

HEAD
A TWISTED TALE OF LOVE
by pwatson1974

“Hey, hey, everyone settle down, settle down! Now, I know it's traditional for the best man to be giving the speech, but I hope you won't mind if I embarrass myself for a change. Jim, you can do that next time. ...Stop laughing! That wasn't what I meant! Honey, it really wasn't. Ok, now that I've committed a very public suicide, and you lot have stopped laughing, I can start the story of how we came to be here today, honouring my lovely wife and I! And that was your cue to bloody cheer! “Like most good love stories, this one started in my foolish youth, when I was just starting out and thought having my girlfriend be part of the act would be a really good idea...”

During the foolish days of youth, “And this is what we'll close with.” the young man said, gesturing expansively at the guillotine, the triangular blade gleaming, the dark wood serving as a nice contrast to the brightness of the blade.

“Wow. Impressive. It looks dangerous.” his companion gasped, dark mahogany hair tumbling in thick curls over her shoulders.

“It does, doesn't it? Don't worry, it's not. Not when I'm around, anyway.”

She nodded, but her dark eyes never left the gleaming blade, absently chewing on her lower lip.

“You don't trust me, do you?”

She smiled nervously, “Oh, I do, I do. I mean, you've shown me a lot of really neat tricks, but this is, well, it's major. And potentially, you know, fatal.”

“Ok, watch. I'm sure my dad left them over here.” he walked off into the back, returning shortly with a mannequin under his arm. He quickly locked the mannequin into place, and undid the rope. The blade dropped an inch or so. “Ready?” he didn't wait for an answer, releasing the blade, the arms trembling as it slams down and through the mannequin's neck. The head stared into the basket, stubbornly refusing to fall. “See? I know what I'm doing.”

“Ok, ok. This is just new to me...”

He smiled, raising the blade and moving the undamaged mannequin out of the way. “Your turn.”

She gulped, nervously twirling her hair as she lay down on the padded bench, sticking her neck into the hole, pulling her hair through. She could feel her heart racing, working to keep the shiver hidden.

“This is going to be so cool.” he lowered the lunette, the lock clicking into place.

She pushed up against the top, but the wooden frame doesn't budge. She forced a smile, “Here goes nothin'...”

“Ready?” He untied the rope, the blade settling a little.

Her dark brown eyes closed. She took a breath and held it. “Ready.”

The blade rattled down the arms, the lunette shaking as the blade hit, the cold metal punching through her throat. She gave a gasp and her eyes flashed open. “Did it work?” she took another breath and rolled her eyes as she felt the blade inside her neck, “Never mind.”

“Did that hurt, Beth?”

“No!” she flashed him a broad, gleaming smile, “Not at all!”

“Cool! Always nice not to behead your girlfriend. Now just stay there. I thought up something really great to finish off with, though. Really make it unique.”

“Um, okay. What?”

“Well, if cover you with the cloth and then, you know, vanish your body, the audience'll go nuts. Then we bring you back. Audience on their feet, and us with an instant reputation.” he paused, grinning down at her, his pale eyes shining, “What do you think?”

“Uh, i-if you think you can do it...”

"Such little faith in your magician." he sighed heavily, "Of course I can do it."

"Ok, Ben, if you're sure."

"Great." he leant down, kissing her, his face alight, "This will be soooo cool." He grabbed the black blanket from the shelf, shaking it out. He flung it out, letting the cloth settle over Beth's prone body. Ben stepped up, tucking the sheet around her, making sure her body was clearly visible under the cloth.

"Hey! Watch it, buster!" Beth called out as he tucked it around her chest, "This isn't the after-show, y'know!"

Ben put on an offended look, even though she can't see him, stroking his hand over her cheeks through the cloth, "If you keep this up, I'll leave you as just a head. My own personal blow-job machine."

The cloth moved a little as she shrugs, "Well, there are worse fates." she giggled, the cloth shaking around her, "You could mount me on the wall like a deer head. Bet I'd be quite a conversation starter."

"Hm... Not a bad idea. Wonder how much I could get for you on eBay."

"With a tag of 'RARE! Personal Blow-Job Machine!', I'd imagine quite a bit." she chuckled,

"Anywho..."

"Anywho..." Ben yanked away the cloth, revealing the empty bascule. Beth cooed as she felt her body sliding away into a warm nothingness. Her coo turned into a gasp as she felt a tugging at the base of her neck before she felt nothing at all.

"So, I guess it worked?"

"Of course it worked. And now, to restore you." he leant in, whispering in her ear, "And get to the after-show." he flung the cloth out, letting it settle over the empty wood.

"And now the true motivation shines through. I'd better still have clothes this time."

"Hey! That only happened once! And I'd have thought you'd be pleased that I want to get my hands on your body. Means I won't do anything to risk it."

"True enough. Hey, my neck's starting to hurt. Probably should wrap this up."

"Sure, sure. Ta-daaa!" he yanked the cloth away to reveal, nothing.

"Um..."

He quickly placed the cloth back and whisked it away. Again, nothing. "Uhm..." he tried a third time with the same result. "Ok, there must be something obvious going on here."

"Um, is there a problem?"

"Um, you, uh, you don't seem to be coming back." he tried yet again, and, after getting the same result, he started to examine the cloth.

"I'm gathering that. How do you plan on fixing it?"

"It should work. It's simple!"

"But...it's not..."

"No, it's not."

Beth gritted her teeth, "Ummm, could we move my head, at least? It's starting to cramp up...my neck."

"Uhm, I don't know." he looked around the room as if the answers would appear on the walls, "I'm not sure if taking it off without your, uhm, body is, you know, a good idea. I'll give dad a call. He might know."

"Geez, is it technically even still on my body?" she winced, "When we do this again, we need to fix this thing for better comfort."

"Uh, yeah, when we do this trick again." he folded up the blanket slipping it under her chin, fumbling for his cellphone as he paced around.

A couple of minutes later, he walked back towards her, snapping the phone shut. "Ok, good news, he says moving your head won't be a problem."

"Oh, thank goodness."

"He also says he'll be down as soon as he can to fix things."

"Oh, that's, wait, did he say when he'd be down?"

"Uhm, well," he scratched the back of his head, looking away, "he and mom are busy with the show and he can't really back out, so..."

"So?" her eyebrow arched.

"Well, he should be back, sort of, well, sort of, Sunday."

"Sunday????!!!! I'm going to have to stay like this for a whole week! What am I supposed to do????!!!"

"Uhm," he smiled weakly, "personal blow-job machine?"

She glared up at him, then looked away, "Ok."

"You're daft sometimes." he reached down, lifting her up, cradling her head in the crook of his arm. Beth sighed, nestled up against him, "This is going to take some getting used to. We're having your dad check that blanket before we go near it again, you know."

"Sure, but, well, it wasn't really the blanket."

"So what was it?"

"Well, me. I got an earful and a half about combining tricks like that. As you already had a fair chunk of magic keeping you fine with a piece of metal filling your neck, adding more just made things go haywire."

"I see." her eyes narrowed, "Well, live and learn, I guess." she sighed, "Still, it's only for a week."

"Yeah, only a week."

Her eyes look up, "That didn't exactly sound like a confident tone, Ben."

"Well, you see, he didn't actually say he could fix it."

"What?!!!"

"I mean, I'm sure he can, but he didn't actually say he could."

"Why not?" she asked, her breathing coming more rapidly, eyes darting around, nervously licking her lips.

"When you combine two tricks like that, the effects are, well, a bit unpredictable, he says. He's dealt with things like this, worse even, but each case is different." he looked down into the scared eyes, "I'm sure he's just trying to put the frighteners on us. Make us so scared we don't do anything like this again."

"Yeah." her eyes roamed over her face, "That's not really a problem, y' know?"

"Unfortunately, nothing Dad or anybody else did accomplished a thing. Beth stayed a head. She moved in with me and I looked after her. Hell, not like I had much choice about that was there, given it was all my fault? Obviously the act died. Even if Beth was daft enough to let me near her again, and amazingly she was, there isn't much you can do when your assistant doesn't exist from the neck down. Oh, and yeah, she really did agree to be my personal blow-job machine. Yes, really. "Anyway, that's not important, although the cheer was nice, guys, thanks. But Beth, God love her, kept pushing me to get back into the business. She knew I loved the whole thing, so she kept pushing, and I kept doing nothing about it. So she did the only thing she could do: she went behind my back and started trying to find a replacement herself. And that's when Angela showed up."

There was a brisk, confident knock on the door, "Can you get that, honey?" Beth called from her computer, headmike in place. Ben pulled himself up, and opens the door to the small apartment, already prepared to give whatever salesman or proselytiser was interrupting a piece of his mind. Instead, he just stared. Filling the doorway was a tall, statuesque blonde, her hair trailing over one shoulder. Her blouse hung open at the neck, giving a hint of her generous bosom, her legs going on forever to disappear under her tight, clinging skirt. She was the sort of woman you see Rod Stewart marrying every other year, or going out with the latest big Hollywood star. Certainly not your normal door to door salesman.

"C-c-can I help you?"

"I hope so." she purred, her silky voice wrapping around his spine and turning it to jelly, "I'm Angela leCroix."

"Who is it, honey?"

"Uh, it's, uhm, someone called Angela."

"Angela leCroix?"

"Yeah, how..."

"Let her in. We've got a lot to talk about."

"Uh, won't you come in?"

Angela smiled and brushed past him, her perfume lingering in the air as Ben shut the door. And walked into Angela's back as she stared into the room. "I did say I was the head assistant." Beth smiled nervously.

"You're a head. She's a head."

"Uhm, yeah, kinda had an accident a while back."

"And you want me to work with you? What if there's another accident?"

"Wait! What? What work? What is going on here?"

"That's one of the things to talk about." Beth said sheepishly. Both turned towards her. "Just get me disconnected and we can sort this out."

Ben picked her up from the cushion, peeling the microphone from her face. Cradling Beth, he sat down. "Uhm, Angela, do you want to sit down?"

Angela sat down, still staring at the disembodied head. "Yeah, sure."

"So what..."

"Honey, this is the part where I explain and you listen, ok? Good. Angela is here because I invited here here for an interview to be your assistant."

"But..."

"I explain, you listen. That means you don't talk 'til I'm finished. Now, I've been talking to Angela for a while on-line, and she's between gigs at the moment. And as you need an assistant, I invited her over. And before you open your mouth, you need an assistant because not doing shows is driving you nuts. And that's driving me nuts. Seriously, honey, you need to get back into the business. You're getting grouchy."

Ben opened his mouth to speak.

"I'm not finished yet. I know you can afford to not do this. That's not the point. The point is you need this. This is not up for discussion. I know what you're going to say, but you're wrong. I'll be fine. Now, Angela, honey, could you turn me around a bit? I imagine this is a bit of a shock, but I did tell you I was his head assistant."

"Yeah, but..."

"You don't get to talk 'til I'm done, either. Ben's really good. After, well, after this, his Dad taught him everything, and when I say taught, I mean Full Metal Jacket taught. So he knows what he's doing. We're also stinking rich, so we can pay you well for your trouble. There, explanation over. Now you can talk."

"I know, I know, Beth always wore the pants, even when she didn't have anywhere to wear 'em. What can I say? Still we talked. And talked. And talked. And then Angela took leave of her senses and said 'Sure'. And then I took ave of mine and agreed. So, I was back to being a magician with my new smoking hot assistant. Beth got in on the act, too. She was out in the foyer greeting everybody. Great idea by Angela, that one. Really got them in the mood and also made me feel better about it all. I mean, I knew where Beth was, and I wasn't far away if there was trouble. Which there wasn't. Well, not with Beth.

"Angela, on the other hand, was nothing but. Ok, ok, that's not fair. It was as much my fault, but, well, working that close, and her looking that good, and wearing that little, and Beth missing a lot of things that a guy really likes his girlfriend to have, one thing led to another. And then another. And another. And pretty soon, I had to admit to myself that I was definitely two-timing her.

“Yeah, I was asshole. You don't have to tell me that. Believe me, it was pretty clear. Having wild, passionate, porn star sex with a gorgeous blonde while the woman I supposedly loved was still helpless doesn't exactly rate high on the moral scale. Yeah, and I caused her to be that way, too. Thanks for reminding me. I might have forgotten.

“Still, eventually, I grew enough of a spine to tell mini-me enough was enough. Then I somehow worked up the courage to confess everything. Well, not the details. Some things even a grade A premium asshole doesn't do.”

“...and that's everything. I'm...”

“If you say you're sorry, Ben, I swear I will hurt you. A lot.” she glowered up at him, feeling his hands tremble as he held her in his lap.

“Beth, I...”

“Do you love her?”

“What?”

“Do you love her? Come on, Ben, you've apparently been fucking her brains out for months, do you love her?”

“I...” he looked down at her, glaring up at him, her eyes blazing, a glitter of unshed tears shining there, “I don't know, I, yes, no, I...”

“Oh, for...you 'don't know'? How hard is it to know? Do you love her? Does she make your heart flutter or just your dick?”

“I, I, I, no, I don't love her.”

Beth's eyes narrow, “So you're just fucking her.”

“Beth, I,” his head dropped, “yes, I'm just fucking her. And I'm an asshole for it, I know. I'm cheating on you, and I'm not being honest with her. So I know I'm a shit. I'll, I'll just go. Don't worry, I'll arrange for someone to look after you and you'll never have to...”

“See you again? Nice try, buster, but you don't get rid of me that easy.”

“What?”

“Just call me Tammy Wynette. Well, I guess not so much standing, but you get the idea.”

“You mean you...”

“Oh, no, I don't mean you're forgiven and this certainly isn't forgotten, but I don't want you to go.”

“So we're good?”

“Not even close. You hurt me a whole fucking lot, Ben. We're not good, we're not even in the same neighbourhood as good. But we'll get there.”

“Yes, boss. So...what about Angela?”

“What we did about Angela was simple: I went and got as much courage as the Dutch could spare and told her that I loved Beth and we couldn't go on like this. She was more than welcome to work with us, but it was just work and nothing hot and sticky and sweaty and...” he feels his wife give his hand a gentle squeeze, “anyway, Angela took the whole thing well. To be honest, my ego was a bit offended she wasn't heartbroken at the thought of being denied my body. That lasted until the last day of our run...”

Backstage, Angela pushed the door to Ben's room open, the star peeling and faded. Ben turned, his shirt open, belt hanging around his waist as he frantically buttoned up his jeans. “Awww, just a bit too late.” she smiled, walking up to him.

“Angela...”

“I know, I know. I'm just coming say goodbye.” she leant into him, running her fingers over his

chest, "It was fun. But, all good things come to an end." she kissed his cheek. "It could have been so good between us." she turned and walked away, "But it wasn't to be." she waved, and the door swung shut, leaving Ben staring after her. He shook his head, and quickly finished getting dressed. A few minutes later, he walked into the lobby, and stopped, staring at the empty space that usually held Beth's table. Trying not to worry, after all, there had to be a reasonable explanation, right, he walked over to the ticket desk, "Uhm, hey, Tina, uhm, what happened to Beth?"

"Beth? Oh, the head. Some stagehand came and took it backstage. That was alright, wasn't it?" she asked as he raced towards the stagedoors.

"Thanks, Tina!" he called over his shoulder, heart thumping in his chest.

"I searched backstage for hours, but no sign of Beth. None of the stagehands had seen or heard anything. I even called up Angela to ask if he'd seen her. She was back at the theatre before I knew it, helping me look. We found Beth's table, but no sign of her at all. And believe me, we looked everywhere. She was just gone. As you can imagine, I was a wreck. Angela was a rock. She kept me from going completely nuts. And before you dirty-minded lot get any ideas, it wasn't like that! She was there for me and that was it. She never pushed, never did anything but support me as I searched and searched and searched, turning up nothing for more than a month. And that's when it happened..."

Angela's apartment, the faux fire flickering, wine pouring, "There's nothing. No sign. No one saw anything. No one heard anything. No trace of her. It's like she didn't exist! What am I going to do?" Angela handed him a glass, brimming with red wine, "You'll find her. I know you will."

"I don't know. I mean, if there was anything to go on, maybe, but there's nothing. How can I find her when I don't even have a clue where to start? No one got a good look at the stagehand, so I can't follow him. No one saw Beth, so I can't follow her. No unusual cars reported. There's big fat lot of nothing! Damn it!"

"Shhhhhh. Shhhhh. It's alright. You'll find her." she leant against him, sipping her wine. "Are you going to keep up the act?"

"I don't know. Why bother?"

"Ok. That's enough. Do you think Beth would want you to wallow like this? Of course not. You can't put your life on hold over this. You'll obsess and tear yourself apart. Beth was right; you need to do the shows. It stops you getting morbid."

"And you can't find any other work, right?"

She swatted him gently, "Less cheek, or I might forget you're my boss." she smiled, "It won't need to start for weeks. There's plenty of time to think about it. No pressure." she kissed him gently on the cheek. "Now, I need to freshen up a bit. I'll be right back." she slid off the sofa, slinking out the room. Ben stared after her.

"Wow."

"And when she came back, I realised I had to get out of there. I was falling for Angela again, and I couldn't do that. I took my excuses and left in hurry. We kept on seeing each other as I searched for Beth and she kept me from going mental. And we got closer and closer, but I couldn't do anything. I couldn't cheat on Beth again. And then I finally had to tell Angela how I felt and why I couldn't do anything. If I could find Beth, then that would be one thing, but, I couldn't. Angela understood. She didn't push me, didn't judge me, she even started dressing down, covering up, although that was about as effective at making her unsexy as pissing on a housefire, but she was trying to help."

Ben's apartment, "I know, Dad, but it's been 3 months and nothing. I don't know what I'm going to do." the voice on the other end of the phone spoke, "What can I do? I've searched every inch, questioned everyone, got the police involved, hired private detectives, nothing! ...No, no, I'm sorry I shouted, it's just...What? Magic? How would I...Scrying? Oh my God! I'm an idiot! I could have found her already and...God, I haven't...use yours? Oh, man, that's great! Thanks, Dad! I'll be right over!" the phone beeped off as he raced from the apartment, taking the stairs two at a time.

Half an hour, and several traffic offences, which weren't noticed, later, Ben sat at a small table staring into a shallow gold bowl, the water's surface inside flat as a millpond. He stared, and stared, picturing Beth in his mind, her giggles, the feel of her hair, her dark, deep brown eyes, and slowly the water went dark. "It's working!" Beth's face appeared in the bowl, a gag tied tight around her mouth. "She's alive! She's alive." he stared harder, trying to see where she was when a pair of slim bronzed hands lifted her up. Beth tried to say something, but the gag reduced it to an angry mumble, and the scrying bowl silenced even that. He pulled back, the view expanding in the bowl, revealing the slim blonde holding Beth, a blonde he recognise immediately. "Angela? Angela??! What, how, she..." Angela smiled at Beth, locking her back in her drawer. "She..." The image wavered and vanished, and Ben sent the bowl sailing across the room, clattering to the floor with a splash.

Later that day, Angela's phone rang, "Angela, it's Ben. Could you meet me at the rehearsal hall? I've got something I need to talk to you about."

"Sure, love. I'll be there in half an hour."

"That's great. See you then."

Half an hour later, Angela stepped into the darkened hall, "Ben? Are you here?" A spotlight flashed onto the stage, glittering off the guillotine's triangular blade, Ben standing beside it, one hand resting on the dark wood. "Is that what you wanted to see me about."

"Mmmhmmm. Something new for the act."

"Isn't that what..."

"Yeah, it is. But I was a stupid kid when I screwed it up, I know what I'm doing now. Care to give it a spin?"

Angela beamed, "Sure. Anything you say, boss." she skipped onto the stage and lay down, pushing her head through the lunette. "All ready, mon brave. Let Madame do her worst."

"Not quite ready." Ben reached under the bascule, pulling a set of leather straps out, pulling them tight around her.

"Ooooooh, aren't you kinky? Shame I didn't know this earlier."

Ben unties the rope, "Any last words?"

"Yeah, where's the basket? I..." he released it, the blade slamming through Angela's throat. "HEY!!! I wasn't done yet!"

"Sorry. I'll get it for you." He slid the basket under her.

"That's better. I..."

"Hello, Angela." Beth said from the basket.

"Beth?! How... You were... How did..." she looked up at Ben, "You knew? How..."

"Doesn't matter." he pulled a black cloth from his pocket, walking towards her.

"Hey! Don't! You know what that'll do! You..."

"I know. I told you, Angela, I now what I'm doing."

"Ben, please, don't!" he begged, tears running down her face, eyes darting about as she struggled against the straps, "Ben, please, I love..."

"Goodbye, Angela." the cloth settled over her head and her sobs vanished into silence. Ben pulled the cloth off the guillotine and reached into the basket. "And now for you."

"What now for me?"

"Now I get to make up for a lot of stupid things, Beth." he kissed her on the forehead and placed her neck up against the guillotine.

"What are you doing? You don't mean..." Ben pulled up the blade and Beth shrieked as she felt her head join onto Angela's neck. She took a deep breath, feeling her lungs expand for the first time in years. "Oh my God! Honey, you, how, what about..."

Ben undid the straps, helping her sit up, her brain unused to controlling a body again.

“What about Angela?”

“She's gone, love.” he kissed her again. “Forever.”

“I proposed very soon afterwards, Beth foolishly said yes, and that's the story of why you're all here today! To the happy couple, cheers!” he raises the glass.

Beth stands beside him, linking her arm around his. She smiles at the gathered friends and family, winking at them, her eyes sparkling, knowing what they're thinking and lightly strokes the white silk choker around her neck. Her dress clings to her new body, loose folds of silk sliding across her arms. It cinches in around her narrow waist, the white cloth slit open down one side. “To happy endings!” They raise their linked arms, draining their fluted glasses. As the applause beats around them, Beth leans in towards Ben, kissing new husband deeply, losing herself in the beginnings of her new life.