

The Play's the Thing



A free Red Heir short story for
members of Lisa Henry's
Hangout.

By Lisa Henry & Sarah Honey

THE PLAY'S THE THING

LISA HENRY
SARAH HONEY

The Play's the Thing is a free short story set in the Red Heir universe, for readers of Lisa Henry's Hangout.

Please don't share outside the group.

-Lisa and Sarah

“**B**ut you said you liked theatre people,” Quinn reminded Loth in a quiet voice as they took their places in front of the stage.

“I said I liked to fuck minstrels,” Loth corrected through a forced smile for their many friends and admirers. The audience might have been facing the makeshift stage, but he had no doubt that most of them were here to see him and Quinn.

Quinn’s raised eyebrow judged him.

“Before I was happily married,” Loth amended. “*Ecstatically* married.”

Quinn smiled smugly and took his seat. Loth settled in beside him, and wondered, not for the first time, how the hell he’d ended up here, in a castle, as a king, married to Quinn. He was fairly certain that was not supposed to be the moral of his story, but he wasn’t enough of an idiot to question his luck.

“I actually hate the theatre,” Loth said. “It’s tedious. I’d rather masturbate vigorously with a cheese grater than sit through some playwright’s awful attempt at comedy. This is a comedy, right? At least the tragedies are usually funny.”

“It’s a history, I believe,” Quinn said.

“Fuck everything,” Loth said through his fixed smile. “What poor bastard’s life are they butchering this time?”

Quinn was suspiciously silent. Loth turned to look at him, just in time to see Cal and Benji plop down in the seats next to Quinn. “Ugh. They’d better not have written us as stupid,” Benji complained, flicking his hair over his shoulders and settling in with a bag of peanuts.

“Wait.” A horrible suspicion formed in Loth’s mind. “What did you say this was called again?”

“I didn’t,” Quinn said. “It’s called the Ginger Princes.” His eyes gleamed with merriment.

“Is this about *us*?” Loth hissed.

Quinn bit his lip, a smirk threatening. “Maybe.”

Calarian leaned over and poked at Quinn. "You didn't tell him?" he turned his attention to Loth. "Scott wrote a play about our adventures. I think he's trying to make people forget about Dave's ballad."

Loth smirked at that. Dave's ballad had taken off, despite the dubious lyrics and barely-there tune, and Loth had heard more than one guardsman singing, '*got a crap beard and uneven balls,*' casually as they went about their daily business.

Still. "And we've let Scott write this and perform it *why*, exactly?"

"It keeps him busy. Besides, it might be good. He might have found his calling."

Loth could see that Quinn was losing the battle to keep his grin in check. His husband was *such* a little shit. The kicker of it all was that it only made him even more attractive to Loth, who had always been partial to an arsehole, in more ways than one.

"Is Dave coming?" Calarian asked, craning his head. "I'm saving him a seat. Well, I'm saving him this whole bench. I think he'll fit on it. What about Ada?"

"It's her date night," Quinn said. "With Ser Greylord."

"Oh," Loth said. "So they get a romantic evening far, far away from this torture, but here we are--"

"Here we are supporting the arts," Quinn said firmly. "As we should."

Loth grumbled and sunk lower in his seat. Benji leaned past Cal and shoved the peanuts under his nose. Loth grabbed a handful, hoping he was allergic. At least the sweet release of death would spare him having to sit through this. Because *Scott* had written it? There weren't words enough to convey the horror.

Quinn nudged him. "Cheer up," he whispered. "I mean, how bad can it be?" He leaned in closer. "Besides, if you behave I'll make it up to you later."

"Did you really just ask how bad it could be?" Loth asked, gesturing at the stage. "Because this is *Scott*."

"I'm sure it won't..." Quinn trailed off. "Hmm. You may be right." But then it was too late to do anything but endure, because the lights were dimming and people were settling in and there was that whole pre-show rustling and muttering signalling that it was time to pay attention.

Loth knew it was going to be bad when a guy in stripey clothes and a silly hat bounded out onto the little stage and started jangling around some bells. And then there was the chorus: five people who couldn't carry a tune between them, attempting to sound sombre and serious as they sang something about praising the gods for delivering Aguilon from the tyranny of Lord Doom. The dramatic effect was spoiled somewhat by the one on the end who kept grinning and waving to someone in the audience, possibly his mum if the way he kept mouthing *hi mum!* was anything to go by.

And then the chorus and the guy with the bells cleared the stage, and two actors wearing terrible red wigs took their place.

"Prithee," the first exclaimed.

"Prithee?" Loth asked. "Who the fuck says *prithae*?"

He might have said it a little too loudly, because the actor glared at him before loudly clearing his throat. "Prithee, tell me thy name, fellow prisoner, and what terrible misfortune forces our meeting."

"That's not how that happened," Loth muttered.

Quinn elbowed him sharply, but his face pinched down into a frown when the other actor let out a giggling falsetto and simpered, "For I am the lost pwince Tarquin, twapped in pwison. Will none rethcue me?" And then he fell down in a dramatic swoon.

"I don't sound like that! And I don't lisp!" Quinn sounded so deeply offended that Loth's night immediately improved. "I'm going to fucking kill him."

"Now, now," Loth said. "We're here to support the arts, remember?"

A quick drum tattoo signalled the destruction of the cell wall—in case it was too subtle, one of the actors also helpfully exclaimed, "Oh! Look! Someone is breaking through the cell wall!"—and then pushed over two

wooden boxes. It was all very dramatic.

The audience cheered wildly as Dave the orc appeared on stage. Actual Dave. He beamed widely, his tooth-tusks gleaming, and waved at Loth and Quinn. Then he announced loudly, "There are two of them!"

Mad applause and the stamping of feet followed. Dave bowed repeatedly before finally clambering down off the stage and squeezing onto the bench beside Calarian.

"I'm in the play!" he declared happily. "I'm the star!"

The play had started badly, and it only got worse from there. When Dave didn't appear inclined to go back on stage, his role was taken over by two men sharing a green trench coat. It might have almost worked, except one of the men was about a foot and a half taller than the other and for some reason he was the one on top, so every time 'Dave' moved across the stage, the actors weaved and wobbled like a drunken sailor and were in danger of falling arse over teakettle. Dave didn't seem to mind, pointing excitedly and saying "It's me!"

Calarian and Benji had already collapsed into fits of laughter, periodically throwing peanuts at the stage.

"Humans are so stupid," Benji gasped, holding his stomach as tears streamed down his face. "Plays are so stupid. Everything is so stupid."

For once, Loth agreed with him.

Scott, of course played Scott. It turned out that Scott's version of Scott was even more painful than the real thing. Loth hadn't thought it was possible for someone to cock up playing themselves, but Scott managed it. There was, funnily enough, no mention of shitting in the swamp.

Calarian was played by a whip-thin boy with acne and yet another terrible wig. Ada was played by a man who spent the entire play kneeling, and Benji...

Benji was played by a busty woman with dark hair and skin-tight pants with a cucumber shoved down the front of them.

"At least I'm still hot," Benji said, crunching on some peanuts. "But my dick is bigger than that."

"That's true," Calarian said. He and Benji fist bumped.

"Yeah," Quinn agreed, nodding.

"Maybe there weren't any decent sized eggplants available," Loth suggested. "I think Scott used the last one on his costume."

"I think you're very pretty as a girl, Benji," Dave said.

"Gender constructs are stupid," Benji said. "But thank you, Dave."

Pie was played by a finger puppet, and still managed to steal every scene. And when at last the play was done, and the confused audience clapped awkwardly, Loth and Quinn escaped before Scott could invite them to the after party.

"I can't move!" Benji yelled after them, from where he was rolling on the floor grasping his stomach. "Help me, humans! I've laughed so much I hurt all over!"

Loth and Quinn ignored him and hurried outside into the gardens.

"I feel like if we ban all theatre by royal decree, that would be a bad thing," Quinn said. "But I can't deny I'm tempted."

"Are you sure we can't execute Scott?"

"Oh, I'm so tempted," Quinn said, his mouth tugging up in a smile. "But, you know, *also* a bad thing."

"How about banishment?" Loth asked.

"Banishment?" Quinn raised his eyebrows. "For writing a bad play?"

"I was thinking about banishing us," Loth said, "in an attempt to outrun our humiliation."

Quinn snorted.

"Although..." Loth hummed.

"What?" Quinn asked. "You have that look on your face that means you're plotting something. With you, it usually ends in blowjobs."

"That's because everything should end in blowjobs."

"True."

Loth grinned at him, and tugged him closer. He planted a smacking kiss on his lips. "So, supporting the arts, you said?"

Quinn wrinkled his nose.

“You know what would be really supportive?”

“What?” Quinn asked.

“If we paid Scott and his theatre troupe enough money so that they could take this play on the road,” Loth said. “For a really extended tour. A long, long way away from here For *years*.”

Quinn gasped. “That would be incredibly supportive of us!” He paused. “He’s not taking Dave, is he? We want to keep Dave.”

“We’re definitely keeping Dave,” Loth said. “So that's settled. Tomorrow, we establish, by royal decree, the Aguillon Travelling Players. Now, what was that you said about a blowjob?”

Quinn grinned wickedly, grabbed him by the hand, and dragged him inside and up the stairs to their bedroom. Loth followed him eagerly. The play might have been a disaster, but at least he knew the rest of the night would have a happy ending. And he was pretty sure that at least a significant part of him would give Quinn’s performance a standing ovation, over and over again until dawn.