

Dexter by Design

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DEXTER BY DESIGN

JEFF LINDSAY



ONE

PARDONEZ MOI, MONSIEUR. OU EST LA LUNE?

Alors, mon ancien, la lune est ici, ouvre la Seine, énorme, rouge et humide.

Merci, mon ami, I see it now Et actualment, name of a dog, it is a night for the moon, a night made just for the sharp pleasures of the moonlight, the dance macabre between Dexter of the Dark and some special friend.

But *merde alors!* The moon is over *la Seine?* Dexter is in Paris! *Quelle horreur!* The Dance is not possible, not in Paris! Here there is no way to find the special friend, no sheltering Miami night, no gentle welcoming ocean waters for the leftovers. Here there are only the taxis, the tourists, and that huge, lonely moon.

And Rita, of course. Rita everywhere, fumbling with her phrase book and folding and unfolding dozens of maps and guidebooks and pamphlets, all promising perfect happiness and, miraculously, delivering it – to her. Only to her. Because her newly wedded Parisian bliss is strictly a solo act, and her newly acquired husband, former high priest of lunar levity – Dexter the Drastically Deferred – can only marvel at the moon and hold tightly to the impatiently twitching Dark Passenger and hope that all this happy insanity will end soon and send us back to the well-ordered normal life of catching and carving the other monsters.

For Dexter is used to carving freely, with a neat and

joyful hand that now must merely clutch at Rita's and marvel at the moon, savoring the irony of being on a honeymoon, wherein all that is sweet and lunar is forbidden.

And so, Paris. Dexter trudges meekly along in the wake of the Good Ship Rita, staring and nodding where these things are required and occasionally offering a sharp and witty comment, like, 'Wow,' and, 'Uh-huh,' as Rita trammels through the pent-up lust for Paris that has surged in her all these many years and which now, at last, has found consummation.

But surely even Dexter is not immune to the legendary charms of the City of Light? Surely even he must behold the glory and feel some small synthetic twitch stirring in response, somewhere in the dark and empty pit where a soul should be? Can Dexter truly come to Paris and feel absolutely nothing?

Of course not. Dexter feels plenty; Dexter feels tired, and bored. Dexter feels slightly anxious to find someone to play with sometime soon. The sooner the better, to be perfectly honest, since for some reason Being Married seems to sharpen the appetites somewhat.

But this is all part of the bargain, all part of what Dexter must do in order to do what Dexter does. In Paris, just like at home, Dexter must *maintenir le déguisement*. Even the worldly wise French might pause and frown at the thought of a monster in their midst, an inhuman fiend who lives only to tumble the other monsters off the edge into well-earned death. And Rita, in her new incarnation as blushing bride, is the perfect *déguisement* for all I truly am. No one could possibly imagine that a cold and empty killer would stumble

meekly along behind such a perfect avatar of American tourism. Surely, not *mon frère*. *C'est impossible*.

For the moment, alas, *très impossible*. There is no hope of slipping quietly away for a few hours of much deserved recreation. Not here, where Dexter is not known and does not know the ways of the police. Never in a strange and foreign place, where the strict rules of the Harry Code do not apply. Harry was a Miami cop, and in Miami all that he spake was just as he ordained it to be. But Harry spake no French, and French cops are so very unknown to me; the risk is far too high here, no matter how strongly the pulse of darkness may throb in the shadowy back seat.

A shame, really, because the streets of Paris are made for lurking with sinister intent. They are narrow, dark, and possess no logical order that a reasonable person can detect. It's far too easy to imagine Dexter, wrapped in a cape and clutching a gleaming blade, sliding through these gloomy alleys with an urgent appointment somewhere nearby in one of these same old buildings that seem to lean down at you and demand that you misbehave.

And the streets themselves are so perfect for mayhem, made as they are out of large blocks of stone that, in Miami, would have been pried out long ago and flung through the windshields of passing cars, or sold to a building contractor to make new roads.

But this is not Miami, alas. This is Paris. And so I bide my time, solidifying this vital new phase of Dexter's disguise, hoping to live through only one week more of Rita's dream honeymoon. I drink the French coffee – weak by Miami standards – and the *vin de table* – disturbingly, reminiscently, red as blood – and marvel at

my new wife's capacity for soaking up all that is French. She has learned to blush very nicely as she says, '*table pour deux, s'il vous plaît,*' and the French waiters instantly understand that this is a brand new two and, almost as if they got together ahead of time and agreed to feed Rita's romantic fantasies, they smile fondly, bow us to a table, and all but break into a chorus of '*La vie en rose.*'

Ah, Paris. Ah, *l'amour.*

We spend the days trudging through the streets and stopping at terribly important map references. We spend the nights in small and quaint eating spots, many of them having the added bonus of some form of French music playing. We even attend a performance of *The Imaginary Invalid* at the Comédie Française. It is performed entirely in French for some reason, but Rita seems to enjoy it.

Two nights later she seems to enjoy the show at Moulin Rouge just as much. She seems, in fact, to enjoy nearly everything about Paris, even riding a boat up and down the river. I do not point out to her that much nicer boat rides are available at home in Miami, boat rides that she has never shown any interest in, but I do begin to wonder what, if anything, she might be thinking.

She assaults every landmark in the city, with Dexter as her unwilling shock troop, and nothing can stand before her. The Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, Versailles, the cathedral of Notre Dame; they all fall to her fierce blonde focus and savage guidebook.

It begins to seem like a somewhat high price to pay for *déguisement*, but Dexter is the perfect soldier. He plods on under his heavy burden of duty and water

bottles. He does not complain about the heat, his sore feet, the large and unlovely crowds in their too-tight shorts, souvenir T-shirts and flip-flops.

He does, however, make one small attempt to stay interested. During the Hop-On-Hop-Off Bus Tour of Paris, as the recorded voice drones out, in eight languages, the names of the different fascinating locations with massive historical significance a thought comes unasked-for into Dexter's slowly suffocating brain. It seems only fair that here in the City of Eternal Accordion Music there is some small cultural pilgrimage available to a long suffering monster, and I know now what it is. At the next stop, I pause at the door of the bus and ask the driver a simple and innocent question.

'Excuse me,' I say. 'Do we go anywhere near the Rue Morgue?'

The driver is listening to an iPod. He pulls one ear bud out with an annoyed flourish, looks me over from head to toe, and raises an eyebrow.

'The Rue Morgue,' I say again. 'Do we go by the Rue Morgue?'

I find myself speaking in the too-loud tones of the American non-linguist, and I stumble to a stop. The driver stares at me. I can hear tinny hip-hop music coming from the dangling ear bud. Then he shrugs. He launches into a brief and passionate explanation of my complete ignorance in very rapid French, pops the ear bud back in, and opens the door to the bus.

I follow Rita off the bus, meek, humble, and mildly disappointed. It had seemed like such a simple thing to make a solemn stop at the Rue Morgue, to pay my respects to an important cultural landmark in the world

of Monsters, but it is not to be. I repeat the question later, to a taxi driver, and receive the same answer, and Rita interprets with a somewhat embarrassed smile.

‘Dexter,’ she says. ‘Your pronunciation is terrible.’

‘I might do better in Spanish,’ I say.

‘It wouldn’t matter,’ she says. ‘There is no Rue Morgue.’

‘What?’

‘It’s imaginary,’ she says. ‘Edgar Allan Poe made it up. There is no *real* Rue Morgue.’

I feel like she has just announced there is no Santa Claus. No Rue Morgue? No happy historical pile of Parisian corpses? How can this be? But it is certain to be true. There is no questioning Rita’s knowledge of Paris. She has spent too many years with too many guidebooks for any possibility of a mistake.

And so I slide back into my shell of dumb compliance, the tiny flicker of interest killed as dead as Dexter’s conscience.

With only three days left before we fly back home to the blessed malice and mayhem of Miami, we come to our Full Day At The Louvre. This is something that has raised mild interest even in me; just because I have no soul does not mean I don’t appreciate art. Quite the opposite, in fact. Art is, after all, all about making patterns in order to create a meaningful impact on the senses. And isn’t this just exactly what Dexter does? Of course, in my case ‘impact’ is a little more literal, but still – I can appreciate other media.

So it was with at least a small interest that I followed Rita across the huge courtyard of the Louvre and down the stairs into the glass pyramid. She had chosen to go

this alone and forsake the tour groups – not out of any distaste for the grungy mobs of gaping, drooling, woefully ignorant sheep who seemed to coalesce around each tour guide, but because Rita was determined to prove that she was a match for any museum, even a French one.

She marched us right up to the ticket line, where we waited for several minutes before she finally bought our tickets, and then we were off into the wonders of the Louvre.

The first wonder was immediately obvious as we climbed out of the admissions area and into the actual museum. In one of the first galleries we came to, a huge crowd of perhaps five large tour groups was clustered around a perimeter marked by a red velvet rope. Rita made a noise that sounded something like ‘Mrmph,’ and reached for my hand to drag me past. As we walked rapidly past the crowd I turned for a look; it was the *Mona Lisa*.

‘It’s so tiny,’ I blurted out.

‘And very overrated,’ Rita said primly.

I know that a honeymoon is meant to be a time for getting to know your new lifepartner, but this was a Rita I had never encountered before. The one I thought I knew did not, as far as I could tell, ever have strong opinions, especially opinions that were contrary to conventional wisdom. And yet, here she was calling the most famous painting in the world overrated. The mind boggled; at least, mine did.

‘It’s the *Mona Lisa*,’ I said. ‘How can it be overrated?’

She made another noise that was all consonants and pulled on my hand a little harder. ‘Come look at the Titians,’ she said. ‘They’re much nicer.’

The Titians were very nice. So were the Reubens, although I did not see anything in them to explain why they should have a sandwich named for them. But that thought did make me realize I was hungry, and I managed to steer Rita through three more long rooms filled with very nice paintings and into a café on one of the upper levels.

After a snack that was more expensive than airport food and only a little tastier, we spent the rest of the day wandering through the museum looking at room after room of paintings and sculptures. There really were an awful lot of them, and by the time we finally stepped out into the twilit courtyard again my formerly magnificent brain had been pounded into submission.

'Well,' I said, as we sauntered across the flagstones, 'that was certainly a full day.'

'Oohhh,' she said, and her eyes were still large and bright, as they had been for most of the day. 'That was absolutely incredible!' And she put an arm around me and nestled close as if I had been personally responsible for creating the entire museum. It made walking a bit more difficult, but it was, after all, the sort of thing one did on a honeymoon in Paris, so I let her cling on and we staggered across the courtyard and through the gate into the street.

As we turned the corner a young woman with more facial piercings than I would have thought possible stepped in front of us and thrust a piece of paper into Rita's hands. 'Now to see the real art,' she said. 'Tomorrow night, eh?'

'*Merci,*' Rita said blankly, and the woman moved past, thrusting her papers at the rest of the evening crowd.

'I think she probably could have gotten a few more earrings on the left side,' I said as Rita frowned at the paper. 'And she missed a spot on her forehead.'

'Oh,' said Rita. 'It's a performance piece.'

Now it was my turn to stare blankly, and I did. 'What is?'

'Oh, that's so exciting,' she said. 'And we don't have anything to do tomorrow night. We're going!'

'Going where?'

'This is just perfect,' she said.

And maybe Paris really is a magical place after all. Because Rita was right.