

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 25
BUTTERFLIES, AND OTHER AGENTS OF CHAOS

“Man, I ache! This is all your fault, Magic Boy.”

“Yes, dear.”

“And don't get cute with me when I'm haranguing you.”

“No, dear.”

“That's better. How much more of that do we have left?”

“A few weeks. We're not due on stage till early next month. But we'll probably need to practice some at E's.”

“And you can bet Carrie will want to watch.”

“Watch? I'll take money that she'll want to join in.”

“Probably. At least she hasn't been bugging us since we...” she trails off.

“Since we posted her back to Sarah.”

“Yeah. You don't think she's mad, do you?”

“I doubt it. She's asked Sarah if she can keep the stem.”

“She didn't say 'yes', did she? Oh, God, that's the last thing I need! Waking up to find Carrie's turned me into a sex toy.”

“I wouldn't worry about it.”

“And why's that, Magic Boy? Don't tell me you're going to protect me from my evil sister? Or have you done something to make me immune to everyone else's magic?”

“I was thinking more like the former, Lise. If you need rescuing, I'll be there. Shining armour and all.”

“Well, as long as I get to keep the white horse afterwards.”

Peter leans down, kissing her as she rests against him on the sofa. “We'll see. Do you want me to do anything about those aches?”

“Like what? Knowing you, you'd make them vanish. Along with whatever part of me was aching.”

“Possibly. But that wasn't what I was planning on.”

“And what were you planning on exactly?”

“Just a massage.”

“A massage? You can do massage?”

“My Mum taught me. I can't do anything fancy, but easing out the kinks is doable.”

“No magic?”

“No magic.”

“Well, I know you have good hands, so, ok, Magic Boy, I'm in your hands. But just for a massage. We can discuss what else we might do afterwards. If your hands are good enough, that is.”

“You'll need to be lying down.”

Lisa looks up at him, “I am lying down, dopey.”

“I meant on something a bit harder than the couch.”

“You're now going to tell me you've got a massage table in your back pocket, aren't you?”

“Well, no.”

“So what am I lying on?”

“Well, you know I said 'no magic'...”

“You didn't actually mean 'no magic', did you?”

“Well, no, but I mean no magic in the massage.”

“So when do you mean magic?”

Peter reaches his hand out, closing it into a fist and knocks on the air. “About now.” he says, grinning sheepishly, “Just something more appropriate to lie on.”

“Anything else that should be covered by 'no magic' but isn't?”

“Well, maybe one other thing...”

“You're pushing your luck here, Peter.”

“Well, it would be better if there wasn't anything between me and you while I'm doing the....”

"You're just looking for an excuse to get me naked, aren't you?"

"No, no, I just..."

"Pity. And how does me being naked require magic?"

"It doesn't require it, really. It's just quicker."

"Impatient to get your cold hands on me, aren't you?"

"Maybe."

"Well, what are you waiting for? Get on with it."

"Yes, dear."

Lisa swats him playfully, shivering slightly as her clothes dissolve into streamers of smoke, coiling briefly around her body before coalescing into a pile of neatly folded clothes on the sofa. "Well, Magic Boy, where's the invisible table for me to get onto? Not all of us are used to climbing on things we can't see."

"Allow me." he bows, and Lisa feels herself rising slowly up.

"You have a really strange idea of no magic, Peter." she takes a deeper breath as she starts to fall slowly forward, tilting until she's horizontal, staring down at the wood strip flooring, "And you could give me a little warning, too." she raises her head as she drifts sideways, slowing to a stop in the middle of the lounge, "I'm not feeling a table, Peter."

"Don't you trust me?"

Lisa turns her head, "About as far as I could throw you." she replies sweetly, "Any other little things you forgot to mention? Because staring down at the floor without anything between me and it isn't what I need to relax."

"Well, we can't have that, can we?" he squats down, smiling up at her, one hand flat on the floor.

"You're pushing it now, Peter."

"Sorry." He raises his hand, pale white wisps of smoke curling out around his fingers. The smoke spreads out, rising up around Lisa, forming a sheet of cloud under her, supporting her like a hard mattress. Lisa leans her cheek on her hand, pressing into the cloud.

"Much better." she feels long, warm fingers pressing into the base of her neck, digging into her aching muscles. "Mmmmmmm. Feels good. Maybe you do know what you're doing, after all."

Later, when both are back on the sofa, Peter's arm around Lisa, her head leaning on his chest, "Ok, Peter, where did you really learn that? I can't imagine naked massaging was something your mother taught you."

"No, she was usually clothed."

"And you tried some of those moves on her?"

"Don't be silly. I learned some things in my misspent youth."

"I'm starting to believe some of those stories now."

"Heh."

"You really did eat Sarah all up, didn't you?"

He looks down, "Yes."

"And you want to do that to me."

"Yes. When you want to let me."

"Won't be for a while, Magic Boy. Sarah's got a lot of weird ideas about what's fun."

"This is very true." He kisses her forehead, "Of course, she's not the only one."

Lisa snuggles up against him, "I resemble that remark." she murmurs. "And you wouldn't have anything fun in mind, would you?"

"Oh?"

"Don't give me that look. It's not like I'm going to let you do anything you like. Just something small."

"Bite size?"

She pokes him in the ribs, still leaning on him, "Don't push it, Magic Boy."

"I can't get something small if I've got you leaning on me." she looks up at him with her eyebrows raised, "Alright, well, yes, I could technically, but it's very lazy and..." Lisa snuggles in closer,

“fine, fine, I won't move you.”

Lisa smiles, feeling a little tingle in her cheek as it lies against him, a warm breeze coiling around her and moving on. “Mmmm, nice.”

“Delivery for Ms McCagherty.”

“Mmmm?” She opens her eyes, looking at a black box about a foot and a half on a side. The edges are crimson, silver diamonds in the centre of each side with a small slit for swords to slide through.

“When I said something small, I didn't mean me! And that thing is just so cramped. You'd think you could at least make it a bit more roomy when you've got a warehouse hidden in your bedroom.”

“Ok, ok, I'll put it back.”

“You need to stop taking me so seriously. I didn't mean no.”

“Not this time.”

“Well, you're the bloody magician. Shouldn't you be able to read my mind to know if I mean it or not?”

“I wouldn't dare.”

“Awww, don't tell me you're scared of little me.” she asks sweetly, sitting up.

“I am if I've got any sense.”

Lisa nods, “And don't you forget it, mister.” before kissing him, and stepping into the box, “I mean it about the space, though. It's a wee bit cramped in here when you shut everything up.”

“I'll look into it. But my dad was better at building them than I am. You might have to suffer.”

“I won't be alone, Magic Boy.”

“Of course not, dear.”

“Right, that's it. When you let me out of here, I'm going to go Yoda on your ankles!”

“Yes, dear.” Peter replies in the same long-suffering tone, folding the box up around her.

“Mmmmmmm. Maybe I'll forgive you, Peter, but I wouldn't put money on it.”

“Yes, dear.”

“Oh, give it a rest, Peter.”

“Yes, dear.” he opens the box, allowing Lisa to step out onto the carpet, sinking up to her ankles. She looks up, and up, and up.

“How small have you made me, Magic Boy?”

“Four inches. Same as last time.”

“Yeah, right. No way were you this big last time. No way everything was this,” she looks around the room, “wow!”

“You weren't really in a position to appreciate things last time.”

“You surprised me last time! And you tricked me! And, and, and, what are you smirking about?”

“Just thinking: Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.”

“Don't go getting smart with me. And how about a lift, I'm getting a crick in my neck just looking up at you, you bloody human tower block. Oh, never mind, I'll do it myself.” she rises into the air, floating upwards, swaying from side to side, “You may applaud now.” she squeaks, floating unsteadily in front of his face.

“Impressive.”

Lisa wobbles. “Whoa. Harder than it looks.” she looks down and blinks, the floor 30 storeys below her,

“Shouldn't have done that.” she screws her eyes up, trying to concentrate, “Help!!!” her arms flail as gravity reasserts its hold, dragging her towards the floor below, and into a hard landing on a pink barrier, “ow!” she lies there, feeling everything hurt, especially her head, her breath coming in hard gasps, the barrier constantly rippling underneath her.

“Are you alright, Lise? Lise?”

She winces as she pushes herself to sitting, bringing further complaints from her back, a chill running through her, “Ow. Next time I do something stupid like that, please stop me.”

A gale blows over her as Peter sighs in relief, “That was a bit too close.”

“Tell me about it. Ow. I'm going to be black and blue tomorrow. Good hands again, Magic Boy.”

“Yeah. Do you think you could not do that without warning again?”

“What's the matter? My gallant night in shining, ow, armour got to save the day, didn't he?”

“Only just.”

“You still got me, King Kong.”

"This time. I'd rather not have to mop you off the floor. You know how I hate housework."

She blows the worlds smallest raspberry at him and winces, "Ok, ok. In future I'll give you warning before I surprise you. It wasn't something I actually planned. Ow. Especially the falling. You got anything in your bag of tricks that's good for allover bruises?"

"I'll have a look. I might even have something that will stop you plunging to your death when you show off next time."

"Oh, don't do me any favours, Magic Boy."

"I won't. Ah, there it is." he pulls out a long line of white thread.

"You have got to be kidding me. How's that going to help?"

"Trust me."

"Please, like I've ever trusted you, Magic Boy."

"I'm hurt."

"No, I'm hurt. Ow. "

Peter slowly lowers the thread onto his palm beside her, and whistles. One end of the thread rears up, turning towards Lisa, seeming to regard her quizzically.

"What's with the rope snake, Magic Boy? You're not going to get kinky when I'm helpless and in pain, are you?"

"Of course not." the string loops itself down, sliding under her back, worming slowly under her.

"Saving that for later, are you?"

"Maybe." he replies, the string coiling slowly around her.

"And what does wrapping me up do? This isn't exactly a bandage."

"You'll like it."

"And yet you're not telling me what's up? With you, that's always suspicious."

"Lise..."

"I know, I know, with you everything's suspicious. And you're still not telling me what's going on? This better not be another mummy trick!"

"It's not. It's just a healing cocoon."

"Just a healing cocoon? Sure there's not any extra secrets involved?"

"Well, maybe one or two."

"Why am I not surprised? You'd better let me out quickly, Magic Boy." she warns as the thread finishes coiling around her, hiding her face from view.

"5, 4, 3, 2..." an arm pushes out through the thread cocoon, pulling it apart as if the thread was as fragile as wet tissue paper, "You're early."

Lisa spits out part of the cocoon, "Glad I could surprise you without bruises." and struggles free, "Now, could you please tell me what else you did? My back is itching like hell, and I know it's something you've done."

"Guilty." he pinches the cocoon, pulling it away from her, a pair of large butterfly wings unfurling between her shoulder blades. The edges of the wings are black, the rest brilliant red and orange. He holds Lisa up to the mirror.

She gasps, a tiny squeak, as she stares into the mirror. The wings spread out behind her, almost as tall as she is, arcing over her head. "They're gorgeous!! Do they work? And they're fiery too. Your idea of a joke, Peter?"

"Can't claim credit. The colours are what fits you best. And, yeah, they work."

Lisa takes a step towards the edge of his palm, and looks down, "They'd better." She spreads her wings and rises off Peter's hand, fluttering up to his face, "Much better." She flutters up to his nose and pats him, before flitting off, "Tag! You're it!"

"What?"

"You're it, Magic Boy. Catch me if you can." she flutters through the door into the kitchen.

"And what happens when I catch you?"

"We'll see when it happens, big boy. But you won't catch me in there." she shouts back, landing on top of the cupboards, crouching down behind the lip. "Now, let's see if that box did what I think it did." she reaches into her jeans' pocket, pulling out a tiny ruby ring, "Perfect. Let's see you catch me now, Peter." she grins, putting the ring on her finger, and vanishes. "It's not really cheating, is it? I mean, he'd do worse if he caught me, wouldn't he? Alright, better if he caught me. Bloody conscience, always think you're right. Alright, alright, so it's cheating. I'm with a magician. I need all the advantage I can get. Now shush." the annoying inner voice goes quiet as Peter enters the room. Lisa ducks down, then peers over the edge as Peter looks round the room. She giggles and Peter makes no sign whatsoever of noticing. "Oh, I like this ring. I really, really do."

"Where are you hiding, Lise? You know I'll find you eventually."

“Oh, yeah? Right now I could be standing in front of you stark-naked doing starjumps and you wouldn't notice.” she pauses for a moment, “Nah, I'd never get my shirt over these.” she reaches back, stroking the wings, “Wonder how he expects me to sit down? Typical. I have to think of everything.” She looks over the edge of the cabinet. Peter is still there, looking for her. He hasn't tried opening the cupboards yet, but it won't be long. “Come on, Lise, I know you're in here.”

She peers over the edge of the cupboard, and grins. “Driving you mad, isn't it, Magic Boy? Bet you can't think how I can be hiding from you.” Peter turns, looking straight at her. Lisa ducks down behind the lip. “Did he see me? He couldn't have seen me. That's the point. He can't see me.” she peers over the lip again, but Peter's looking at the other side of the room, “phew! I thought he saw me there. And if he had, a certain fairy and I would be having wo... what?” she feels static clinging to her skin, pulling on her, lifting her up, “Dammit! He did find me! How could he? How did you?” she looks around to find that everything on the tops of the cupboards floating above them. Peter turns around the room, lowering objects one by one as he confirms they're not Lisa. “Shit! I don't care what that fairy said, there's no way he won't notice me when he has to bloody well put me down! And then he'd have all sorts of questions I don't want to answer. Probably broken another one of the secret police's rules. 'No unauthorised dealings with little winged people' or something.” She tries flapping her wings, flailing about, but the grip holding her in place remains as strong as ever. “Oh, this is just ridiculous. Maybe I should let him find me. No, I didn't think so either. Oh, I wish I could get out of this without him seeing me.” she hears the doorbell buzz and feels herself being lowered down to the top of the cupboard, shivering as she touches down amid a thin carpet of dust. “Now that is what you call good timing.” She jumps over the edge, her wings fluttering as she flits after Peter. “Now, let's see who's interrupting.”

Peter pulls the door open as she catches up, and the draft promptly knocks her back again.

“Oh, you are so going to pay for that, Magic Boy. Even if it was an accident.” She rights herself, fluttering forward.

“Hey, Joe.”

The woman in the doorway pouts, pulling her lips together. Her slim figure is clad in black leather that looks painted on as it clings to her. Jet black hair cascades over her shoulders, streaks of red flashing through it, a black motorcycle helmet under her arm. “I'm Sue today.” She points at her name badge, a little brass rectangle on her left breast, “Seriously, do I look like Joe? Were these not a clue?” she jabs a finger at her breasts.

“Sorry, Sue. So what brings you down to London?”

“His Master's Voice, what else? He's going to have to learn to trust the mail sometime.”

“And stop you from riding around?”

“Well, yeah, that is a definite plus.” She smiles, pulling down the zip of her jacket, revealing milky skin beneath. She reaches her hand in, pulling out a thin gold-paper envelope. “And he'd quite like to see you. Soon. Tickets are in there.” She zips herself up again, “See you soon. And maybe this will help you remember who I am.” She grabs Peter, pulling him through the door, kissing him deeply. She turns, waving over her shoulder, pulling on her helmet as she walks down the stairs. Lisa follows her out, fuming.

“Ok, who the hell is that??? And what does she mean kissing my boyfriend? Peter, your explanation for this is going to be very interesting. And it better be good!” she turns, scowling as Sue slides over a jet black bike that wouldn't look out of place on a race track. The engine roars, smoke rises from the tyres and she speeds off, heading straight for the wall. Lisa looks down. “Oh great. She's going to kill...” Sue and the bike slam headfirst into the wall, and vanish, driving straight through the shadowed brickwork. “The explanation's getting more and more interesting. If you've been keeping more secrets from me, Magic Boy, I'll...” she flutters up to the door, only to find it firmly closed.

“Fuck it! That's what I get for following the leather-clad tart rather than just hitting him! Oh, well, there's always the windows.”

“Well, if you want to be unimaginative, there is, I suppose.”

Lisa whirls, to find a fairy sitting on the railing, her wand resting on her crossed legs, a red bikini edged in white wrapped around her. “What are you doing here?”

“Honestly, is that any way to talk to your fairy godmother? Especially when you seem to be enjoying the labours of our last meeting.”

Lisa looks down at the ring, “Ok, ok. Thank you very much for the ring. I admit it is very nice. Now, what are you doing here?” the fairy looks disapprovingly at her, “Please?”

“Well, dear, since you asked so nicely, I'm here to see how things are going.”

“And the real reason?”

The fairy pouts, folding her arms, the wand tapping, “You are still a very rude and impertinent young lady, I see. Why, I've half a mind not to see if that silly wish you made has affected you.”

“Wish? What wish?”

“What wish she says.” tiny eyes roll in their sockets, “The wish you made in the last ten minutes. The one that accelerated that magician's messenger through the shadowrealms like she was shot out of a cannon. The one that drew half the realm's attention. That wish! Now, what did you wish for?”

“I don't know. I...”

“Now, you listen here, young lady, you made a wish. While wearing a fairy ring. Do you have any idea what that means? No, of course you don't. So, we'll see what you wished for and then, we'll talk.” she floats down to the concrete floor. “Sit.” she pats the floor next to her.

“I don't...”

“Sit!”

Lisa sits down suddenly. “Hey! What do you...”

“Shush.” she places her wand on the floor, tracing a circle over the rough concrete, “Now, this usually works better with water, still pools are the best, but needs must.” the concrete starts to move, swirling around the tip of the wand.

“What the?!”

“Shush.” the concrete shimmers, revealing the inside of the kitchen, staring down at Lisa's wings as she struggles in the grip of Peter's magic.

“Oh, this is just ridiculous. Maybe I should let him find me. No, I didn't think so either. Oh, I wish I could get out of this without him seeing me.” the tiny image squeaks. The doorbell buzzes again.

“Well, not that bad, all in all, but you must be careful. This,” she takes hold of Lisa's hand, tapping the ring, “is not something to take lightly.”

“If it's so dangerous, why the hell did you give it to me and not warn me?”

“I didn't think it would grow quite so quickly. It usually takes years before wishes start being granted. Plenty of time for you to understand the rules.”

“Growing? Rules?”

“It's a fairy ring. In the presence of magic, it gets more potent. It also gets more potent the more it's used, or even the more it's worn, but that takes a lot longer. It just shouldn't be able to grant wishes yet. Even little ones like that.”

“Oh, I wish...” a hand clamps over her mouth.

“No you don't. I'm not going to see just how powerful it's gotten with me as the target thank you very much.”

Lisa mumbles something behind the hand.

“Shush, dear, the grown ups are thinking. Ow!!!” she yanks her hand away, “You bit me?! That hurt!”

“Serves you right.”

“Maybe it does. Maybe it doesn't. It still hurt. And a solution still has to be found to an irresponsible, vicious, rude mortal running around with a wishing ring before she's ready.”

“Can't I wish for the ring not to grant wishes?”

“Well, yes, but that would set up a reality inconsistency. A wishing ring that because of it's own wish doesn't grant wishes. That sort of thing can really upset the universe. It's probably better if you don't make wishes while in it's presence. At least not unless you really mean them. Just don't wish for world peace or something big like that. You know the deal, careless wishes always backfire. Selfish wishes always backfire. Really, really big wishes always backfire.”

“All wishes always backfire?”

“Unless you're very, very, very careful, that's probably a good place to start, dear. Actually, it's probably a good place to stay. You mortals are never as clever and thorough as you think you are.”

“Well, if you're so clever and thorough, why don't you give me a solution?”

“Oh, that's easy dear. Just give me the ring and everything will be fine.” she looks over at Lisa, “But that's not going to happen, is it?”

“No.”

“So, my advice to you is to stop wishing. Don't say 'I wish'. At all. It'll be good discipline for you. And as you won't be able to stop just like that, I suggest you stop being quite so, emphatic. If there isn't enough will behind it, the ring won't work. In the meantime, let's see how far along things have got. Always a good idea to know how big the problem is.”

“About 5'4 usually.”

“Very funny. Let's see. Have you tried being visible while wearing the ring? That's quite a simple thing.”

“How will I know? I can see me and you can see me anyway.”

“Well, for one thing you'll get a shadow, dear. That and I'll know. I did create this, after all.”

“And forgot to include safeguards?”

“Don't be silly, dear, of course I included safeguards. I only gave it to someone who wasn't likely to be corrupted by power. Well, not corrupted in a

bad way. If anyone else tries to use it, poof.”

“Not corrupted in a bad way? What the hell does that mean??”

“Oh, you know, the hurting or controlling others type of corruption. The kinky sex kind of corruption is a given with magicians. You humans get so uptight about the most meaningless little things like that. Now, stop stalling.”

“Jawohl, mein frau.” she stares down at the ring, willing it to stop working.

“And don't be cheeky.”

Lisa feels the ring go cold against her finger. “Did it work?”

“It worked, dear. Look for yourself.” she points the wand at Lisa's new shadow, “Now, unless you want to be found...”

“Right, right.” the ring grows warm again and Lisa's shadow fades.

“Now, as it's a fairy ring, you should be able to become more of a sensible size, so we can deal without craning our necks or straining our wings. I do not understand how you can possibly stand being so huge and clumsy normally. It must be like driving one of those tanker things, takes a week to turn it around. But obviously, you are a sensible size now, so we'll have to check that later. Now, we know you can handle invisibility and the like, so the next step is insubstantiability.”

“What? That's not even a real word.”

“Invisible to the world around you as well as it's eyes and ears, dear. Stepping into the grey realms.” she looks at Lisa's complete incomprehension, and sighs, “Intangibility. Being a living ghost. Ah, recognition dawns.”

“If you're finished? So, how do I become a ghost then?”

“Such impertinence. Here I am, out of the goodness of my heart, trying to help, and what do I get?”

A sceptical look is the answer. “Of course. The only reason you're here is out of the goodness of your heart. Nothing to do with half the fairy realm suddenly getting interested in where a mere mortal like me got a fairy ring from.”

The fairy reddens slightly, “You are very suspicious. Of course, that's nothing to do with it. I am merely concerned for your welfare.”

Lisa smiles. “Of course. So, how do I become ghosted?”

“It's like invisibility, only it's more. You fade away, become not there, I suppose it feels like it feels when you let him vanish you only not quite because you're not that far gone.”

“Well, that clears it up.” she stares at the ring, trying to capture the feeling of vanishing, her body drifting away into nothing. The ring feels warmer than ever, a shiver passing through her body. “Well, something just happened.” She pushes her hand against the floor, feeling it give a little. She pushes harder and her hand passes through into the solid concrete, as easily as if it was nougat. She pulls her hand out, staring at it. She shivers again, the ring almost painful on her fingers, and her legs slip through the floor as easily as if it was a pool of water. Lisa gasps, her wings beating to pull herself up, but achieving nothing. She feels her skin sparkle, golden light wrapping around her, drawing her up. The fairy puts down her wand.

“Maybe not quite that far gone, dear. You need to be a little connected to the world, but just enough to move through it, not so much that you fall through. You wouldn't like what's on the other side.”

“Other side?”

“Best not worry about it, dear. Try again, but not quite so hard. I'll be here to pull you back.”

“I always worry more when people tell me not to worry about something. Ok, here goes nothing. Again.” she feels the ring warming up, her body shivering. She presses her hand against the floor, feeling it change from concrete to nougat to jelly to molasses to syrup to water slowly getting easier to move through, her hand reaching deeper and deeper.

“That's enough, dear.”

Lisa pulls her hand back. “What happens if it turns solid while I'm inside something?”

“You won't. The ring won't let you do that without you consciously willing it to. But my advice is don't. It's very messy.”

“Messy?”

“All the blood and screaming. Obviously the pain pretty much shatters your mind into a thousand pieces, so at least you're not aware of it, but it's still not pleasant. Still, onto more pleasant matters. If you can tread the grey realms, then the Voice shouldn't be a trouble for you. Try that out later.”

“The Voice?”

“It's just something that compels obedience. People have to obey your commands, that sort of thing.”

“Compels obedience? So, I tell someone to kiss my boots and they do it?”

“Something like that.”

“So that's how I did it.”

“I'm sorry, dear?”

“I, well, I ordered Daryl at Sheckys to sit down and they just did, even though they didn't want to. Peter got really worried about that, wasn't sure how

I could do it, but now I know why. That's a relief."

"Quite. Shall we try some translocation? Teleporting? It's like moving to the grey realms, but you step in and move back somewhere else."

"I thought stepping into the grey realms was bad?"

"No, dear, stepping through them to the other side is bad. It's a fine balance, but all you really do is step outside the world, then step back where you want to be. As you get better, your steps take you further. Seven league boots just make the whole thing easier."

"So, I just fade into these grey realms, but not so far that I fall out the other side, and step back in and I'm somewhere else?"

"Something like that. I think it might be better to wait until you've mastered the grey realms. We don't want you stuck there, do we?"

Lisa shivers "No, I don't think we do."

"Come on, Lise, it's not funny now! Where are you?"

"Oh dear, I think someone is getting impatient. Maybe you'd best go inside and put him out of his misery."

"After that kiss, his misery's just beginning."

The fairy smiles, "That's the spirit. Go and teach him a lesson."

Lisa feels the wing grow warm as she flaps up into the air, fluttering through the door, the plyboard sliding easily through her. She pokes her head back through the door. "Thanks for the lesson." and is gone back inside.

"You're welcome, dear." she turns to the shadows under the stairwell. "You can come out now, she's gone."

Red eyes open as the shadow deepens. **"You never stop meddling, do you?"**

"What meddling? She was going to be able to do all that eventually, I'm just, channelling her energies."

"Half the realm shaken? The grey realms? How long did it take to invent that drivel?"

"I thought I was extemporising marvellously. Now, whenever things go a little unusual, she'll have a believable reason. And it might stop her wishing so much. Which I think you'll agree is a good thing before she kills herself trying to wish the impossible."

The eyes glare at her.

"Agreed?"

"Agreed. On that one point. You are still meddling."

"No more than you are with Peter, dear. You are still trying to persuade the Conclave, aren't you? Well, now they'll have a much tougher time saying Lisa isn't part of the community. She is doing magic on her own, after all."

"With your crutch."

"Crutch, smutch. Until she's ready, it'll keep her asking too many awkward questions. You're just upset that she's progressing faster than you think she should. You always did hate it when you were proved wrong."

"I have yet to see a reason she should progress so swiftly. That, in itself, is concerning. And then you encourage her."

"Oh, please. She's the sort who'll push any boundary you give her until it's what she wants anyway. This way, we get her to push at the ones that aren't dangerous. Can you imagine what would happen if she started scrying? So my meddling is done with good reasons, excellent motives, and a fair degree of skill in accomplishing it. Besides, the less she's dependent on Peter, the happier she'll be with him. And that's a wonderful thing to work on."

"True love does not conquer all."

"Oh, of course it does. We haven't done badly out of it, have we? Or are you saying you don't love me anymore?" she looks down, her eyes going dewy, lips trembling.

"That, is cheating."

She grins up at him, "Of course, dear. Being sneaky is what we're about." she stops, putting her hand to her ear, "And it seems that Peter had a good explanation for that kiss. Good. Shall we be off? All that arguing's made me quite tired." she yawns, stretching her arms, thrusting her tiny chest out, "I can't wait for bed. Care to help me warm it up?" she flitters off, diving into the grey realms, the darkness fading behind her.



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