

WHOOOPS

or

THE SHOW MUST GO ON, RIGHT?

By pwatson1974

The spotlight shines down on the stage, to where a young man with sandy hair is looking rather nervously out, his jeans and t-shirt not what the crowd is expecting from 'Faustus the Great'. There is a low mutter from the crowd, "Uhm, good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm afraid there's been something of a, uhm, hiccup with the performance tonight." The muttering grows louder. "Don't worry, there will be a magic show tonight, but, well, you see, our van got lost on the way here. And, uhm, it contained all the equipment we were going to use for the show." The muttering is now very loud, "And, uhm, most of my team of assistants." Now the crowd is starting to get angry. "But as the old saying goes, the show must go on. And even if it didn't say that, Dave the manager isn't going to pay us unless we put on something so, could you give a big hand for the one assistant who didn't go out shopping this afternoon and couldn't remember the way back..., the lovely Jackie!"

Jackie walks on stage right, her jeans faded, a dark black t-shirt emblazoned with "St Patrick's Day 2004" hanging shapelessly around her. Her red hair is cut short, spiky strands falling over her forehead, her green eyes shining in the spotlight. She gives the audience her best smile nonetheless, and is rewarded with half-hearted applause.

"Uhm, obviously our costumes were in the van, too." Paul explains sheepishly. "And, uhm, I'm going to have to borrow some stuff from the audience to do any tricks with the lovely Jackie. So, does anyone have a penknife, or a handkerchief, or a ring, or a couple of dollars, or all of them?" the crowd is quiet, "C'mon, you will get them back in one piece and without them we can't do anything interesting." The crowd remains silent.

"How much do you need?" a voice calls from offstage.

"A couple of bills is all. And a hanky. After people see a trick, I think we might get some more help. Right?" he looks hopefully at the audience. A few, sporadic 'right's answer him. "See?"

"Fine. But I'd better get them back." Jackie disappears offstage towards the voice and returns with a pair of crumpled dollar bills.

"Thanks, Dave. You're a lifesaver. A round of applause for Dave the manager, please." Paul starts the clapping, which slowly spreads around the small theatre. "Now, I just need a..."

"Oh, fer God's sake, take mine." Jackie sighs, her Irish lilt filled with exasperation as she hands over a small crumpled piece of cloth.

"Excellent." He takes the handkerchief, unfolding it. He looks from it to Jackie and back again. "It's a little small for what we need, though."

"Just get on with it, will ye?"

"Ok, ok." He holds the handkerchief out between his thumbs and forefingers, turning it back and forth to prove it's just an ordinary handkerchief. "Now, observe closely, ladies and gentlemen." He folds it up and starts to unfold it, keeping opening the cloth up until he's holding a piece of cloth the size of a sheet between his arms. "Almost big enough. Jackie, could you go and grab someone from the audience to help with this?"

“Sure.” She walks out, her hips swaying as she sashays down the steps, an effect that would look a lot better in her assistant’s costume than her normal clothes, but still draws the eyes of the largely male audience. “Well, han’some,” she stops at a table, talking to a well-muscled young man with cropped dark hair, the edges of a tattoo just pushing out of his stretched t-shirt, “do you want to help me out here?”

“Sure.” He gets up, his mates whistling as Jackie leads him onto the stage, none of them paying any attention to the cat-like eyes gleaming at him.

Paul holds out his hand, pulling the sheet with it, “Uhm, right.” He pulls his hand back, to a certain amount of laughter and folds it over his hand, reaching out to shake the man’s hand, again. “And you are?”

“Vince, Vince Zucko.” He replies, smiling a perfect white smile. His table cheers.

“Friends of yours, Vince?”

“Yeah, they work with me on the site.”

“What do you do, exactly, Vince Zucko?”

“I’m in construction.”

Paul shakes his head, turning towards Jackie. “What is it with you and construction workers? I swear she either chooses them or barmen every time.” The audience laugh at that, laughing even more when they notice Jackie’s scowl. They laugh even louder as Paul turns towards her, and the scowl becomes a dazzling, professional smile. “Now, Vince, I want you to hold this up so Jackie’s hidden from the rest of the audience. And no peeking.” He hands Vince the sheet and helps him unfurl it. He turns to the audience, “Now, just checking for legal reasons, is everyone here over eighteen?”

“Why?” Jackie’s voice comes back full of suspicion from behind the sheet.

“Trust me, J.”

“Not bloody likely.”

“Fine. Be that way.” He reaches behind the sheet and whips out Jackie’s t-shirt.

“Hey!!”

“Ok, Vince. Could you lower the sheet a bit, just so our audience can see...”

“You bastard! I haven’t got anything on under that!”

“Whoops. You’d better stop there, Vince.” Vince stops, the sheet lowered to Jackie’s shoulders, her face looking like thunder.

“You...are...sooooo...dead, Mister! There won’t be enough left of you to identify with genetic testing!”

“Well, as I’m already dead. I can’t make things any worse for myself, can I?” he winks at the audience, reaches in and emerges with Jackie’s faded jeans. Jackie shivers. Paul keeps reaching in, quickly pulling out Jackie’s trainers and socks. He reaches in again.

“You do, and you’ll regret it.” Jackie warns, glaring daggers at him.

“Why?”

“You’ll see. Believe me, you’ll see.”

“Don’t believe you.” Jackie squeals as Paul pulls her panties out, dropping them on the ground with the rest of her clothes. “Ok, Vince. Drop the sheet.”

Vince looks to Jackie.

“You didn’t pick a chivalrous one, did you, Jackie?”

The crowd starts calling on Vince to drop the sheet, his mates cheering him on the loudest. He looks around, and then back at her, trying to decide what to do.

“You’re verra sweet, Vince, but it’s fine. Trust me.” She breathes, still somehow managing to glare at Paul.

Vince takes his cue and drops the sheet, revealing Jackie wearing a dollar-bill motif bikini, an emerald stud gleaming in her navel. She smiles at the audience, turns her back on Paul and wraps her arms around Vince’s neck, coiling her leg around his as she reaches up to kiss him. The audience is cheering and whistling at this, the loudest catcalls coming from Vince’s friends.

Jackie eventually breaks the kiss, unpeeling her body from Vince.

“Well, I promised you a show tonight, didn’t I?” Paul turns to the audience, receiving his laugh. “Even if that wasn’t what I had in mind.”

“Aww, ye’re jest jealous.” Jackie smiles, still leaning into Vince.

“I won’t even dignify that with an answer.”

“Get on with it!” someone calls from the crowd.

“Thank you, Statler? Or is it Waldorf.” The audience chuckle, “But, I suppose you guys are paying for a magic show, so, we shall now cut Jackie in half.” He pauses, “As soon as I can find a saw. I don’t suppose anyone in the audience has one to hand?” he looks towards Vince’s table, “Any of the construction boys bring your tools with them?”

“Yeah, but you’re talking to them.” Vince says behind him, provoking laughter in the crowd and assorted gestures and anatomically impossible suggestions from the table.

“Ok. No saw. And you, I’ll do the comedy around here, ok?”

Vince shrugs.

“Ok, we’ll have to be inventive then.” He pauses, trying to look thoughtful. “Does anyone have any string, thread or rope on them?” again, the audience is silent. “You’re not making this easy, you know?” he turns to his assistant, “Sorry about this, Jackie.”

“Sorry? What for?”

“I just thought of the perfect place to get thread from.”

“Where?” Jackie asks, looking at him suspiciously. Paul reaches out, taking a pinching one hair falling over her forehead. “What are ye up to?” Paul pulls on the hair and keeps pulling.

“Here, hold this, would you?” he passes one end to Vince and keeps pulling until Vince holds a single thread of hair in his hands, a few dozen feet long, and Jackie is as bald as the proverbial billiard ball. She reaches up, patting her head.

“Ye’d better put tha’ back when ye’re finished.”

“It could have been worse, you know. I could have taken the thread from your costume.” Paul replies offhandedly as he takes the hair, folding and braiding the hair into one string. Jackie sticks her tongue out at him. “Hands up, please.”

Jackie raises her hands and Paul wraps the coppery thread around her waist, looping it around her. He gives one end of the thread to Vince and turns to the audience. “Now, I’m sure you’ve all seen a wire cutting through a slab of cheese. This is the magician’s version. Vince and I will pull and the thread will cut through Jackie leaving her in two pieces.” Jackie looks dubious. “Ready, Vince?”

“Ready.” Vince takes a tighter hold on the thread.

“On 3. 1...2...3!” both men pull. Jackie gives a little yelp as the thread slides through her. There is a twang as it emerges at the top of her bikini and pulls taut. The audience holds its breath. Nothing happens.

“So, what’s supposed to happen?” Vince asks. Paul looks up from coiling the thread of hair.

“Well, she’s supposed to be in two pieces.” He tosses the loop of hair around his shoulder and walks up to Jackie. Paul wraps her arms around Jackie’s waist and lifts, leaving a clear gap between her top and bottom halves. The audience gasps, and begin to applaud. “And it looks like that worked.” To complete the illusion, he lowers her to the floor, resting her on her waist. “Of course, with only one assistant tonight, I can’t waste her by leaving her like this.”

“Just remember to put the hair back.”

“Fine.” He slips the loop off his shoulder, piling it on Jackie’s waist. Her legs shift from one to the other.

“That tickles.”

“Vince, could you put Jackie back together?”

“Huh?” Vince looks up, “Oh, right.” He bends down, taking a firm grip on Jackie’s waist and lifting her up. “What about the hair? Won’t it get in the way?”

“Leave that to me. Lower away.”

Vince hesitates.

“Do it.” Jackie whispers, “He usually knows what he’s doing.”

Vince lowers her down. The hair vanishes under her torso, her body shivering, a cockeyed smile on her face as the halves merge. Jackie pats her head, grinning broadly as she finds her hair back in place, tickling as it weaves through her scalp.

“You can let go now, Vince.”

Vince yanks his hands away from Jackie as if he’d been shocked, a sheepish smile creeping onto his flushed face. His table erupts into catcalls.

“For my next trick involving Jackie, I’ll need a bottle of beer. Vince, could you go and get me one from the bar? I promise to pay you back when Dave pays us after the show.” Paul winks with exaggerated conspiratoriness at the audience. “Don’t let them open it.”

“Sure.” Vince walks to the bar.

“Ok, while he’s busy we’ll get ready for the neck trick. Jackie, could you lie down, please?”

She does, holding her arms by her side. Paul whips the sheet out, covering her. As Vince returns, the sheet starts to rise into the air and as Vince returns to the stage, Paul whips away the sheet to reveal Jackie lying rigidly on thin air at about waist height. She smiles up at Vince.

“Excellent. Just put the bottle on the floor under Jackie.”

Vince kneels down and sets the bottle under Jackie.

“Enjoy the view down there?” she whispers as he gets back up and Paul fiddles with the exact placement of the bottle.

“Ready?”

“Ge’ on wi’ it!” Jackie sighs.

Slowly Jackie lowers down, until her back is resting on the bottle cap. She shivers, “Ohhh, cold!” The audience giggle. “It’s not...” she gasps, not completing the sentence as she drops sharply to the stage. The audience gasps. “Ye could ha’ warned me!”

“And take away all the fun?” Paul grins, reaching down to help her up, the neck of bottle pushed through her navel, the concave base pushing out her back. “Vince, would you care to do the honours?”

“What?”

Paul indicates the bottle. “Pull it out. Not as classy as a sword from a stone, I grant you, but...”

Vince gingerly takes hold of the short neck emerging, his hands brushing against Jackie’s stomach, evoking a quiet, distracting purr. He pulls slowly, obviously afraid to pull too fast. Jackie’s smile grows wider as the glass rubs through her body, until, with a soft ‘pop’ Vince pulls it free.

“I proclaim you ‘King of Beer’.” Paul says solemnly. He takes the bottle and pops the cap off with his thumb, amid a few giveaway sparks. “Here. I can’t drink on duty.”

“Why not?”

“Do you know what the penalty for being drunk in charge of a handsaw is?” the audience laughs. Vince drains the bottle quickly, only then noticing a rattle coming from it.

“What’s that?”

Jackie looks in the bottle and immediately feels around her navel, “Hey! That’s mine!” Paul tips the bottle and Jackie’s navel jewellery slides out into her hand. “Eeewwwww! You don’t think I’m putting that back now, do you? It’s not sanitary.”

“Suit yourself.” He turns to the audience, “Now, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention, but I’m afraid I’ve only got one trick left.” silence, “You’re supposed to go ‘awwwww’ at that point.” Laughter, “Vince, could you stay up here and make sure everything is above board?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Good.” He once again throws the sheet over Jackie, completely hiding her under it. He puts the empty bottle on the stage and covers it with a handkerchief. “Girl, bottle, bottle, girl.”

“Enough with the Tommy Cooper impressions.” A muffled voice comes from under the sheets. “Ye’re no

good a' them."

"Be like that." He whips the sheet away, revealing empty air underneath. "Ta-daaa!" the audience applauds. "It's not over yet." He pulls the handkerchief off the bottle revealing Jackie inside, hands on hips and looking a little put out.

"Oh, marvellous." She squeaks.

"And that concludes the show, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you." The audience applauds. "Vince, come round back after the show and we'll sort out what I owe you for the beer."

"Uh, sure." Vince walks back to his table, and the laughter of his mates, as Paul exits the stage, carrying the bottle, and Jackie, lazily by one hand.

Half an hour later, Vince knocks on the dressing room door, the white paint cracked and peeling. "Yeah?"

"It's, uhm, me, uhm, Vince Zucko? You said you wanted to see me afterwards?"

"Sure. Come in, Vince."

Vince opens the door, stepping into the small changing room, "How much do I owe you?" he pulls out a five-dollar bill.

"Uhm, where's Jackie?"

Paul grins, and holds up the bottle. "Right here."

"Hi, Vince." Jackie smiles in the glass, waving at him.

"You're still in there?"

"Looks like."

"You're alright?"

"Never better. Ye wouldna' believe how good this sort of thing feels."

"Vince, Vince..." Paul waves the bill around, drawing Vince's eyes from the bottle. "We've got a proposal for you."

"Proposal?"

"Yup. We're going to let you choose how we pay you."

"Huh?"

"You get the money," Paul holds up the bill.

"or ye get to keep the bottle fer the night."

"Why would I want an empty bottle?" Vince asks.

Jackie rolls her eyes, "Is the bottle empty a' the moment?"

“Well, no...” Realisation finally dawns. “You mean...”

“Ye can take his money, or ye can get the bottle, an’ contents, fer the night. Ye’re choice.”

“That’s a choice?”

“Well, I hope ye’re not too conflicted.” Jackie admits, posing seductively.

“I’ll take the bottle.”

“Tha’s my boy.” She grins as Paul hands over it over. Vince looks down at the bottle and the tiny woman inside.

“Uhm, how do I get her out?”

“Honestly, ha’ ye never read Aladdin?” Jackie sighs, “Jes’ rub the damn thin’!”

“Oh, right.” He rubs the edge of the bottle and Jackie vanishes, green smoke pouring out of the bottle. The smoke rises up into a slim column and condenses into Jackie’s smiling figure, glad in translucent green pantaloons, harem slippers and a strip of dark green across her chest. She presses her hands together and bows slightly.

“How may I serve ye, Master?”

“M-Master?”

“Jes’ fer the night. So we’d best get goin’. See you tomorrow, boss.” She waves and dissolves into smoke, swirling back into the bottle. Vince stares down, mouth hanging open, “Well, don’t just stand there like a great galla, get movin’!”

Vince moves.

The next morning Jackie returns to the Tardis early, carefully unlocking the door. “Morning.”

“What are you up so early for, Paul?”

“Just finishing something up.”

“Oh, what? Something new for us?”

“Well, not for you yet.”

“Awww.” Jackie pouts, her lower lip trembling.

“Come have a look.”

Jackie walks into the living room, her genie costume replaced by a green skirt and crop-top, her trainers quiet on the carpet. Inside she sees Paul fiddling with a large glass tank. “When did we get an aquarium?”

“Heh. We haven’t.”

“So what’s tha’ then?”

“Come closer.”

Jackie peers into the glass, and giggles, looking at the four tiny figures inside. “You shrank them?”

“Yup. I think this should teach them not to screw up a job like that. And they’ll stay like this for a month, except for the shows. No magic. No going out. No extra-curricular.” The cries from inside the tank rise in volume. “Unlike some people...”

“Ye’re jes’ jealous it wasn’t you.”

“True.” He reaches over and kisses Jackie’s side.

“Hmmm. Not right now, boss. I got more than enough last night. God, I love construction boys,” she smiles and shivers, “so much stamina.” She smiles down at the inch-high figures, “Can I play with them?”

“Yes. But...”

“We’ll get you back, you vicious cow! As soon as we get back to normal size.”

“Promises, promises, Petra.” Jackie reaches in, plucking the tiny woman out. “Just for that, I’ll start with you.” She pulls out her skirt and the front of her panties, dropping Petra into them. “Enjoy.”

“You bitch! I’ll get you for...”

“Mmmm.” Jackie wriggles, “That feels good.”

Of course, the month was eventually up and the girls haven’t missed a show since. Even if Marcel has to carry them out of the shops over his shoulders to get them back in time.



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