

PETER AND LISA: PART 35
A CHANCE TO CATCH YOUR BREATH

"Sooooo?"

"So?" Lisa replies innocently, hands wrapped around a steaming cup of coffee.

"So, how did the..." Sarah pauses, "...relaxation go?"

Lisa shivers a little as her mind flashes back. Going from nothingness to light. Sounds coming from nowhere. The dizzying moment as she tried to fit everything together. The feel of the sheets of the bed, the smells filling the room that she never noticed until they weren't there. "It went alright, I suppose."

Sarah's eyebrow rises, "Just alright?"

"Ok, you were right, I admit it. It was fantastic. I've never felt anything like that before. Felt like I was gone for years! No distractions, just me."

"And..."

"And?"

"And when you came back?"

"What about it?"

"How did that feel?"

"Uhm..."

"Relaxed?" Lisa nods, remembering just lying there, drawing in breath slowly, staring up at the ceiling, "Warm?" and again, "Safe?" and again, remembering the warmth filling her, the feeling of peace, that nothing bad was going to happen, "Hornier than Rod Stewart on Viagra at a convention of six-foot blonde models?" Lisa blushes at that, remembering the light touch of Peter's hand on her skin. She remembers the hungry kisses, pulling him back into the bed, spending too long in his arms. She smiles slightly, remembering the excuses at work they'd have had to make if Peter hadn't made a shortcut through his magic door. "So it was good, then?"

"Oh, yeah. It was soooo good."

"And you went all the way with the massage?"

She nods, "All the way. Eight hours of nothingness. Better than sleeping for a week."

"And he didn't take advantage?"

"That's kind of a personal question."

"It is, but I'm kind of a personal question person." She smiles, her eyes sparkling, "You might have noticed. So, did he?"

"No. I told him not to. This time."

"You don't know what you're missing. It makes the morning after so much more fun."

"I'll find out next time."

"Next time? We'll make a proper assistant out of you yet."

"A proper assistant? You mean a magic addict like you and Carrie?"

Sarah beams, "Absolutely."

"Speaking of Carrie..."

"Yes, he signed the contract. He grumbled about it, and made us change 'fingers' to 'hands', but your sister is now officially an assistant again."

"And she'll be ok?"

"She's smart, she knows what she's doing, she'll be fine."

"I know, I know, it's just..."

"Understood. You should know Mark does keep sending flowers to Tabitha with apology notes on them. Or he did."

"He did? What stopped him?"

"Me. It was upsetting her."

"Right."

"Onto happier matters, I'm glad you popped in, and don't think I won't be finding out why, I need to give you something."

Lisa looks up at her, a touch of suspicion in her eyes, "What?"

"Oh, nothing bad. Invitations. You and Peter are invited to our Christmas party."

"Oh, nice, thanks." She takes the proffered gold envelopes. "If we can, we'll come."

"Good. You'll find your Secret Santa recipient in there, too."

"You're doing Secret Santa?"

"Why not? It's a bit of fun. £10 limit. Which you may breach as you like."

"How much magic can you get for £10?"

"Not a lot. Unless you enchant it yourself. Don't worry about getting something magic, most people don't."

"Ok."

"Do worry about getting too drunk and waking up without arms afterwards."

"What?"

"Happened once. Took us a while to find out who'd got rid of them to restore."

"Mark?"

"Scott."

"Scott? The nice old gentleman?"

"That's him. Don't let the nice, befuddled old man act fool you. He's got a wicked sense of humour. Just like everyone else."

"Even you?"

Sarah grins like a Cheshire Cat, "Oh, especially me."

"Thanks for the warning."

"No problem. It won't help you."

"Oh, enough with the fake threats."

"Fake?"

"You know what I mean."

"Fine, fine. You can be so conventional."

"Thanks."

"That wasn't a compliment."

"I know." She takes a sip of the coffee.

"And the reason you came here for a chat was..."

"Peter's birthday's coming up."

"Yeeessss?"

"And he's impossible to get anything for! If he wants something, he'll buy it himself. What am I supposed to get him?"

"Ah, what to get the magician who has everything? I suppose a permission slip's out of the question?"

"A what?"

"Permission slip. It would be perfect for you."

"And that is...?"

"It's a short term, very short term, actually, contract. For one day, the person is given permission to play with you with no restrictions. They're a lot of fun."

"I'm not interested in a sex-toy contract. Not even for just one day."

"Ok." She shrugs, "Guess it's socks and boxers for Peter this year, then."

"There's no way I'm giving anyone, even Peter, that kind of control over me."

"Ok."

"I mean, I'd be totally helpless."

"And at this point you cross into 'protesting too much' territory." She takes a sip of coffee to hide her smile, watching as Lisa blushes, "So where is your boy-toy? I thought you were joined at the hip like Rafi and 'Jita these days?"

"He's out doing something. He wouldn't tell me what, but he looked really unhappy about it."

"Oh, it's that day already?"

"What day? You know what's going on?"

"Yes. But I can't tell you."

Lisa sighs, "Wonderful. More magic secrets."

"This one's more personal than magic. It's something Peter feels he has to do. I'm sure he'll tell you about when he's ready to, so don't push it."

"Is that a royal command?"

"Just a bit of advice, Princess Chopped Liver." She takes another concealing sip as Lisa chokes on her coffee. "So, now that you know what to get him, what do you have planned for the rest of the day?"

"Picking up O and hitting the shops."

"Ah, sounds like an excellent idea."

"Was that another subtle hint? Want to join us?"

"I thought you'd never ask."

"Maybe we can pick up the portal off her."

This time Sarah chokes on her coffee. "Portal?" she coughs, "You've left a portal with your friend?"

"Uhhmm, yes?"

"Your non-magical friend?"

"Uhm, yes?"

"You've left a portal, which is a rather obvious piece of magic, with a non-magical friend, who therefore doesn't know magic works?"

"Uhm, yes."

"And this didn't strike you as a bad thing? At all? Despite knowing about the rather..." she pauses, "...zealous approach the Hellsings take to secrecy?"

"I didn't give it to her! It was left behind when Peter moved in. I keep forgetting to ask for it back."

"She's had it for months??! Are you really this stupid or just ordinarily suicidal?"

"Hey! It's not as if it works without the other portal, the one that's rolled up at the back of my sock drawer, by the way, is it? O thinks it's just a fancy bit of artwork."

"Ok. I suppose that helps, a bit, but you are getting it back today. Not asking today, getting it back today. And that is a royal command! If you don't, I'll have to escalate things and make it official. And I don't really want to do that; I like you too much. So it gets sorted today. No exceptions. No excuses. And tell Peter I want to see him about this. Soon. He really should know better. And so should you!"

"Fine, I'll get it back."

"Good. See that you do. Just let me get Grace ready to go out and we can be off."

Some time later, after Grace has been dressed in enough layers to leave only her face visible, and that only if you look deep into the quilted hood, strapped into her papoose and held against Sarah's chest, they set out onto the Tube, Grace gurgling or sleeping or somehow otherwise staying quiet until they reach Ola's flat. "You know Carrie's living downstairs with her mysterious roommate."

"Oh, she's not that mysterious."

"I've never seen her."

"She's a bit shy. And Carrie's probably enjoying messing with your head. As usual."

"Possibly." Lisa pulls her glove off, knocking on the door, knitted hat pulled tightly over her ears.

"Now, remember..."

"Get it back. Today. Or else. Got it."

"Coming! Coming! Be right there!"

Several minutes later, the door opens, Ola wrapped up with even more layers and colours than Grace, her bright red hat pulled down over her earmuffs, her pink scarf pulled up over her mouth, wrapped around twice, hands hidden inside thick black mittens, "Sorry, L. Had to get everything ready, and, oh." she looks at Sarah. "Sorry. Didn't know L had brought anyone else."

"No problem. Can we come in for a bit? Grace is wriggling like she wants something and it's too cold out here for a feed."

"Oh, oh, sure. Sorry."

Sarah walks into the kitchen, "O..."

"Yeah?"

"Can I grab that poster on the way?"

"You mean my nice black velvet poster?"

"Yes, I do mean Peter's nice, black, velvet poster."

"Possession is 9/10ths of the law."

"True, but knowing a good lawyer is the other tenth and I've got one that owes me a favour."

"You do?"

Lisa smiles, "Oh, yeah."

"Fine, fine, you can have it back then, you mean, selfish, rhymes with witch."

"Hey!"

"What? First you chuck me out of my home, then you come into my new home and demand a bit of artwork I've grown very fond of, and you threaten me with lawyers. That's not nice, L. Not nice at all."

"Neither's stealing our stuff."

"Stealing?! Me? I never..."

"Intended to give it back?"

"Of course I was going to give it back." she looks sideways at Lisa, watching her eyebrows quirk upwards, "Eventually."

"Ok, ok, not stealing."

"Thank you."

"Extended borrowing."

"Exactly."

"Which has now come to an end."

"Spoilsport. I'll go get it, then, shall I?" she pushes herself off the sofa, heading for the bedroom.

"Thanks, O."

A few minutes later, she comes back in, a black piece of fabric rolled up under her arm.

"Here you go, L. One piece of art, returned to its rightful owner. Now, I think I have a shirt on my back if you'd like to take it, too?"

"No thanks. Were you this melodramatic when we were flatmates because I really don't remember it?"

"That was before you abandoned me for the transitory pleasures of the flesh with your boyfriend."

“Well, cut it out. I get enough of that from Sarah.”
 “I heard that!” a voice calls from the kitchen.
 “You were supposed to!” Lisa shouts back.
 “That’s all right, then. Grace is full and we’re both ready to hit the shops.”
 “Great. Let’s go, then.”
 “Hey, L, aren’t you forgetting somethinnnnnnng.”
 “What?” she turns to find Ola holding up the portal, grinning over it.
 “Wellll, if you don’t want it after allllll....”
 Lisa grabs the portal, “Got it. Now can we go?”
 “You’re going to carry that alllll day? And alllll the stuff we’re going to get, L?”
 “Maybe. But I’ve got a plan. Come on.” she walks purposefully out and down the stairs, Sarah and Ola following along.
 “And just what is this mysterious plan, L?”
 “You’ll see.” she stops, pulling off one glove and knocking on the door. “Come on, come on...”
 The door opens a crack, Carrie’s tousled hair and eyes appearing around it, “What do you want, sis? Kind of busy.”
 “Can you look after this for the day? I’ll pick it up when we get back from shopping.”
 “Yeah, yeah, sure.” she extends a bare arm for the roll of fabric, and closes the door quickly.
 “What was that about? I’m not allowed to keep it but your sister is? How unfair is that!”
 “Carrie will remind me she’s got it, O. And I can set my mum on her if she doesn’t give it back. That wouldn’t work with you.”
 “Well, true, but that’s because she likes me. Much better than her good for nothing daughters, anyway.”
 “Come on, before I brain you with the nearest blunt object and make you smarter.”
 “Temper temper, L.”

Several hours, dozens of shops and hundreds of pounds worth of purchases later (including socks for Peter), Lisa puts down her set of bags, knocking on the door. “You go on up. I’ll catch up.”

A minute later, she knocks again, “Come on, Carrie. I don’t have all day.”

A further minute passes, “Fine. I’ll get the damn thing later.”

Behind the door, Carrie barely hears the knocking as she stares at her computer, headphones plugged in, wires running in all directions. She looks up, turning towards the slim feminine black hole in the wall, darkness swirling inside it, dozens of wires and cables running up and into it. “Ok. I’m pretty sure I know what went wrong. This time, I’ll fix it. I’m sure of it.”
 The hole in the wall sighs.



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