

## Props and Paint

"Ok! You can come in now!" Landon called through his bedroom door. It swung open and his sister entered.

"Right," Olivia said, "let's see what's so special about this costume of yours."

Landon stood still while Olivia looked him over. She scanned his crisp black pants, tuxedo jacket, bow tie, and ruffled dress shirt. Her eyes hovered over his hastily combed hair and sweaty brow.

"I want to say.... a nervous groom on his wedding day?"

Landon gaped. "What? No! It's supposed to be James Bond!"

"Ah... no, I didn't get that."

"Grrr! And I thought it was such a good idea, too! Victor's party is in an hour! That's not enough time to find a new costume!"

Olivia chuckled at her brother's overreaction. "Relax, Lan, it's not that bad. You got the clothes right but you're just not *wearing* them right. Here, let me show you."

Landon held out his arms. "Well, you *are* the actress."

"Exactly, now shush."

Olivia re-tucked Landon's shirt so that it wasn't as creased and stood back to consider.

"Right, your jacket is too loose, we need to swap it for something tighter."

"But this is the only black one I have!"

"But not the only one that can work." Olivia corrected. "If I recall, you should be able to use the jacket you wore to Aunt Era's wedding." She fished said jacket out of the closet. "Yea, this'll work. Try it on." Landon complied. "See? Much less loose. Tighter clothes make for a more suave costume."

Landon adjusted the jacket. "Yea, but... it's navy."

"*Dark* navy." Olivia corrected with a breathy tone. "Dark enough to look black in dim lighting. You're going to a Halloween party, Lan, dim light is standard."

"Oh." He smiled. "Neat."

"Indeed. Now, go comb your hair properly while I grab something from my room. I think I have a prop that can really help you."

Five minutes and one wrestling match with the squirt bottle later; Landon's hair was slicked back.

“Nice, looking better already.” Olive chimed as she returned. “But now I’ve got something that’ll definitely ensure no one mistakes your costume.”

She held out a toy gun. Landon’s eyes went wide. “That’s a Walter PPK!”

“Exactly.”

He snatched the gun and turned it over in his hands. “Damn, Liv, I’ve been looking for one of these everywhere! Even the dollar stores were sold out!”

“It’s from the theatre. We do a James Bond parody every time a new movie comes out.”

Landon struck a pose and assumed a Sean Connery accent. “Call me Bond. James Bond.”

“I shall call you Cliché. Incredibly Cliché.” Olivia sniggered.

Landon’s counter was interrupted by his cellphone buzzing from the nightstand. He had gotten a text. “It’s from Victor.” He said as he slid open the phone. “Says to ‘check your email’.”

Landon powered on his laptop and opened Outlook. Victor’s email was nestled above pizza ads and appointment reminders.

Subject: Costume Addons!

Heya Lan! Vic here! The party is an hour away and that’s the perfect time to spice things up! So, in order to make things more interesting, I’ve decided to add a challenge to the dress code >:) Everyone who RSVP’d has just gotten an email like this one explaining that I’ve used the POWERS OF RANDOM NUMBERS(tm) to assign each of you an animal. Your challenge: incorporate that animal into your costume! Is this last minute? Yes. Will it inspire frantic searches for costume bits? Of course. Will it give me immense satisfaction? I’m evil, so definitely! I SHALL DRINK IN YOUR SUFFERING! :D Also: your animal is raccoon. Enjoy!

“A... ra—raccoon?” Landon stuttered. He reread the email. “How the devil am I supposed to make James Bond into a raccoon?”

“Hmm?” Olivia read the email over Landon’s shoulder. “Well, he did say he was evil. But he only specifies that you have to ‘incorporate’ the animal into your costume. Dad’s got that ‘rollerblade raccoon’ belt buckle; if you wear that you’d satisfy the requirement.”

Landon scowled. “James Bond would *not* wear a rollerblade raccoon belt buckle.”

“Then all I can think of would be face paint.” Olivia began before her own cell rang. She answered. “Yea? Seriously? How could she possibly have pulled that while—oh. Well, that’s just stupid. Uhh, I think so. Gimme ten minutes.” She hung up and turned to Landon. “Lan, that was Jake from the theatre. Seems Nan strained a tendon or something and I need to fill in for the Halloween show. I have a spare case of stage makeup in my room that you can use. Just clean up after yourself.”

"Ah, thanks."

"And don't forget to bring a pack with a change of clothes."

"Yes mom."

"Oi! Watch it!"

He smirked. Olivia returned the look before leaving. Landon shut off his laptop before crossing the hall to Olivia's room. His sister's washroom was clean and organized with the exception of the maze of cords circling the sink connecting to her electric toothbrush, hairdryer, and water pick. Landon found the makeup kit easily on the top shelf of the medicine cabinet. In addition to what he imagined to be "standard" makeup items like powder and rouge, there was a set of coloured face paints and brushes.

"At least this'll be easy..." Landon murmured as he dipped a brush in the light gray paint. He shivered as the brush ran the cold paint across his face. He finished and washed and dried the brush before dipping it into the black paint and adding the bandit's mask. As an afterthought, Landon added a dot on his nose. The paint dried quickly and had set by the time he finished putting the makeup case away. He checked the finished effect in the mirror and sighed.

"I'm a James Bond raccoon; on Her Majesty's Secret Service and with a license to... rummage through garbage bins. Lovely."

The effect wasn't *that* bad, actually. Olivia's changes to the clothes still left him looking pretty savvy. Landon struck a pose. Yea, he could see this working. From across the hall came the faint sound of his cell phone alarm.

"Ack! Time to go!"

---

"Lan! Great you could make it! Glad to know my email didn't pose too much trouble!" Victor beamed as he opened the door. He was wearing a crisp white suit and had a monocle over his left eye and an eyepatch over his right.

"Yea, it wasn't too hard to manage. What're you supposed to be, anyway?"

Victor feigned a hurt look. "Can't you tell? I'm a spy villain!"

"Uhh... any villain in particular?"

"Nope. Just grabbed a bunch of traits and mushed 'em together! If my cat wasn't cowering upstairs I'd stroke her evilly to show you."

"I see..." Landon paused. "Is there a place I can drop my backpack?"

"Eh, just toss it under the coat rack. Now come in before the bugs get you."

Olivia was right. The lights inside were dimmed and supplemented by various flavours of jack-o-lantern. In the half-lit house Landon's navy jacket really did look black. He recognized some of his friends from

school among the guests. Others he imagined were people that Victor knew but he didn't. Still more had costumes that obscured their faces too much to tell who they were.

Some guests, like himself, had used face paint to meet Victor's last-minute costume credentials. Others had to take more creativity with their assigned animals. As Landon approached the snack table, he bumped into a pirate who had a toy meerkat on his shoulder instead of a traditional parrot. The pirate gave a quick 'yarr!' in greeting before leaving to resume a game of cards with a girl dressed as Little Bo Peep and her conspicuously woolly stuffed dog. After filling a plate with treats, Landon had to take care to avoid stepping on the paper-mache lizard tail trailing out from a ballerina's tutu as he found himself a free beanbag chair in the corner of the living room. He flopped onto the chair and watched the other guests mingle. Landon would join them soon enough. He just wanted to enjoy his plate of snacks first. Tasty, tasty snacks.

A commotion of whistles and catcalls erupted from the front hall just as Landon got halfway through his second brownie. Another guest had arrived, and all eyes in the front hall were turned on her. Felt bunny ears perched on top of an astronaut helmet waggled and bounced as the guest strutted into the living room. The girl wore a suit of aluminum foil that was wrapped so tightly it left little to the imagination. Landon stared as the glint of candles flickered and danced across the space-bunny's costume.

"Damn!" Exclaimed a nearby knight. "What are you wearing under that?"

There was a hiss of static before a sultry voice echoed through the helmet. "What makes you think I am?"

The knight was speechless. The space-bunny swept the room before turning to Landon. She approached. Landon gulped.

"A raccoon in a suit, hmm? What brings such a fine, well-dressed woodland creature like you to this soiree?"

Landon managed to hide his stammer behind a cough to clear his throat. He mustered his best accent. "A necessary piece of cover, ma'am, required to infiltrate our host's lair. Call me Bond, James Bond."

The bunny leaned in. "Well, mister Bond, if you truly are an agent let me ask you this....is that a pistol in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?"

"Standard issue, my dear." Landon grinned as he pulled out the replica.

The bunny broke character faster than Bond could down a martini. "Oh wow! That looks just like the real thing!" She snatched the gun from a surprised Landon's hand. "Definitely plastic but really detailed. The barrel is so thinly notched and the grooves even have a hard metal lustre to them! You had to have gotten this from your sister, right, Lands?"

Landon blinked. Lands? There was only one person who called him that. "Hanna?"

There was a burst of static from the helmet. "Me? Oh, not at all. Now, why don't we go somewhere quiet and I can make you forget all about this 'Hanna' of yours, mmm?"

“Nice try. You called me ‘Lands’. Only Hanna uses that weird nickname.”

The space-bunny lifted her visor to reveal the face of Landon’s friend surrounded by a mass of curly hair that had been squashed into the small helmet. “Oh, fine. Yea, Lands, it’s me.”

“You’re not really wearing nothing under there, are you?”

Hanna rolled her eyes. “Yea, as if. I *obviously* have clothes on beneath this, Lands. Tinfoil isn’t exactly known for its insulation.”

Landon chuckled. “Touche. Still, ‘sexy space bunny’ isn’t exactly a costume I could picture you wearing.”

“Well that’s the point, isn’t it? I thought it’d be funny to do something so out of character!”

“How’d you wrangle the voice?”

“Mic in the collar. Just gotta speak into it.” Hanna explained. She turned her head at an angle and her next words came out with the seductive air from earlier. “It took a few days to wire right but my dad helped so it wasn’t too bad. Honestly, I wanted to see how long I could keep the act up.”

Landon grinned. “Was probably a bad idea then to make a beeline for your best friend, eh?”

A scowl. “Maybe, but at least you were still fooled for a bit. I saw the way you were looking at me, Lands!”

“I don’t know what you mean.” Landon replied innocently. “I’m a raccoon after all and you’re the shiniest thing in the room.”

“Ah, the ol’ ‘I was just looking at her tinfoil’ excuse.”

“That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.”

Hanna leaned in and looked over Landon’s face. “It *is* a pretty good raccoon though. Olivia helped you with that too, I assume?”

“Trust an actor to know good costumes.”

“I’ll say!” Hanna grinned. “The ears especially look so realistic!”

“What’re you talking—?” before Landon could finish, Hanna reached out and rubbed his ears. His ears that were on top of his head. He could feel her touch muffled by the distinct sense of fur. This was not right.

“Be right back.” Landon spluttered before leaping off the beanbag and dashing to the front hall. He grabbed his backpack from under the coat hanger and locked himself into the closest washroom.

His strange suspicion was confirmed by the mirror. Landon’s ears were furry, peaked, and on top of his head. With this fact in mind, he was not entirely surprised to find his face sprouting fur as well; fur that

was coloured and patterned after the face paint. Common sense, what was left of it, dictated that Landon find someone to ask for help. He fished his cell out of the backpack and called his sister. He eyed his increasingly fluffy bandit's mask in the mirror as the phone rang.

Olivia finally picked up. "You chose a bad of a time to call, Lan. Intermission is almost over. What's up?"

"I'm turning into a raccoon."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm growing fur. My ears have moved. What the hell was in that makeup?"

"Take off your shoes."

"What?"

"Do it! Quick!" Olivia snapped.

Landon hastily obeyed. No sooner had he tugged off his shoes and socks than his feet burst outwards. Long, dark, and clawed, they matched the limbs of a raccoon perfectly.

"Explain. Now." Landon demanded. His hands had begun to darken as well.

"You used the makeup box in my bathroom instead of the one on my desk."

"There was a box on your desk?"

"Well, yea. I said to get the makeup from my room."

"I did!"

"No, you used the box in my bathroom! That's special stage makeup."

Landon stared at the phone. The gears in his head sputtered as they tried to register what Olivia had just said.

"Hello? Lan?"

"You...have stage makeup that turns people into animals?"

"Uhh, sort of? We use it for children's plays mostly since regular animal costumes look cheesy. Got a chem major in the prop department to whip it up last year. "

"Umm... ok then. How long is it supposed to last?"

"A few hours normally. It degrades in sunlight so at most you'll need to wait for morning."

"What am I supposed to do until then?" Landon asked exasperatedly.

"I dunno, whatever you were doing normally? It's Halloween, Lan, no one will notice."

"But I'm supposed to be James Bond!" he protested. "I can't be a secret agent if I'm...fuzzy."

"Well then make sure to use the right makeup next time!"

A chittering sigh escaped Landon's new muzzle. "Yea, yea. Anything else?"

"Avoid the urge to rummage through garbage bins."

"What? Will that actually happen?"

"Maybe? It's a 50/50 sort of thing. Gotta go now—intermission is over—bye!"

**\*click\***

Landon's clawed hand scratched the phone's cover as he snapped it shut and threw it into his bag. A pressure at the base of his spine made him remove his pants. A puffy, striped tail flowed out.

"Well that's just wonderful..." Landon grumbled as he checked his reflection again. The fur was everywhere now. It pressed uncomfortably against his shirt so he had to lose that too. At least it was Halloween. Like Olivia had said, no one was likely to realize this wasn't just a really good costume. Still, it sucked that Landon's master plan of dressing as 007 had failed. Or had it? There might be something salvageable here...

Landon clacked his claws together as he considered the pieces of his costume scattered on the floor. The bow tie was on a strap that could be worn around the neck, so it could be used. The dress shirt would definitely make him overheat, but the jacket could still work. He could even keep the belt and strap the PPK to it. The shoes had no chance of fitting, but who paid attention to shoes anyway? Inspired, he went to work.

Hanna was having fun seducing a vampire with a tiger-striped cape when Landon returned.

"Woah, what happened to you?" She asked wide-eyed.

"Got the rest of my outfit on." Landon fibbed. "Like I said, trust an actor to know a good costume, right?"

Hanna left the vampire hanging and followed Landon back to the living room. "So... what... you're a secret agent raccoon now?"

He shrugged and hopped back onto the beanbag. "I was before. Just swapped the ratios a bit. Wasn't sure which way I wanted to go at first but you helped me decide." He swished his tail around to his lap and rested his hands on it. It was really fluffy.

"Whatcha mean?" Hanna asked.

Landon was distracted by his tail's fluffiness.

Hanna leaned over and playfully tugged on one of his ears. "Oi!"

"Ack! What? What?"

"How does my costume make you, uh, raccoonify?"

Landon leaned back in the beanbag and calmly stroked his chin fur while his mind panicked to come up with an explanation.

"Well, see, it's like this..." he began. "I wanted to come as James Bond, yea? Awesome and cool secret agent and all."

"You wouldn't shut up about it in class."

"Uhh, right. Anyway, Victor's email sorta harpooned that. Hard to be suave and fluffy at the same time. Olivia had some spare costume pieces and wanted me to go all in. I, however, didn't. Still, she made me bring the parts in my backpack. I didn't plan to use them, though."

"And yet, here you are."

Landon leaned back and crossed his legs. He then uncrossed them since it turned out to be incredibly uncomfortable with thick fur.

"Well, that's because of you." He chittered. "Like I said earlier space-bunny isn't exactly in character for you, Hanna. I figured if you could do that, then I could manage an evening being cute instead of cool."

The lie was coming more easily as Landon realized it was tinged with fact. It must have been really embarrassing for Hanna to try out her costume's character, but she still went through and even had fun with it. Tonight was Halloween after all. If Hanna could wrap herself in tinfoil and wear a helmet with a sexy-voice microphone, then he should be able to enjoy being a makeup-induced raccoon for the night.

Hanna lowered her visor. "Well then," she said through the mic, "I believe that to be a fine arrangement. I love a man who isn't afraid to show his soft side." She scratched Landon behind the ear.

"And I like a girl who knows her shinies." Landon murred in contentment.

A hiss of static mixed with her chuckle. "Victor was just announcing that his 'Evil Apple Bob' had been set up in the back yard. What say we indulge in the night's more risky ventures?"

Hanna stood up and offered her arm. Landon rose and accepted it. "Of course, my dear. An agent must always be beholden to his mission."

"Afterwards, perhaps a private debriefing? I can do things with apples that will make your tail curl."



They stared at each other before bursting into laughter. Landon's tail swished happily behind him as they stepped out onto the porch and joined the crowd clustered around the apple bob. Tonight was Halloween, after all. Tonight was a time for space-bunnies and raccoon-spies to have fun.

*Jonas Belford, 2011*