pulls it away as the black hand rockets back grabbing hold of her arm and pulling. Lisa jerks backwards and yanks the arm out of Peter's grip. The hands turn their stumps on each other and drag off a black leg and a white arm before they clash again on a white, ticklish stomach, a contest that resolves in Lisa's favour, with a scream of laughter and her hand and stomach dropping to the floor. Peter uses the opportunity to pull his stomach into the pile of pieces and grabs a white leg, dragging it halfway across the stage before Lisa catches him, dropping his chest onto his hand like a cartoon anvil and returning victorious with her stomach. After that, they leave each other alone to reassemble in peace. Once whole, they bow to the applause, and the curtains close. Peter takes several deep, panting breaths.

"Well, that didn't go too badly, did it?"

"Let's wait until we see the comments, shall we?"

"But what did you think?"

"I think it went pretty well, but I'm not sure how it looked to the audience, or what their reactions will be. And that's the important thing."

"But you enjoyed it, right?"

"Yeah, I enjoyed it. Maybe performing won't be so bad, but there's a huge difference between this and a full show. And that'll be the test." He peeks around the curtain. The audience has almost all filed out, leaving their comment papers in a small box by the door.

"What are we waiting for?"

"For all the forms to be filled in and put away. Then we go and get them and after that we spend a lot of time reading them and thinking about what the comments are." Lisa rolls her eyes.

"Sounds really exciting."

"Always helpful if we're going to actually do one of these for real."

"Yeah, I guess."

"That's the spirit. Let's go and find out how terrible we were." He walks over to the box and pulls out a small bag filled with folded forms.

Back in their room, the comments are pleasantly surprising. Almost all praise the originality of the show. Most point out only small flaws in the timing, and a stiffness to the performance. The vaudeville style also seemed to be popular. The major criticism of the whole performance was believability; it was far too

believable. There was no obvious way people could work out it was faked. “Why’s that a problem?”

“Because if people can’t think of a way it’s fake, they might believe it’s real.”

“It is real.”

“Remember the secrecy rule? Letting people know it’s real is the problem. So until we can work out a way of concealing the magic, we’ll have to leave this out of our shows. But I’m pretty encouraged. We weren’t as terrible as I thought we might be.”

“Nice to know you have such confidence in me.”

“I was more concerned with my performance, to be honest, Lise. You know coordination isn’t my thing.”

“So, what are we doing for the next couple of weeks, now that that’s out of the way?”

“Well, I favour lying in the sun, most of the time, and occasionally abusing your body with magic. What do you think?”

“Sounds good to me. But I want to see a proper magician perform before we go.”

“Fine. How about the night before, so we don’t tire ourselves out and miss our flight?”

“OK. Do you know who’s performing?”

“Not yet, I’ll check on the board tomorrow. Does it matter?”

“Guess not.” She looks at the papers scattered all over the room, covering their beds and most of the illusions. “Maybe we’d better tidy up. I don’t think I could sleep with all these rustling.”

“Yeah.” He waves his hand, the papers sweeping into a dozen piles, all neatly folded and in the corner, out of the way. Lisa claps softly and slowly.

“Very good, Peter. You’re going to be useful when we need to clean up.”

“We?”

“Well, you never know when you and I’ll be making a mess of your place, or mine when Ola’s away.”

“Sounds like fun.” He yawns, “But I think we’ve done enough for tonight.”

They spend the next eleven days doing not a lot more than lounging about in the sun. Some evenings they spend out, some relaxing together in front of the television, and a couple playing strip poker with the added extra of betting body parts when they ran out of clothes, which Lisa did more often than can really be expected by chance or skill with cards alone.

Soon the last day of their holiday comes, and they settle into their seats to watch the show. “Peter, what do I critique them on? I’ve never done a real show before.”

“Just think of how it looks from an audience point of view. What works as entertainment; what doesn’t; that sort of thing. Don’t worry about the lack of lights and smoke, just concentrate on the trick. Now quiet, it’s starting.” The curtains open on another young couple who introduce themselves as Eric and

Tracy in a slight West Coast accent. The first thing Eric does is ask for an audience volunteer, selecting a slightly older woman who introduces herself as Jill. The trick itself involves putting Tracy in one box and a mannequin in another (which Peter notes, even though he knows Eric will know it's a problem. Even he can see it's a problem), dressed in pink or white clothes, signed by Jill, and swapping them over between assistants. The magic word, 'Prugh', elicits a brief chuckle from Peter and he replies, "Computer geek humour. Don't worry about it." to Lisa's questioning look.

At the end Eric vanishes both Tracy and the mannequin, only to reappear them behind the screens Tracy had used to change behind and restore them to the clothes they were wearing before the trick began. Eric finishes by pulling the signed clothes out of his waistband, which both Peter and Lisa note as a nice twist to the trick. They file out with the rest of the audience, dropping their response sheets into the box as they pass.

"So, what did you think?"

"It was a neat trick. Maybe we can borrow it."

"Not for the shows we can't. New illusions like that are exclusive properties for a year, and after that, the magician who created it has rights on the license. So we'll have to wait. Anyway, who were you planning on having me swap your clothes with? They wouldn't suit me."

"I don't know. And I wasn't thinking of swapping clothes. I'm sure you could think of some interesting things we could swap like that rather than clothes."

Peter arches a pale eyebrow. "I'm sure I could. But for now, I think we'd better pack. We've got an early flight tomorrow, after all."

"I suppose." She leans against him as they walk across the plaza towards the hotel. "But I don't know how you're going to top this for my birthday."

Peter grins, kissing her forehead. "Don't worry, Lise, I promise you I have something in mind you'll love."

"You know Carrie's going to be with us, at least for some of the time?"

"I told you, don't worry. I've got you a normal present you can show off to Carrie, and I can give you your real presents once she's gone."

Lisa snuggles closer against him. "Sounds good to me, magic man o' mine. And if you're very good, I might even drop your ban early."

"That's not fair, Lisa. You know you like me better when I'm bad."

"I know. Now I'm seeing if you can be good when you have to be." A dim halo appears above Peter's head.

"I'll have to try hard then, won't I?"

"I guess you will." She kisses him lightly on the cheek.

Author's note: Thanks go to Keith Moe(galapagos0401) for creating Eric and Tracy, and for using my characters in his story, Magical Honeymoon. I am now returning the favour, and giving the story of Peter

and Lisa's visit to Shecky's. I hope I've treated his characters as well as he did mine.



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