

THE MUMMY'S CURSE

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Peter rubs his sweaty palms on his jeans. *What am I so nervous about? We've been out together before. Hell, we've slept together before. Nothing to worry about.* His hands don't seem to get the message so he wipes them again and rings the doorbell. The door opens and the dark face behind splits in a huge grin of pearly teeth.

"Ooooh, are those for me?" Ola asks, her dark eyes glancing at the bouquet of red roses and heart-shaped box of chocolates in his hand.

"Sorry, Ola." He kisses her forehead, "But you know Lisa would emasculate me if I tried anything with her best friend."

"Damn right!" a voice calls from Lisa's bedroom, "I'll be out in a minute. And if I find any lipstick on him, O, you are in real trouble."

"Yeah, yeah. Come on, Handsome; let's get you settled. She'll be hours yet."

"Will not!" Lisa calls from behind her door. Ola keeps grinning, leading Peter into the lounge.

"You want a glass of wine before you two lovebirds embark on your Valentine's night debauchery?"

"Thanks. But we're just going for a simple meal and a creature feature night at the cinema."

"You're going to a creature feature on Valentine's Day?!"

"Why not? The cinema's just as dark and cosy if it's screening the Curse of the Mummy or Pretty Woman. And we can avoid a bit of the soppy stuff every other place in the western world is probably going to be offering."

"And Lisa knows about this?"

"Sort of."

"Sort of? She knows you're going out, but she doesn't know where?" Peter shifts in the sofa. Ola's grin turns impish. "She is sooo going to kill you when she finds out. What you gonna offer me to not tell her?"

"What would you like?"

"Well, I've always been partial to the little things, gold, diamonds, that sort of thing."

"Not a chance. If all my girlfriend gets is roses and chocolates, her flatmate isn't getting anything that nice."

"Oh, all right." Ola pouts, "I'll settle for a kiss."

"I'm not that suicidal, either. Would a peck on the cheek and letting you watch when I tell her be enough?"

"Oh, all right." She leans forward and Peter kisses her lightly on the cheek.

"What are you two up to in there?"

“Nothing, Lise. Just talking.”

“You’d better be. ‘Cause I’m ready.” She walks out. Peter whistles. She’s wearing a sleek backless black silk dress with a swooping neckline. Her hair gleams like polished copper, a single ruby in a silver teardrop necklace hanging on her pale chest. She looks at Peter, in his jeans and sweatshirt. “I think,” she says carefully, “one of us has made a mistake.” The tone is quite clear. She has not made a mistake; Peter may have made a fatal one.

“I don’t think so, Lise. I’m sure the people down the Coliseum will be happy to see you.”

“The Coliseum? Your plan for a Valentine’s date is to go to a cheap, run down cinema that specialises in old horror films?”

“Something like that, yeah.”

“I see.”

“You’ll love it, Lise. Trust me.” Lisa smiles. It is not a pleasant smile.

“Oh, I’m sure I will. And then, once I’ve fully ‘enjoyed’ it, you are going to pay. Believe me, Peter, you are going to pay.”

“Do you want to change?”

“What? And miss the first showing of Dracula, Lord of the Vampires? Don’t be silly. Let’s go. Don’t wait up, O. And if the police call, you didn’t see him tonight. He never showed up and you don’t know what happened to him.”

“No problem. You two be good.” Peter smiles at her, “OK, try, at least.”

“Come on, Peter. Mustn’t keep the monsters waiting.”

Outside, Lisa turns bright emerald eyes on him, “Now, were you serious in there? Do you really plan on taking me to the Coliseum?”

“Yeah, but I planned on taking you out to dinner first.” Lisa looks him over.

“Where? I’m not in the mood for takeaway.”

“You underestimate me, Lise.” He pulls a zipper out of his pocket and places it on the neck of his sweatshirt. Lisa watches as he pulls the zipper all the way down and steps out in a dinner jacket, complete with black cummerbund and bow-tie, the latter with his trademark silver diamond on it. “I just wanted to see your face.” He rolls up his old clothes and slips them inside his jacket, where they promptly vanish. “Now let’s get going, I’m freezing out here and you’re not exactly dressed warmly.” He opens the door to his car and helps her in.

“So, where are we going? Or do you want to surprise me again?”

“We’re going to a good restaurant and on to the Coliseum.”

“Another Italian place where the owner knows you?”

“Fraid not. This is just a good restaurant I know.”

The meal passes quickly, in small talk and some moaning about work (as is traditional), and, once Peter’s overdraft is nearly exhausted, they leave.

In the small car, Peter unzips his suit and shuffles out into jeans and a black jumper. “Oh, I wish I could do that. This dress is lovely, but it’s not warm. And it’s not the sort of thing you go to the cinema in.”

“Not a problem.” He pulls another zip from his pocket and gently puts it on the top of her breastbone, just under her necklace. “Just unzip yourself and concentrate on what you want to be wearing, and you will be.” Lisa pulls the zip down and steps out in jeans and a ribbed sweatshirt.

“What about this?” she points to her discarded dress, now complete with flesh-coloured arms, legs and chest, like a body-stocking. “And is that really my skin on it?”

“Yup. But you’ve magically regrown some more to cover it. When you get home, put on the dress and zip up and you’ll be able to take it off normally. In the meantime, just roll it up and put it in the glove box for now. You can put it back on on the way back. And now,” he grins, “classic horror awaits.”

“I still can’t believe this is your idea of a good Valentine’s date.” She cocks her head very slightly, “Wait, yes I can. It’s exactly the sort of thing you’d do on Valentine’s Day.” Peter grins. “And that smile means you’ve got something else planned for me, too. Come on, Peter, spit it out. What do you have planned?”

“Uh-uh. Movies first, then magic.” Lisa smirks

“So, you admit you have something planned?”

“Course I have. This is Valentine’s Day, after all, when you try and make your love happy. And I know you love me for my magic, so…”

“I don’t just love you for your magic.”

“I know, but you still love the magic.” He pulls into a side street, “Now, come on, the Coliseum’s only a few minutes away.

They just make the showing of ‘The Curse of Mummy’. Lisa manages not to giggle at the bandage-wrapped figure shuffling through the black-and-white pyramids in search of the thieves who defiled its tomb. She enjoys the film, but it’s just so silly. She can’t believe it was ever considered scary. After the film reel rattles off, Lisa leans in close to him. “Why did you want to see this?” she whispers.

“I like it. And besides I thought I’d give you an idea what I’ve got planned when we get home.” He whispers back as they leave the Coliseum.

“What? You’re going to have an ancient Egyptian pharaoh chase me around the house?” she giggles.

“Not quite.” Peter replies as he opens the door for her. “But something like that.”

“And if I refuse?”

“If you refuse, I’ll take you home. But you won’t.”

“Why?”

“Trust me.” Lisa snorts.

“Not until Satan starts skating to work.”

“That’s quite a long time.”

“I know.” Peter feigns a look of hurt innocence.

He pulls into the road by his flat half an hour after leaving the Coliseum. He keeps the engine running for the heater, “So, do you want to come up, or shall I take you home?”

“I’ll come up. But you’re going to tell me what you’re going to do before I agree to it.”

“Am I?”

“Yup.” Peter shrugs and opens the door.

“Don’t forget your dress.” Lisa pulls the roll out of the glove compartment and follows him up.

“OK, Peter, what are you planning?” Peter gestures at a sarcophagus in black with the features picked out in red. On its chest, between the clasped hands is a silver diamond. “OK. I get in there; you close the door; then what? I disappear?”

“Not immediately.”

“Quit being so bloody cryptic, will you? Believe me it is not an endearing trait!”

“OK. I push this” He pulls out a frame, filled with sharp spikes a little longer than the sarcophagus is deep, “through the sarcophagus.”

“And me.”

“And you. Then you step out, I vanish you and bring you back.”

“What’s the catch?”

“Why would there be a catch?”

“Because it’s you. There’s always a catch with you and your magic.”

“You’ll just have to trust me. At least enough to get in the sarcophagus.”

“OK. But if you try anything...”

“I won’t do anything terrible to you, Lisa. You know that.”

“I know.” *But I’m not going to let you do anything to me without a fight.*

“So, if you would...” Lisa backs into the sarcophagus. “Good. Just fold your arms over like the imprint on the front.” Lisa crosses her arms. “Excellent. See you in a bit, for a little while at least.” He closes the lid of the sarcophagus. Lisa hears him wheeling the rack of blades around, but the thick walls muffle it. She feels dozens of pricks all over the back of her body and the spikes slowly sink into her back, a hot dry feeling, like a soft desert wind, pushing ahead of them. She tries to open her eyes, but can’t. She can’t move at all as the spikes push out through her body. She concentrates on what she’s feeling as hundreds of sharp stakes puncture every part of her body. She also feels something like thick gauze pressing around her head and over her hands. Her clothes feel tight, so she assumes it’s around her body too. *He’s turned me into the mummy!* She smiles around the spikes piercing her mouth. The lid of the sarcophagus moves away. Lisa feels Peter reaching inside, gently pulling her bandage-wrapped body off the spikes. As the spikes recede a sensation like warm honey fills her up. Her forehead crinkles. *What’s he up to?*

“How familiar are you with ancient Egyptian burial practices, Lisa?” she tries to answer, or to protest about her inability to see, but she finds her mouth dry and her tongue as immobile as the rest of her.

“You’re probably going to say that they bandaged them up. Which is true. But first, they removed all the person’s internal organs so they wouldn’t spoil the process. And then they put them in ceramic jars, along

with their eyes and tongue.”

*“He wouldn’t have... Hell, yes he would. When he brings me back, I am going to kill him. Slowly. No, very slowly. No, not just very slowly, there’ll be another ice age before I’m finished with him.”*

“Don’t worry, Lise. Everything’s going to plan.” Lisa hears a ceramic jar lid being prised off and light floods into her eyes. She tries to blink but can’t. Peter reaches into the jar and holds her eyeballs in his hands, gently turning them to face her body. If she could, Lisa would gasp as she stares through her disembodied eyes at the shrunken, bandaged form. “I’m just going to vanish your body now, Lise. When it comes back, you’ll be completely back to normal. No tricks.” He very gently takes his hand away from her eyes, leaving them hovering in the air as he unwraps the end of the bandages. He takes a firm grip on the bandage and jerks his arm back violently. Lisa’s body spins wildly, like the mummies always do in cartoons. Lisa feels her body disintegrating under the violent treatment, a small dry brushing rubbing over her skin as it flakes away and moving deeper. When the last of the bandages unwrap, she stares down at the tiny pile of dust that remains of her body. Peter sweeps up the dust, brushing it into a small jar, which he promptly screws shut. He returns her eyes to the jar, and proceeds to put all the jars, along with the bandages and her dress, back into the sarcophagus. He closes the lid, raps sharply on the image of Lisa and pulls it away.

Lisa leaps out of the sarcophagus, her eyes blazing. She stops just short of hitting him, and that’s only because she’s too busy gaping at the scene around her. She’s actually in Egypt. She’s at the foot of the Pyramids, and Peter has a small table set up with a white cloth laid over it. A bottle of red wine is opened on the table, beside a tall, narrow white candle and a vase of white roses. Lisa looks down and finds her back in her slinky black dress, while Peter is in his tuxedo. “What?! Where? How?”

“I arranged things so that we could have a quick holiday over the weekend. You like?” Lisa glares greatswords at him (like looking daggers only much worse). “What’s wrong, Lise?”

“What’s wrong?! What’s wrong?! How about you ripping out my fucking eyes?!”

“I’ve done w...”

“No, you haven’t! The other stuff wasn’t like this; this was, was...” she gropes for the right word, “terrifying! I couldn’t move! I couldn’t talk! I couldn’t even see most of the time! I didn’t have a clue what you were doing!! I was totally fucking helpless!!!”

“Jeez, Lisa, I am so sorry. I didn’t think you’d take it so badly. I was just trying to set things up for this.”

“I’ll say you didn’t think! Didn’t you, just once, for one fucking second, consider that I might be just a bit worried when I couldn’t move?”

“You couldn’t move when I sawed you, either.”

“But I knew that was going to happen! I had a reason it was going to happen! I had accepted it! This time, I just couldn’t move!!”

“Did you think I’d leave you like that?” Lisa calms down a little bit, enough to feel her nails digging little crescents into the palms of her hands.

“No, yes, yes, I did, for a bit. I was shit scared because I didn’t know what you were doing and I couldn’t do anything about it. I know you wouldn’t do something like that, but I was still panicking.” She takes several deep breaths, the cold, dry air making her shiver, “Don’t do anything like that to me again, Peter. Just don’t. Ever. Not without warning me first. And I mean before I start the illusion, not ten seconds before you do it anyway.”

“No problem, Lisa. I really didn’t know it would affect you like this. You don’t think I’d do something

like this to you deliberately, do you?”

“No. No, I don’t. I know you’re a devious bastard and you’ll always put in an extra twist on whatever I agree to, but I trust you not to torture me.”

“That’s a relief. Do you want me to take you back home now? I don’t think you really want to be around me at the moment.” Lisa looks up.

“What about how much this cost you?”

“I’ll cope. Trust me, Lise, I can afford this. After all, the airfare was free. So, you want to go home?”

“No. I’ll stay. I’ve never been to Egypt. But no magic while we’re here. I just need some time to recover from that.”

“No magic. Not a problem. Until we leave Egypt on Sunday, you’re safe from me.”

“Right. And I believe that because...” Peter looks really hurt, “Kidding. You know I trust you, right?”

“You keep saying you don’t.”

“And you know I don’t mean it.”

“Yeah, most of the time, anyway.”

“Good. Now that that’s settled, is this all for show,” she gestures at the table, “or is there food coming? After what you just put me through, I’m starving!”



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