

Blind Dates Part 1(?)

By Nickylion

“You need to get out more. Get out there and find someone new! Don’t just sit in your apartment bemoaning your fate. So Don dumped you. Big freakin deal!”

“I dunno Mark, I really don’t feel it. I mean Don was everything to me. Five years! How am I supposed to get past that?” The lion sighed and flopped his face onto his elbows, staring not at all melodramatically at the pint of beer on the table in front of him.

“Look, Danny, you and Don hadn’t really been working out at least six months before he dumped you. Then he cheats on you and dumps you in the course of a week. That’s a big betrayal so I can understand the month of ‘mourning,’ really I can.” His friend the panther clasped his arm.

“Look, your friends and I all talked. You up for a little exercise of faith, my friend?” The lion looked over at the panther and glared through red and tear-stained eyes.

“What exactly did you have in mind, Mark?”

The lion was handed a small card. “The Chuckle Hut, really? That place is a dive.”

“Flip it over, stupid. Guy’s number’s on the back. Hell I’ll even call him for you and set it up. Next Tuesday at 8 still works for you right?”

Danny sighed and shook his head, “This was all pre-ordained before we even started this conversation wasn’t it?” The lion shook his head and covered his face with a paw.

“Natch! Look Danny, I’m just trying to prove that your faith in men isn’t totally shattered. I’m not asking you to fall in love right from the get go. You just need to have it proven to you one more time that men aren’t all assholes.”

“There’s nothing I can say or do that’s gonna change this is there?”

“Nope! Enjoy! And who knows,” the panther turned the lion’s head to him, “maybe getting a little refill of faith isn’t the only thing you’ll get.”

Just by looking at The Chuckle Hut one could tell that the faded brick exterior of the building combined with its equally faded and chipped signage was advertising exactly

the sort of dive club atmosphere that lay within. Danny looked down at the crumpled up flyer in his hand and shook his head. This was such a mistake, letting that damn tiger fix him up on a blind date. But hey, at least this way he could get the awkward rebound date out of the way. The lion crossed the street, avoiding the slowly passing cars and pushed open the door, ignoring the signs advertising tonight's show: The Swinging Fox, Master Hypnotist!

The interior of the comedy club was just as dingy as the exterior. Off-white walls that at one point had been pristine and bright white but slowly lost their color over time. The red vinyl seats in the booth he'd been seated at by the hostess were cracked and missing small bits of fabric from where they'd been picked at over the years. The lion let off a little sigh, then stared at the small glass of water he'd been left with.

"This seat taken?" Danny looked up and into a pair of truly golden eyes.

"No, well sorta." The lion blushed, "Waiting on a date actually."

"Ah, well then you have found him," the fox to which those eyes belonged smiled and slid into the booth, "my apologies for being a bit late. It had been my intent to meet you at the door, but alas," he paused and raised one paw to his temple in a feigning of dramatic tension, "my chosen profession kept me occupied much later in the day than I was expecting."

Danny blinked and nodded, glancing down at the candle on their table a moment after he realized he'd been staring into the fox's eyes during that entire exchange, "It's, w-well, it's quite alright. Really." The lion took a moment and glanced over the fox's body, noting the crisp white dress shirt that looked as though perhaps it were fitted specifically for his tight lithe body. The reddish orange fur about his muzzle had the slightest hints of grey, but his paws were stark black. Early to mid-thirties, Danny guessed to himself.

"Ah well, what is it that you do for a living, my dear lion?" Danny shook his head again and inwardly cursed himself for staring. His first date in years and he was going to come off like some creepy stalker boy.

"Freelance journalist. I write op-eds and cover political stories for the AP, Reuters, whoever will take me really. And yourself, uh," the lion looked back down at the candle then back up at the fox, "I apologize. Mark never told me your name."

"Dominic Todd, or Dom to my friends," the fox's accent might have contained a slight southern twang, but if it did Danny didn't notice. Instead the lion was glancing up at the waitress standing above them both, a pair of drinks on a serving platter.

"I hope you don't mind. I took the liberty of grabbing the first round of drinks. Mark mentioned that you were partial to long islands, and while this club may look shabby," the fox said with a wink to the waitress, "it more than makes up for it in the

strength of the booze.” He turned and tipped his head back to their server, “Thank you hunny, I think we need a few minutes before food, kay?” The server nodded politely and headed off for other tables.

“Mark has obviously told you quite a bit about me,” Danny’s tone was cautious and measured, “Why don’t you tell me about you so that we’re, ya know, on a bit more even of a playing field?”

“Sure! Well as you can see, I’m a bit of a raconteur. I love to talk, to tell stories.” The fox played with the drink in his hand, stirring the little umbrella in such a way that when he stopped it continued on for several long seconds, “But I really like to listen to others too, which I have to say, made it really hard to pick a career. Then one day I’m here at this place working the bar when along comes this lynx. And I gotta say, he’s got the prettiest eyes I’ve ever seen.”

The fox was staring now, looking just above the candlelight, right into the lion’s eyes. Danny wasn’t even aware he’d been staring. Maybe it was the drink, maybe the fox was a good talker; regardless he was enjoying himself a lot. His eyes closed briefly and he took another swig of the long island, “Anyways, this lynx, he says that there’s one profession where you can listen to your clients and get to talk all you want.” The fox paused for just a moment, eyes flickering down at the candle light, then back up at the lion.

“Focus, he says, focus is the key.” Danny blinked, confused. Did he miss something? “Whether it’s my eyes, or this candle here, it’s important to get your listener focused on something. It’s like how you can see the candle in my eyes if you look hard enough, Danny. Go ahead, take a gander.”

The lion squinted and looked into the fox’s impossibly gold eyes, “I...I really don’t see it.”

“Like I said, Danny boy, focus is the key. Gotta be focused and right now you’re way too tense to be focused.” The fox’s paw shot out and gripped Danny’s free hand, “Do this for me, just look right ahead at my eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose,” the fox paused as though he were doing it too, “and then out through the mouth.”

Danny exhaled, not even realizing he’d just done as the fox had asked, “Good there Danny boy, now just keep doing that. Breathing in, breathing out. Just watchin my eyes looking for that candle. Don’t worry bout the rest of the world, just let it fall away and you’ll see that candle soon enough. That’s it, just keep looking,” the lion’s hand had grown steadily more limp in the fox’s arms.

Danny wasn’t squinting anymore. In fact Danny’s eyes were actually blinking and fluttering a bit. The lion’s brow furrowed in some vague confusion. He was starting to feel very, “relaxed,” the fox’s voice swept into his own thoughts, “that’s it, just relaxing, staring deep into my eyes. Yup, just like that. And you’ll start to see that

candle soon enough, Danny boy,” sure enough, there was the smallest ripple in sea of gold that was the fox’s eyes. The ripple shimmered and drifted with the slightest of shifts in the fox’s eyes, but Danny could see the shape of the candle and the flame within.

“Good, you see it now, don’t you?” the fox’s voice was softer than Danny remembered it being a moment ago.

The lion opened his muzzle to speak, “Yyyesss,” the word slipped out softly, barely audible across the table.

“Such a good boy you are, Danny. And the neatest trick about this, is once you can see the candle, you realize that it’s more than just a candle.”

“It...is?”

“Of course it is, my boy. Candles are important symbols to us foxes. The wax is your body, nice and firm normally, but heat it up enough and it melts and becomes malleable. The wick is your spirit, always there, but sometimes being consumed by the fire up above you. And the flame, well, the flame is your conscious mind, consuming a little bit of your spirit each day. Makes sense, doesn’t it?”

Danny’s head nodded up and down slowly. The lion’s eyes were only about halfway open, “And so to stop the mind from eating up too much of yer spirit, we gotta turn that off sometimes, don’t we boy?” The fox nodded his head, eyes raising and lowering. The lion’s own head nodded back, a sloppy imitation of Dom’s own nod.

“Attaboy Danny, and when the candle is out, you’ll be free to relax and listen. Your conscious mind will be asleep, off in its own world, and your spirit and I can talk in a way you’ve never been able to do before. Won’t that be nice?” There was another nod from the fox, and another parroted nod from the lion, “Very good boy.”

Dom’s lips parted softly. The candle flame flickered and vanished. Danny’s eyes closed as the table was enveloped by darkness. His body shuddered and slid back against the cushions. His mind fell away, carried into the darkness of sleep on the breath of a fox.

The clink of a glass startled Danny awake, “Oh hey there, hunny,” the waitress from earlier was standing over him, “Sorry to wake ya, but your food’s here.”

Danny looked about groggily, “What...where’d Dominic go?”

The waitress blinked at him, “Oh your guy?” She smirked a little, “He took off after you couldn’t hold your liquor. Paid for the drinks and the food and everything. You don’t remember that?” Danny shook his head, then looked over at the empty

glasses, then up at the waitress again. The collie slid his plate onto the table in front of him, "Next time don't drink so much on an empty stomach, lightweight."

The collie's voice took on a stern, almost motherly tone, "Now eat your food and I'll call ya a cab after the show, understand? You're in no shape to be driving if you're gonna pass out after just one drink." The lion nodded, clearly unwilling or unable to argue the point with the waitress. Instead he fixed his eyes on the stage just in time for the lights around him to dim and the stage curtains to draw away, revealing a rather drab and bored looking tiger. True to the club's nature, the feline didn't even bother dressing up; a wife beater and jeans accented only by a worn down leather jacket completed his ensemble.

"Ladies and gentleman! I'd like to introduce, for his final engagement at the Chuckle Hut, our very own Master of Mesmerism, Dominic Todd, the Swinging hypnotist!" Danny blinked. Did he just hear that right? The pit growing inside his stomach continued to get bigger as the tiger moved to leave the stage.

The black tuxedo clung to the fox's slender body, and the cane he bore made him look like the consummate magician, but it was those golden eyes above all else that made Danny certain his date had just walked on stage. Practically the only thing the fox lacked to complete the look was a pocket watch and magic wand, "Why thank you my good Vincent," he said, taking center stage and bowing to the audience, "but do be a dear and come back here for a moment."

"Sure, Mr. Todd," the barback said as he turned backwards, only to have the fox put his arm around the big burly tiger and slid his cane down the tiger's face, leaving a blank and softly snoring tiger in its wake. Smiling, the fox released the tiger, who wavered there for a moment, head bowed and in a profound state of relaxation.

"First rule of being a stage hypnotist folks," the fox walked just off stage and returned with a pair of chairs, "always have chats with the staff before hand. You never know when you might find one with a hidden fantasy of being a stripper." A snap of his fingers rang out through the room, and a moment later the leather jacket lay discarded against the back of the chair. The tiger began dancing, undulating really, to a beat that only he could hear, walking towards the center of the stage and peeling off his wifebeater, twirling it about and tossing it to the fox, who caught it and draped it over the jacket.

The tiger moved lower, bouncing on his heels and beginning to undo the clasps on his jeans, sliding them down just enough to expose a nicely packed red jockstrap. Before he could go any further, the fox stepped in, "Freeze." The tiger stopped, hands inches from that package, framing it beautifully.

"I'd offer to let you tip the barback, actually why don't I?" the fox smiled and put one paw on the tiger's shoulder, the slightest pressure buckled the tiger's knees and slid him into a kneeling position, "I'm sure he won't mind a few extra dollars, even if he does

have to pick them out of his underwear.” The fox turned and winked again at the audience, eliciting more than a few chuckles and whistles. Meanwhile people at several of the tables close to the tiger had gotten up and stuffed a few bills into the frozen stud’s jockstrap. A few even went so far as to give that well-framed package a good fondling.

“Second rule of being a stage hypnotist,” the fox gestured off stage, beckoning with one finger, “always have a backup! Come on out here Jared!” A towering hunk of a panther walked out on stage, “Of course Sir!” Unlike the tiger, the panther was already stripped down to a thong, this one sparkling and blue in the spotlight. This alongside a black sequined bow-tie made for a very squirmy lion, who continued to watch, stunned.

“Folks I’d like you to meet Jared, my assistant, say ‘hello’ Jared!” The panther waved rather sheepishly to the assembled crowd, “Aww, he’s so shy folks. What’s say we fix that, hmm? Come here Jared.” The feline hesitated just a moment, which was all the fox needed, “Oh c’mon folks, you want to see this lovely specimen onstage yes? Why don’t you give him a round of applause?”

The sheer number of claps and catcalls that followed from the audience were enough to pull the large borderline overbearing feline out onto the stage, waving shyly and trying to hide the flush of red beneath his dark black fur, “Aw shucks sir, I ain’t nothing special.” The twang alone was enough to make Danny realize that he had grown more than a little aroused at the sight of the two well-muscled studs.

“Course it ain’t nothing, my good boy,” the fox passed his hand over the eyes of the panther, and in that pass a shuddering change came over the feline. His head bowed, his shoulders, once bastions of the feline’s tension and stress, relaxed visibly. A goofy looking smile plastered itself across Jared’s face and with it a slightly lolling tongue. The fox looked him over, then out at the audience.

“Ain’t nothing at all, is it folks?” The fox swept his paw up and down across the feline’s body, taking care to highlight all of the ‘assets.’ Clapping rose up, mostly from the ladies but from more than a few men as well, whistling and showing their continued appreciation for this most relaxed feline form.

“Now I know what you’re thinking. God, what does he do all day,” the fox was guiding the feline forward by the hand, “I mean, you have these two sexy beasts, how do you ever get any work done?” He winked at the crowd.

“The answer is: I don’t. That’s what they’re here for!” There were more than a few giggles at that.

“Hey, that’s the great part about being a hypnotist! The ‘perks’ as you would call them. I mean, I can’t tell you how many times Vincent here,” he laid his paws upon the barback’s shoulders, “Or Jared here,” he laid his hands against his assistant’s shoulders, the gentlest of pressure sending the feline to his knees, “Have delivered me my morning coffee and paper in these babies.”

More chuckling and now some outright laughter.

“And they’re so deliciously customizable too.” The fox stood between them and began scratching both felines behind their ears, “It was so easy to convince these two to let their minds wander, to wonder how life must be like as a dog. Amazing too, when you consider feline pride. But with hypnosis, this as so many things are possible.” As he was speaking both felines lurched forward, their eyes opening, mouth sagging open into a pant. Jared leaned forward and let out a throaty bark that startled a few of the closer audience members.

“Anyone want to play fetch?” Clapping and laughter from the audience, “Now both of you, back to your original poses. Feel yourself becoming feline again, back to yourselves, deeply relaxed and open to my suggestion. Are you both there?”

Two nods. The fox placed one paw on each of their shoulders.

“Excellent. Now I want you both to begin counting softly, to yourselves. Each number brings you deeper and deeper, down into the furthest reaches of your mind, relaxing, sleeping until I tap you on the shoulder.”

“So now that you’ve met rule one and two,” the fox smiled at the laughs, “would you like to meet rule three?” The audience broke into raucous applause, “Allright allright, since you insist.”

“So what’s rule three? Well the third rule of being a stage hypnotist,” the fox lowered his cane, pointing across the club just as a spotlight hit it perfectly, sending sparkles of its facets right into Danny’s eyes, “Always bring in a volunteer from the audience.” Danny blinked, staring off into the facets, a feeling of warmth and sleep swirling around his body, he had risen from his chair without even noticing it. His eyes blinked again and again, each time the stage was closer somehow. He never noticed the stares of the audience, or the face that when he blinked again he was now onstage, staring into the facets of the fox’s cane. Or maybe it was the fox’s eyes. It was hard to tell, harder to think.

“So what brings you here, gorgeous?” The fox’s other hand was on his shoulder, kneading gently, rhythmically, on one of his shoulder muscles.

“I, uhm...a date...?” Danny shook his head, trying not to look at the facets, the fox’s golden orbs somehow reflecting in each one.

“Oh, well I’m sure there’s some lucky gal out there in his booth. Say honey, anything you want him to be more attentive about when I’m done here?” The fox took his paw off of Danny’s shoulder and put it to his ear, “No? Well let me know if you change your mind. I charge \$25 for dish duty, \$50 to quit smoking, and if you need help with him,” he lowered his voice to a stage whisper, “in the bedroom, well my prices are

negotiable there.” Getting more laughs from the audience, the fox turned back towards the rapt and dazed lion.

“Now then, let’s deal with you,” The cane shifted, twirling softly. Danny became aware of whispers, of how heavy his eyes suddenly were. The cane raised and lowered, up and down, up and down, round and round. It became harder and harder to follow, until one pass down past his eyes and the cane brought them to a close.

“What’s your name, son.”

“Danny.” In the darkness, Danny heard a voice respond. Wait..wasn’t that his name?

“And how are you feeling, Danny?”

“Relaxed. Sleepy.”

“Good, Danny, and do you know why you’re like this?”

“You...hypnotized me?”

“That’s right Danny. Do you remember when we spoke at your table? About the candle at the table? About the candle in your mind?”

“Yesss?”

“Very good, Danny-boy, can you see the candle in your mind now? Just imagine it there, see it like it was sitting right in front of you.”

“I...see it.”

“Very good. You’re doing very well Danny-boy. Now I want you to take that candle, and shine it over the area in front of you. See the stairs that the candle is illuminating. You can see them now can’t you? A wonderful narrow spiral staircase, like they have in those old houses in upstate?”

If Danny’s eyes had been open, they would be wide and awestruck. In the lion’s mind an image had formed, of a giant gilded spiral staircase, sinking down into the blackness beyond the stage, “I can see it...pretty.”

“That’s right Danny, so just take your candle and start walking down. Count the steps for me.”

And so Danny began counting. Number after number. He wasn’t how long he’d been there, how high the numbers had gotten. Somewhere along the way, the actual number seemed to not matter anymore. All that mattered was sinking deeper and deeper

into trance, deeper into the darkness. He barely noticed the candle vanishing, the stairs vanishing, the words guided him, down into the deepest most relaxed state imaginable.

The fox stepped away from the lion. Danny's body was currently resting on the outstretched arms of his two hypnotized 'assistants.'

"I know you're wondering," he gestured to the lion's body, which had been stripped down to its underwear, a nice bulging sparkling green thong, "hey, he must be a plant, right? I mean he's wearing that." The fox gestured to the thong.

"Well I have a perfectly reasonable explanation for that gorgeous green thong. It goes with his eyes." The fox touched Danny's forehead, "Danny, I want you to think of the numbers, think of the number seven Danny. I am taking that number away from you. I am drawing it out of you with nothing but a touch. The number means nothing to you now until I say the phrase 'back to normal.' Do you understand?"

The lion's head nodded, a barely whispered, "yes," accompanied the nod.

"Good, now in a moment I will count to three, and when I do, you will open your eyes and yet remain in the deepest of imaginable trances. My words will become your thoughts, and my suggestions will be as normal to you as asking you what color the sky is. Do you understand, Danny?"

Another nod. Another whispered, "yes."

"Good. One, two, three. Open your eyes and remain deeply under, still frozen, able to speak but not move."

The lion opened his eyes, blinking, looking up at the fox, "I..uhm...hi?"

More laughter from the audience, "Hi yourself, handsome. So I want you to do something for me. Roll in place so that you're on your belly. Your body can move again, now." The lion blinked and shrugged, turning himself onto his belly, still supported by the two frozen felines, who had not moved, nor shown the slightest bit of discomfort this entire time. Grunting, the lion pushed himself up on his elbows to get a better look at the fox.

"Now who would like to see this little lion get a bit more built, hm? Maybe some exercises?" There was clapping that Danny didn't understand, "Good good. Danny, can you do ten push-ups for me? Count them out so that I can hear."

"Okay. One," the lion grunted and began to do pushups atop the outstretched paws of the panther and tiger.

"Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Eight. Nine. Ten." He sank back down onto his elbows.

“I dunno. I don’t think that was ten pushups. Maybe you should start over and count again.”

The lion’s face wrenched up in annoyance. Of course it was. He’d counted them out-loud, “Fine, one more time. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Eight. Nine. Ten.” He sank back into his resting position. Pushups had never been his forte.

“Hmm, I think we’re still short one. Why don’t you stand over here for me for a moment.”

Danny stood up, scratching his head and walked to where the fox had told him to, “I don’t understand what you mean. I did ten pushups. I even counted them out-loud for you.”

The fox merely smiled, “Course you did, handsome. Why don’t you try counting to ten again for me. Maybe it’s your numbers that are broken?” The fox knelt down, tapping the shoulders of his frozen feline assistants again and whispering to them in hushed tones.

“Okay fine. Have it your way. One, two, three, four, five, six, eight, nine...” The lion trailed off and blinked, “No, that’s not right. One, two, three, four, five, six, eight, nine, ten...I..you made me forget number...uhm...that number!”

Dominic’s ears perked up and he stood up and turned back to the lion innocently, “I made you forget a number? Which one?”

“That number between, uhm...six and eight.”

“Well there’s lots of numbers between six and eight. Can you be more specific?”

Danny’s face contorted to an icy glare, “The only whole number. There’s only one.”

“That you’re aware of anyways”

“I...I...” The lion’s face was a wash of frustration, exasperation, and confusion, “there are more?”

“Oh yes, many more.” Dominic walked over to him again, his assistants flanking him on either side, “But I don’t think you’ll have need of them where you’re going.”

The lion blinked, gulped, and looked at the two imposing, muscled felines, “I, what do you mean by that. Where am I going?”

“Back to sleep of course.” The cane was in the lion’s face again, shimmering, shining, bearing him back down to darkness and the waiting arms of the tiger and the panther. The fox stood in front of the limp lion, and with a triumphant smile leaned with his cane in front of him and turned to face the audience.

“How bout a round of applause for our most confused volunteer. Don’t worry folks, I’ll make sure he leaves back to normal. I mean, it’s awfully chilly outside to send someone home in their underwear.”

The audience continued laughing, and the fox continued talking, but Danny heard little of it. His body was carried between Vincent and Jared backstage to a waiting, very plush chair. Their work done, the two felines sat down in similar chairs, their bodies going limp and slack as they waited. Two puppets with cut strings.

Danny was aware on some level of the stage lights going down, the curtain closing, and the fox walking off stage carrying two pairs of pants, a leather vest, and Danny’s shirt.

A pair of the pants and the vest were slid into Vincent’s lap, “Good boy, Vincent.” The tiger mewled, the tightly bound package within his thong beginning to bulge, “Now go, get dressed and awaken at your own pace. You’ll remember everything you need to remember and forget everything you need to forget. You did well tonight.”

“Yessir...” the tiger stood up, re-donned his vest and pants, and began to walk towards the dressing room. His slightly wobbly steps became less and less wobbly with every step away from those chairs.

“As for you two, I want you both to stand, rising up, easily upon my voice. Open your eyes and follow me to my dressing room.” Jared, Danny, both stood, their muzzles slack, wide unfocused eyes opening to follow the fox as he lead them into his dressing room and shut the door behind him. Dominic grinned, “Time for this evening to really begin.”