

Theater Magic

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Content Warning: Mummification, bondage, packaging, body control, identity theft, dubious consent and unwilling.

"Welcome to the reopening of The Plebian!"

Ophelia beamed. The audience present for the opossum's grand announcement was larger than she'd ever seen for a show opening at the amateur theater; a whole six people were present, and only four of them were people she directly knew! The Plebian had never looked better. The benches were freshly made, the mismatched wood of the stage had been patched up with even more mismatching wood, the curtains were newly bought, and the building's front had been remade to be open to the busy lower city street.

"Thank you all for being here," the opossum said, still clothed in her everyday gothic garb, the less familiar passerby believing the on-stage girl to be costumed as if a witch. As if the tiny community theater could afford costumes! "To celebrate, I, Ophelia Aphara, will be performing my solo rendition of *Cruor's Ritornello* by Vladamir Caulrad. But before I begin, I hope you will consider joining future productions or donating so that the arts might continue in the district!"

As Ophelia gestured to the nearby coin box and explained the theater's history, the lioness in the audience leaned over to her companion. "A Caulrad play? Isn't...that a bit ambitious?" Amelia whispered.

"Revy not know," the lynx said, "but Ophelia...ambitious is good word, yes."

"Knock them dead, dear!" an older opossum called from the bench behind the two, coaxing an acknowledging wave from the actress by hobby on stage.

The lioness glanced backwards. "Is that..."

"Do not make eye contact," Revya hummed, gently guiding her date's attentions back to the stage. "Mom of Ophelia be...distracting. Play begin now, Revya think."

"*Hark!* Upon the horizon!" Ophelia theatrically gasped, dramatically pointing stage left. "Do my eyes deceive me? As if a ghost emerges from a buried grave, a castle rises bearing foul portent! The rampart fires are lit! How has this come to pass when its master is but dust? It calls me forth by my blood, a challenge I cannot refuse!"

Revyra stifled a laugh at the strange, stompy walk the opossum made across the stage, pumping her arms and leaning slightly forward as her boots clomped noisily against the wooden stage.

Amelia tilted her head. "What is she...?"

"I think that's her 'determined' walk," a nearby aardvark whispered.

"Determined to walk like angry child," the lynx quietly snickered.

"Foul beasts plague the town, and both drake and behemoth guard the gates!" the opossum on stage cried out, hands gesturing to the invisible fallen creatures. "Surely evil has command once more for this land to be cursed so. And look! Amidst a light, a vulnerable girl floats trapped! Back, cultist! Let her be free once more! Speak, child! What has come to pass in these black walls?"

The seated five observers collectively grew silent in surprise and confusion as, from stage left, exaggeratedly collapsed a new form...an uncannily similar opossum in gothic garb and a pointed, wide-brimmed hat.

"Oh, brave warrior! The master of this castle has been returned," she gasped, throwing the back of her hand up to her head and leaning back in a near faint. "I came to slay him, but I was apprehended! But now I shall assist you!"

The first Ophelia gave a forced laugh, shoulders back in a fake arrogance. "But you are still small! How could you fight such a dire evil?"

"Fie on you for your lack of faith!" the second pouted, immediately shifting to stand up and fold her arms grumpily. "My blood calls for justice too. Your ignorance shall not stop my own quest!"

"This be magic," Revyra muttered. "...this must be magic; Revyra cannot handle two Ophelia."

"Lady Aphara, did...did you have twins?" the aardvark quietly asked the seated opossum nearby.

"I am relatively certain I did not, Angorra" Titania Aphara responded with a happy sigh. "I am so proud of my darling Ophelia...acting so well that we truly believe there are two of her!"

"...magic. Not act," the lynx muttered, narrowing her eyes. "Where be Malcolm? If Revyra head hurt, Malcolm head should hurt too."

“Yeah, wasn’t he supposed to be here?” Amelia echoed, looking over her shoulder as passerby began to stop and take seats in the theater to observe the strange scene on stage. Not one of them was a certain raccoon brawler, though. “He seemed so enthusiastic about supporting Ophelia’s new endeavor...”

“Thank you so much for supporting my theater endeavor, Malcolm!” Ophelia cheered, a big smile across her face as her hands busied themselves with the sticky, soaked cloth straps. The backstage had been mostly cleared out, much of the materials from before its closing, but that just meant the two or three small rooms gave a unique opportunity for remodeling and restocking without having to navigate clutter.

The remodeling of Malcolm, for instance, was going swimmingly. The poor raccoon found the bands binding his body impossibly tight, the brawler’s toned body unable to break the firm layers wound around his form. His muzzle was firmly wrapped already, leaving his shocked eyes glancing about the only form of expression he had apart from wiggling his mostly paralyzed form about. And the wet feeling of all those gummy straps against his mostly-naked form wasn’t particularly pleasant, each new squish of off-white linen against his chest causing him to shudder.

“I’m really glad you showed interest in volunteering,” the opossum told her friend, continuing to wind the fabric up his chest. “I know you don’t have any experience acting in theater like I do, but that makes you perfect for amateur theater! You’ll be a wonderful blank slate.”

Malcolm, between moments of panic and muffled protests against the muzzle bindings, gave a dry stare that fully expressed his doubts as to Ophelia’s claims of theatrical expertise.

Ophelia simply looked down at her handiwork. From feet to chest, every tiny bit of greyish fur had been utterly hidden away between multiple layers of special wrapping. The thick, redundant wrapping made every anatomical detail smooth out into a generic humanoid shape, and now the last of her fellow adventurer’s toned chest was vanishing as well. “You know, you also make a pretty great mummy,” she observed proudly, beginning to wrap up his neck. “Very strong shape! Once I’m done, though, you’ll have disappeared. You won’t have to even worry about embarrassing yourself on stage; nobody will know it’s you. It’ll be our secret.”

The raccoon’s eyes shrunk even more as he felt his neck weighed down with layer after layer of soaked straps, and now the opossum was wrapping up his head. He wasn’t sure he wanted to disappear!

“Oh, no, you don’t have to worry about them falling off,” Ophelia assured the scared-raccoon, either purposefully or densely missing the source of her friend’s alarm. “They’re

very much gummed up. Just a few minutes of drying, and you'll be completely sealed in! Nice and permanently wrapped away. And, with a little bit of magic, you'll be a part of the theater for as long as you like!"

Malcolm's ears flattened, one more pleading look sent to his friend, the aspiring actress.

"Oh, don't worry. You'll be alive. We'll just have to let the magic recharge whenever you're not needed, keep you nice and snug in storage." She nodded and spun the bands around his head and across his eyes. As the raccoon's vision slowly vanished, the light getting darker and darker with each new layer, the last thing he saw was her smile and happily waving furless tail. "I'll make you into the best actor I know!"

It took only a couple more minutes before Malcolm was entirely gone, barely even able to wiggle in the steadily drying mass of fabric that was gluing together and entirely mummifying him. Ophelia waved her fingers and tapped the newly featureless mummy head, occult and arcane magic racing down the straps and lighting up subtle magic runes etched across every inch of the linen. Breath and awareness would return first to her helpless friend, and then...it would slowly ready him to take the stage.

"I will not join you! For you defy nature, and your existence is an affront to civilized life!"

"I cannot be blamed for my nature! Judge me by my manners, the manners of a true lord. The manners of a savior!"

"Ah, that's my cue to take the stage! They need a third, after all," Ophelia said to the prone, bound blank canvas she desired. "I'll be sure to get you in the next play, okay?" Rushing out from the prop room, she wiped her hands clean of bandaging gum quickly on a nearby curtain and straightened her skirt. Then, she put on her most dark expression and stepped on stage.

"My master, the heroes are breaking through!"

"Ah, fate! Alas, my dear, may we meet in more pleasant circumstances..."

"Oh...I pray for their success...and my rescue..."

Slowly, while the maiden on stage was likely provided for in the script, Malcolm realized rescue wasn't coming for him. The bindings only grew more sturdy and taut as they dried. But when his finger twitched, it wasn't from his own will. The mummification began to shift, and it shifted him with it. Eventually, a pleased smile drew across the theater mummy's face. It wasn't his own.

"Perish, fiend! Your presence in these lands is unnatural!"

"I had no will in my return. It is those your kind that gave me life, seeking my dominion and their own subservience!"

The two Ophelias on stage exchanged barbs as both hero and villain. Their performance, while amateurish, overdramatic, and tacky, had attracted a small crowd to take most of the available seating before the stage. Never before had The Plebian come even close to achieving a full house except, perhaps, the one time they'd organized a children's choir for the Darkest Moon holiday season.

"I'll be honest, Revya, this is kind of impressive," Amelia whispered as the figures on stage dueled, the younger audience members shouting cheers and instructions to the opossum representing the hero and gasping whenever it seemed the villainous opossum landed an obviously stage-whiffed blow.

"...Revya will give some credit," the lynx sighed. "But Revya will not budge. Revya will not adventure with three Ophelia. One is good number."

"Ah! So...here it ends," gasped the evil Ophelia, distinguished solely by her lines and the fact she now crumpled to the floor in defeat. "But know that I will return so long as your kind seeks and wants for me!"

"And you will fall to ruin each time, monster," asserted the heroic Ophelia, "for nothing as vile as you will survive to rule for long!"

The crumpled Ophelia crawled off-stage, leaving the victorious one to walk "determinedly" to the opposite downstage corner and pose.

"Hark! Upon the horizon!" she announced to the crowd, pointing once more stage left. "The creature's castle falls into the sea, as if a structure of sand before a wave! Its master is dust once more, and so it shall be. Desire not to be ruled by might, my fellow folk, and look to be ruled by love and honor! But should you fall short again, my bloodline will answer the call."

Ophelia bowed, and the crowd cheered. The donation box was half-full of copper and silver, a small fund for the theater's improvement in appreciation of the seemingly one-opossum play. It was more than The Plebian had ever seen for a single performance. The prop and costume rooms would be filled once more before long.

"Great work, Ephemera!"

The opossum stepped into the room with a bright smile, arms wide open to give a hug to the finely-dressed tiger who'd complimented her. "Thanks, Janus! I couldn't have done it without you, me, and me."

The two briefly looked over to the side. Stuffed into two thick crates were two squirming mummies, each packaged in thick cushioning that dampened their highly-muffled noises. Only their rune-traced cloth-wrapped heads were visible above the packaging, but both opossum and tiger knew how they were bound: arms crossed across their chest, legs tight together, and tails hiked up and strapped to their backs. "It'll be a week or so before those two are ready to be Ophelia again, but I'm sure they'll have plenty of fun as the props they now are until then."

"And what about me?" the actress asked, placing her hands upon Janus' chest. "Do I get to still be Ophelia?"

Janus smiled broadly. "Nope."

The opossum seemed to blink in surprise as the illusion fell away, into the tiger's arms collapsed a mummy whose bindings were far more heavily layered than the rest. A thick wrapped tail wiggled where it could, and a flustered "Mmmhph..." sounded out from the blank and featureless head.

Janus took little time, hoisting the mummy up and laying it into a large carrying case, its firm yet plush interior already moulded to the helpless figure's shape. "It's quite fun taking cues from the real Ophelia and playing out her acting with these stand-in actors, I must admit," he mused aloud as he strapped down the wriggling shape's tail into the case with a few belts, keeping it curved backwards for the trapped person inside to really feel how it was yanked up entirely beyond their control. "It's a different sort of acting exercise than I get at The Whitewall Theater as a professional actor."

As he took hold of the top of the case, the tiger knelt down next to the nearly fully stowed mummy. "But no, you don't get to still be Ophelia," he rumbled contently and teasingly. "They might be props, but you're my secret toy. Nobody will ever notice you're gone. Nice and snug, entirely under my control....for as long as you want, of course."

Janus cupped an ear, but all the tiger could hear was the squeak of desperate squirming from inside his case and unintelligible muffled noises. "...I'm not hearing a no, so..." Confidently, he closed the case's top and leaned on it as he snapped shut the clasps, ensuring his toy inside was as tightly squeezed from all angles as possible. "...guess I get my souvenir from this performance~"

"Hey! You're Hanes Rothschild, aren't you?"

As the tiger stood hoisted the case up into the air, he looked to the inquiring aardvark. "Yes?" he asked.

"Wow! What's a big actor like you doing at my friend's theater?"

"I would hardly consider myself a good artist if I didn't support both beginners and amateurs in their quest to grow and perform," the tiger replied. "Ophelia is also a friend of mine, and I greatly admire her spirit."

"Wow..." the aardvark sighed, smiling in admiration at his answer. "Where is she, anyhow?"

"Angorra! You made it!" Ophelia, in all her usual wear, stepped out from the back room with a pleased grin. "Thanks for showing up to my little experimental show."

"It was a pleasure!" Angorra skipped past the tiger to hug her friend, the tiger seemingly content to watch. "I really want to know how you did it! I've never seen a show like that."

Ophelia tilted her hat and waved a finger. "Come now, you know I can't give away the secrets to the magic of theater!" she chided playfully.

Angorra gave a sigh, relenting the point. "Oh, but you made community theater seem like such fun. I'm usually stuck in the musician's pit up in the upper city. But...maybe sometime I could join you down here to try acting out?"

"Why wait?" the Ophelia asked, eyes glinting with theater magic and waving a hand at the door behind her despite what a certain raccoon inside wanted. "If you step back here, I can help you become one of the best actors I know."