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JOSÉE RENARD

THE
MAGICIAN

The Pleasure Club

Wicked



The Pleasure Club:

The Magician

By

Josée Renard

The Magician by Josée Renard

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The Magician

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ISBN: 978-1-60088-639-3

Cover Artist: Sable Grey

Editor: Jana Hanson

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Cobblestone Press, LLC

www.cobblestone-press.com

The Magician by Josée Renard

Dedication

For everyone, everywhere, who has ever dreamed of real magic.

Welcome to The Pleasure Club

Beth,

We're pleased to welcome you to The Pleasure Club.

As you have already signed and returned the contract and filled out all the necessary forms to ensure you receive your every wish, we will be in touch with you shortly with the details of your first Pleasure Night. Your Wish List and Pleasure Forms have been turned over to our staff of highly trained Pleasure Guardians, and they are hard at work finding your perfect match.

We will endeavor to meet your personal fantasy.

When you are contacted again, you will be given a location where your Pleasure Night will begin, and you will also be given a safe word to use should you at any time become uncomfortable. There is no shame in changing your mind. We're here to pleasure you, and should your safe word be used, your match for the evening will cease all activity, and the game will be put on hold until a mutual agreement between you and your Pleasure Master can be reached.

Once again, welcome to The Pleasure Club.

Please feel free to contact the office at any time should you have any questions.

Yours truly,

The Pleasure Club Management

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Beth,

Your Pleasure Night will begin Valentine's Day at midnight. The Orpheum Theater.

Your safe word is abracadabra.

* * * * *

Beth still wasn't sure she was doing the right thing, but because she'd fought this ambivalence in almost all of her clients, she discounted it as unfounded fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of change.

She couldn't allow herself to ignore the advice she gave her clients every day, so she shook off the fear and carried on.

The Orpheum Theater.

The whole idea of The Pleasure Club frightened her, but that they'd chosen this particular theater for her encounter was downright creepy. She hadn't told them *where* she'd seen the magic show. Yet that's where she was headed.

Rain dimmed the streetlights and sent shivers through her as she hurried toward the unlit theater marquee. A few lights shone in the lobby, and a large poster—invisible except as a black rectangle against the light—darkened one of the glass panes.

Beth stepped off the sidewalk and into a cold puddle. "Damn," she whispered and paused to repeat her mantra for the one thousandth, three hundred and seventy-fifth time since she'd got the letter from The Pleasure Club telling her where—and when—to go.

"I can't go on like this."

She had spent her life ministering to the mental and sexual health of others. *Her* mental health—if you defined it as being aware and dealing with any problems—was fine. Her sexual health—if you defined it as shying away from any kind of sexual activity with another human being of the opposite sex—was also fine.

Grinning, she laughed at how she'd become an expert at self-fulfillment since she'd given up sex almost fifteen years ago, deeming it too complicating to bother with.

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Her toy box was full of lovely things: lotions and oils and dildos and vibrators and whips and blindfolds... Well, just about anything she saw online or in her favorite toy store. She'd tried almost all of them, and Beth had convinced herself that the orgasms she gave herself were better than anything a man could give her.

That conviction was based on a few unsatisfactory sexual encounters as a teenager. Beth knew those long-ago encounters weren't enough to make the decision she'd made at seventeen: that sex was a waste of time and energy. She wouldn't have allowed one of her clients to maintain that decision into their thirties, especially a decision based on such obviously insufficient data.

So she'd taken her own advice and faced her fear.

She occasionally recommended The Pleasure Club to her clients, and they came back to her with rave reviews of their experiences. Beth didn't even hope for raves, simply for an experience to dispel those memories.

She didn't care if she never had sex again after tonight, but she knew she'd be a better therapist if she had one reasonable sexual encounter. And the one man she'd dreamed of since her thirteenth birthday was the only man she could imagine having that encounter with.

That birthday was still the happiest day of her life.

She'd been obsessed with magic for a year when her parents had decided to take her to the Orpheum to see a real, live magician. She'd received a party dress and new shoes for her birthday. The three of them had dinner in the old-fashioned, elaborate dining room of the Hotel Georgia. At that point in the evening, Beth had considered it the best birthday ever.

Her mom had said, "Hurry up, you two, we're going to be late."

It was a school night, and Beth whined, "But, Mom, it's my birthday."

"Not late for bed." Her dad laughed as he chuckled her under the chin. "Late for your birthday present."

She remembered walking down Main Street with the two of them and thinking how lucky she was. No matter what came next, none of her

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friends would have such a perfect birthday.

"Close your eyes, angel," her dad said. He guided her down the street for a few more minutes, then turned her around. Her mom joined him, their arms meeting over Beth's shoulders.

"You can open them now," her mom whispered in her ear. "Look up."

The marquee blazed with lights, dozens of people waited in line at the box office, but Beth's eyes went unerringly to the poster of Pendragon. "A magician?" she breathed, her heart pounding with excitement.

"A magician," her dad answered.

Pendragon returned to the Orpheum the following year, but Beth wasn't there to see him. Her parents had died in an accident only a month before his arrival, and nothing was ever the same.

And here I am again, she thought as she pulled open the door.

David Bourne watched as the woman—*Beth*—hesitated at the door. He knew exactly how she felt. He still wasn't sure why he'd let himself be talked into this, but he knew boredom had something to do with it.

He liked stage magic, he really did. He liked the energy of the audience; it gave him a buzz unlike anything except great sex, which was sadly lacking in his life. So he stuck with the stage show because he enjoyed figuring out how to make magic look complicated, like when he made a flock of pigeons disappear using hats and wands and folding boxes when all he really needed was a little focus.

Not that he'd ever made a flock of pigeons disappear. He'd long ago learned to use magic only for what truly counted, not for stage tricks. *Those* pigeons ended up underneath the stage in their traveling cages so he could use them again.

When he'd gotten this assignment, he'd searched out the magician Beth had seen as a teenager—the search necessary because Beth hadn't remembered his name, only where and when she'd seen him—and was pleased to find he'd actually seen Pendragon, even spoken to him when he was first starting out in the business. The older magician had been kind, helping him work out a stage presence, something just as important as the magic tricks.

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David wasn't planning on a whole lot of magic tonight; his plan involved a whole lot of hot, sweaty, wonderful, magical sex. A few splashy tricks to set the stage, so to speak, ending with the magical appearance of a king-size bed. He'd done the set up last night, practiced the bed trick a few times because it was new, and he was ready.

Beth shivered, her hand on the unlocked door of the theater. She'd pulled it slightly open once already, but she wasn't sure she had the courage to swing it wide enough to allow her entrance into the place. She shook her head, trying to displace the memories being here brought. She didn't succeed.

A door opened deep in the lobby, and a figure stood silhouetted against the warm amber light of the theater itself. He wasn't tall, but he was solid, she thought, and he wore... What?

A well-fitting black suit, a shirt as black as his suit, and if he wore a tie, it too was black. His hair was military short and dark against his tanned skin. She imagined he had tattoos on his arms and his back and maybe, she thought, in other places.

The thought of that body, taut and solid, bearing tattoos against the muscles she sensed beneath the formal clothing, sent chills up and down her spine. She hadn't realized until this very moment that the danger he so obviously represented was attractive.

More than attractive, it was compelling. Deeply enticing. Erotically moving.

Her body clenched as she watched him move across the lobby toward her. He stopped one step away, and she was forced to raise her chin to look up into the darkest, deepest eyes she'd ever seen.

David wasn't sure what to say. He had prepared an introduction, basing it on her experience with Pendragon and what her profile had indicated she was looking for. He couldn't speak those canned words to this woman.

She enchanted him.

He tried to step away before she drew him even further under her spell, but he was trapped. He'd never felt this way before, never been so tempted, so quickly and completely obsessed.