

...ON THE BEACH  
A Faustus the Great story  
by Paul Watson

Samantha leans back on the towel, the fine sand shifting under her, the beach umbrella casting a little shade. A white high-cut swimsuit covers her swelling belly as Marcel starts to spread suntan lotion over her. "Mmmmm. A little more." she purrs, as a nearby group of teens groove to a rock band playing.

On the next towel over, Jackie slathers on the factor infinity, a little bosa nova played with soul rolling over in the background. "Hey, Boss, can you do my back?"

"Got him well trained, ah see, Jaks. Does he do any other tricks?"

Jackie grins up at Anne as Paul, in black shorts, rubs the cream into her back. "A few. None o' which ye'll see."

"Kinky." Anne adjusts her bright red string bikini that is much more string than bikini, "Sure ya need this stuff? It'll take a year ta get tanned, ah reckon."

"With my skin? Anything less and I'd be burnt to a crisp like that." she replies, snapping her fingers as Paul's hands press into her back, rubbing lotion under her dark green bikini. "Don't you have to worry about that?"

"If ah were a natural carrottop, mayyyybe, but ah'm as red as Dolly is blonde. Or ah was. Since ah...came back, this has been the normal me. Anyways, ya'll have fun, ah saw some cute studs in these really tight, teeny, tiny shorts bouncin' around an' it would be a real crime if they didn't have them an appreciative audience. See y'all later. Or not." she sashays off across the sand.

"Where's her orange shadow?"

"Dell went off earlier with some of her friends from before us."

"She had a life before us? Her dad let her?"

"Jackie..."

"Fine, fine, none o' my beeswax 'til she tells me."

"And you're already plotting how to get her to do that, of course..."

"Me? Heaven forfend, I'm jes' a wee bit curious..."

"Riiiiiiight."

"An' the terrible twosome?"

He nods towards the sea where a shiny purple figure frolics with an equally shiny blue pool toy.

"I am sure we agreed no magic today."

"You'd rather deal with a pouty Zilvy?"

"Pfffft, wimp. Jes' don't try anythin' on me while I'm workin' on m' tan." she leans back, closing her eyes.

"No, dear."

Half an hour passes, an hour, two... "No."

"What?"

"I c'n practically hear yer mind workin' away. This is our dark day an' we're out o' Vegas. No magic."

"You haven't even opened your eyes!"

"Don't hear wi' m' eyes, do I?"

"You don't trust me?"

"Course no'. Ye taught me way too well t' do tha'."

"Well, I can't argue with..."

"Paullllll..."

He looks up. Zilvy beams down at him, dipping wet and holding the inflated form of her sister.

"Can I have a ball now?"

"What does Petra..."

"You know she'd say yes, and if not, I have some chips of hers, so..."

He glances across at Jackie.

“Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeease?”

“Ah, go on, ye’re dyin’ t’. An’ we all know ye’ll give in eventually. Ye always do.”

Zilvy smiles angelically.

Paul rolls his eyes, “Fine.” he takes Petra from Zilvy’s hands. He presses his mouth against the inflation stem and puffs. Petra blows up, swelling into a perfect sphere. “There you go. Don’t get her lost. Again.”

Zilvy crosses her heart and immediately throws her sister across the beach running laughing after the slowly bouncing blue ball.

“How old is she s’posed ta be again?”

“Old enough to be childish?”

“Verra deep. Fer you.”

“I could go off you.”

“Nah, ye couldn’ an’ we both know it. It’s why ye love me.”

“No comment.”

Half an hour later, give or take, a bright blue beach ball bounces back into their midst with a giggle, both from it and the purple goblin chasing after it, “Sowwy! Coming through!” she leaps over Jackie, following Petra’s erratically bouncing form, “Stop trying to avoid me!” Petra bounces in the opposite direction in response. “Meanie!” Zilvy dives over Sam and Marcel to grab at the ball, “Gotcha!” at which point she crashes into the beach umbrella, bringing all three crashing down in a tangle of limbs, cloth and wood.

“Zilvy!”

“I’m fine, everything’f fine, it’f all fine, I’m just a bit...ftuck.” she muffledly calls, while struggling to extricate herself from the canopy.

“Marcel, can you give me a hand getting this back up?”

“Hey! I’m fill in here!”

“It’ll be easier to get you out when it’s up, Zil.”

“Oh, okief. Chop chop, Marcel.”

“Ye’re lyin’. Zilvy might no’ notice but I do.”

“And?”

“Carry on. Jes’ no’ too much magic. We are on a day off. Aren’t we?”

“Magic? Me?”

“I know ye.”

“Guilty.” he whispers as Marcel manages to set the umbrella mostly upright, “All okay in there?”

“Yef. But get me out!”

Paul shakes the canopy.

“Hey! What...” and opens it, the white lining replaced by alternating panels of bright blue and purple.

“Peace and quiet.”

Applause causes him to turn, “Oh, wow! That was so cool.”

“Uhm...”

“Oh, Jesus, Marie, Joseph an’ the wee donkey, he’s got hissself an audience. We’re doomed.”

Shortly, Anne pushes her way through the gathering crowd, “What in Hell an’ tarnation are they up to?” she pushes through to the front as Paul is talking to one of the crowd.

“...up my sleeve.” he pulls his hands along his bare arms before producing a pack of cards.

“Hey, boss man! Ah thought Jaks done told ya no magic!”

“I did! But does he lis’en?”

“Playin’ with fire there, Boss.”

Flames burst from the pack, “I see what you mean!” he begins tossing the flaming deck from hand to hand.

“Pffft. If ya're gonna cheat and get in trouble, ya might as well do it properly.”

“Oh, really? What did you have in mind?”

“Really, anythin'. Ah can do better'n this.”

“Of course you can.”

She shrugs, “Anythin' ya can do, ah can do better.”

Paul keeps juggling. “No you can't.”

“Yes, ah can. Any trick ya can do, ah can do flashier. Ah can do anythin' flashier than ya.”

“No, you can't.”

“Yes, ah can, yes, ah can, yes, ah cannnnnnnnn!”

“Prove it.”

“Sure thing, boss man. One trick, audience cheer takes all.”

“All?”

“Well, ah think it'd be cute if ya get to be mah assistant fer a change.”

“And when I win?” he asks sending the pack of cards spinning under his leg and back to his other hand.

“Well, ah guess ya get to do the same ta me. For 24 hours, ah'll follow yore command.”

“Only 24 hours?”

“Well, if'n ya wanna be my slave fer a week...”

“Deal.”

“So it is moted, so let it be.” Anne agrees, gesturing to the crowd, “Age before beauty.”

“So kind. Ok, so, I'm going to need a volunteer. Nothing dangerous, I promise.” he continues juggling the still burning cards, “Just a card trick. With a twist, obviously. How about you, miss?”

“Sure. I'd be happy to help.” A blonde in a blue one piece walks up, smiling as the crowd cheers her,

“What do I have to do?”

“Just think of a card.”

“The...”

“Don't tell me.” he hands her a red marker pen from somewhere, still juggling the cards, “Just write it down.”

“On what?”

“Good point. Does anyone have any paper?”

“Smooth, boss.”

“Hush. I know. Your palm.”

“But...”

“I'll clean it all off when the trick's over. Just write it down and don't let me see.”

She slowly writes on her hand, turning her back on him to hide it, returning with that hand clenched tightly closed.

“Done?”

She nods,

“Ok, now I just have to find your card.” the cards escape their box as Paul juggles them through the air, flame covering each one. The audience applaud, “Thanks. This isn't as easy as it looks.” he weaves this way and that, trying to keep the cards in the air. One gets caught by the wind, fluttering over to land on Jackie's stomach.

“Hey! I said leave me...” and the flames flash white hot around her. For a moment, a skeleton lies on her towel, flames flickering over the blackened bones before collapsing into ash.

His volunteer, and several members of the audience, squeal, some stepping backwards from the conflagration.

Paul takes the edges of Jackie's completely unburnt towel and lifts it up. “Now, madam, was this your card?” he turns the towel to reveal the Queen of Diamonds styled in the ash covering the cloth.

She nods dumbly, holding up her hand to reveal the Q and a Diamond shape in red.

“Thank you for your help. Oh, wait, I said I'd clean you up, didn't I?” He pulls out a handkerchief, rubbing it on the volunteers hand until her skin is clean, the writing transferred to the cloth. He hands it over. “A souvenir.”

"Jaks is gonna kill you soooooo dead when she's restored." Anne whispers as he walks past.

"Maybe not if I bring her a pet. You're up."

"Ah am indeed. Now, where...aha!" she puts two fingers in her mouth and lets out an ear-piercing whistle. The crowd turns. "Hey! Dell! Get yore ass over here! We got us a show to do!"

Dell, with exaggerated reluctance lets herself be led away from a gaggle of teenagers.

"So, you're planning on beating the boss, huh?"

"Wanna help?"

"Oh, yes."

"Ah'll hold ya to it." she turns properly to the crowd, "An' now, y'all, prepare ta be amazed! Dell, lie down on the sand. Now, ah'm gonna need some help here from y'all." the crowd looks around, especially the last volunteer, "Well, ok, ah don't need all y'all, just the kiddies with buckets an' spades. We need ta bury mah lovely assistant."

"What?!"

"Sadly, we haveta leave her head, hands an' feet clear. Can ah trust all y'all to do that?"

Dell looks over at the children. "If they tickle me, I will kill you." she hisses through her smile.

"Only if ah let ya. Now, come on, moms and pops, help your little ones with the sand, huh? We don't wanna waste too mucha the sunshine, do we?"

Soon, Dell is appropriately buried. "Now can ya wiggle them fingers and toes for me?"

Her feet wiggle and the hand furthest from the children makes an obscene gesture.

"Close enough, ah guess. So, now ah need one special volunteer. Must have his own bucket."

A sandy-haired child walks over in his bare feet, waving a colourful bucket.

"Ah have mah volunteer it seems. An' what's yore name, little man?"

"I'm..." he looks over to his parents, "I'm Steven...Miss."

"Ah, ain't ya just so polite, Steven." she offers him a hand to shake. He solemnly takes it. "An ah'm the Magicianne, an' this is Dell." he looks with wonder as Dell smiles. "An' ya have a very important job still ta do."

"Me?"

"You. What ah want ya ta do is scoop yore bucket raight here." she pokes into the area of the sand pile around Dell's stomach. "An' keep scoopin' until ya hit Dell or ah tell ya ta stop. Or ya get too tired, ah guess, but yore a strong boy, aren't ya? Can ya do that fer me?"

He nods and looks at Dell who smiles back as if she's not worried at all. Then he starts to scoop the bucket carefully into the sand.

"So, while mah strong man gets the real work done, ah think ah'm gonna relax an' let him. That's a tip raight there, girls."

The audience watches as Steven scoops out the sand, and scoops and scoops and is soon digging an actual hole under the level of the beach.

"Well, ah think that's quite enough diggin' fer now, Steven, ah'm done wore out just watchin'. Did you find any'a Dell under there?"

He shakes his head, staring at the distinct gap between the two piles of sand.

"Do ya wanna help me out a bit more?"

He nods.

"Oh, ah do love a man that's so agreeable. Well, come with me cutie, let's see if we can find somethin'. Now, her hand is raight here, raight?"

Dell gives a thumbs up. Steven nods.

"So, her arm has just gotta be underneath it, don't it? Stands ta reason."

Another nod, although more cautious.

"Well, why don't we just give that a little check?" she kneels down, motioning the boy beside her. She helps him scoop the bucket under Dell's hand and fill it with sand, pulling away Dell's hand waving out the top of the bucket. "Well, how's about that?"

Steven stares at the disembodied hand with big round eyes, looking under the bucket as if the rest of Dell was somehow hiding there.

"Do ya mind if ah borrow yore magic bucket for a sec, Steven? Ya've been a great help."

He hands the bucket over, still staring. Anne walks a little way away from Dell's buried figure and upends the bucket, forming a sandcastle with the hand sticking out the top.

She quickly repeats that with the rest of Dell's extremities before scooping up her head in the bucket. "Now, watch close y'all 'cause ah'm gonna have ta do this quick. Dell, how long can ya hold yore breath, ya reckon?"

"Why?"

"Well, it might just be time ta start holdin' is all ah'm sayin'."

Dell takes a breath and Anne upends the bucket, sand raining down to cover the sandcastles, probably more sand than a child's bucket could really hold. She drops the bucket and plunges her hand down into the sand, dragging a slightly sputtering Dell out. "Ta an' indeed daaaaah!! Now, give a real big hand y'all for mah two assistants, Dell an' Steven." she leads them both into bows, before returning Steven's bucket and letting him run back to his parents.

Paul walks up to her.

"Oh, raight, votin' ta do. So come on, peoples, do yore democratic duty. If y'all preferred the boss man's magic trick, hoot an' cheer now!" the crowd applauds.

"And if you preferred Anne's performance..." Paul doesn't get finish as the crowd whoops, dozens of excited children banging on their buckets.

"Ah think the people have done spoken. 'Less ya wanna recount?"

"No, I think that was pretty clear."

Anne grins like a Cheshire Cat with a dairy full of cream, "Then ah guess we can start the next week off raight now, can't we? Give these fine folks a send off."

"I guess."

"There's the enthusiasm ah was expectin'." the grown ups in the audience laugh, "Now, just lie down for me...an' now can all mah little helpers cover mah boss up below the neck, bury him all the way down." she looks at the adult audience as the children enthusiastically join in piling sand over Paul, "Y'all didn't think ah'd do exactly the same trick now, did ya?" she looks back at the pile, "All done? Good work, volunteers. Now scoot back, it's mah turn." the children retreat as she swiftly starts patting down the sand until there's a crude hourglass figure where the pile used to be. Paul raises his eyebrows.

"Going a bit overboard in places, aren't you?" he whispers, glancing down at the sand mounds over his chest.

"Just givin' the guys what they want, boss. Ah've had ta be soooo good with the kiddies here, after all." she pats an extra bit of sand into the piles. "Now, Marcel, can ah be real cheeky an borrow yore parasol an' Jaks' towel fer a mite?"

Marcel looks at Sam, who shrugs before carrying them both over.

Anne lays the towel over the feminine sand sculpture, ashes side down and then places the pole of the sunshade on its middle. "Ok,gimme a countdown, y'all. Three...two...one!" she slams the pole down, shoving until the parasol touches the sand, hiding the sculpture, towel and Paul from view. There's a smattering of applause. "Now, that's nice of y'all, but ah ain't done finished yet." She jerks the parasol up, it's interior once more a plain white. Lying under the towel is a curvacious figure with Paul's feminised face. "Now, should ah be callin' ya Paula or Pauline. Ya ain't tanned enough to be a Paulina..." Anne reaches down to help her up, handing the parasol back to Marcel. Paul clutches the towel across her with one hand. At least until Anne jerks it away, revealing both sides are back to being white without any trace of ash, and that her new assistant is wearing a tricolour bikini, one cup blue, the other purple and her bikini bottoms a dark green. "Take a bow, boss. It's gonna be a fun week."