

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 38
CARRIE THE MAGICIAN

Carrie looks around the rows and rows of colourful cabinets and crates and stands, taking a deep breath, "Ah, you can almost smell the history." She sneezes, "Wait, that's dust, never mind." No laughter, "Tough crowd. So, what were your plans for this show? How long? How many tricks?" "About half a dozen or so. Plus some small stuff that I can manage on my own. Just close up stuff." "Ok. That's not too bad, I suppose. And what were you planning to do?" "Hadn't got too far with that. Probably a bit of everything except the really weird. So appearance and vanish, levitate and a sawing." "And a couple of other things." "Exactly." "Great. Virtual blank canvas. Ooooh, so many possibilities." "You are enjoying this far too much." "Not yet. But I hope to be soon. Ok, serious face time. Sis, do you want to be involved in this?" "Why?" "Well, you don't have to. I mean, I could do the whole show." "But?" "But, it would be cool to have two assistants for a couple of tricks. Double sawings always go over better than a single." "And you don't want to just steal my legs?" "Well, I did, but I can see that isn't going to work now. But that doesn't change the fact that they're popular. And pretty simple from the assistants' point of view." "And you want to share the spotlight because?" Carrie shrugs, "It's your act. I'm the one muscling in. Might as well try to be polite. That way you might let me do it again." "Isn't being the psycho's plaything enough?" "Oh, he's not that bad." Lisa's eyebrow lifts upwards, "Besides, we're talking about your act, not mine." "Then I'm taking part in it." "Good, glad that's decided. In that case, we're definitely doing a double." "Any particular reason you're being nice?" "I'm always nice!" "You know what I mean." "Simple. This is business. I'll wind you up when I'm not being professional." "Business?" "Yup, we can discuss my exorbitant fee later." She turns away, running her hands over the boxes. "Fee?" "Well, unless Peter's going to actually force me to do this for nothing, which we all know he isn't, I'm going to want something in return." "Such as?" "Well, money, equipment, tuition, playtime, someone to practice on, things like that." "Someone to practice on?" "Well, I can't keep using Tracy for everything, can I?" "By someone, you mean me." "Well, obviously. Don't worry, I'm not teaching you stuff so I won't try to trip you up all the time." "Just some of it." "Of course. Can't have you getting soft." "Thanks. Fine, if you want me as your practice partner, one hour a week, max. No effects outside that hour. Weekends only. Nothing public, painful, adult or too humiliating. And someone who knows what they're doing to supervise." "You're agreeing? Just like that? And only 'too humiliating'?" she looks over at Peter, "What have

you been doing to her?"

"He hasn't done anything." As Carrie starts to reply, "Not like that. And I'm agreeing because you'll whine or trick me into it anyway. At least this way, I'll set things up myself."

"If that's what you want to tell yourself. I'll also want a light sabre. Those look so cool, way better than my blades."

Lisa looks across at Peter, who shrugs. "We'll have to see if you can power one, but I'll see what I can do."

"Cool. So, shall we start?"

"Start?"

"You being my practice partner. It's the weekend, we've got Peter to supervise, and it's not public. Perfectly fine under the agreement."

Lisa sighs, "Ok, I suppose so. How long is this going to go on for?"

"An hour. Just like we agreed."

"You know what I meant."

"Yeah, but I was hoping you wouldn't notice you didn't set an endpoint until we started."

"Why?"

"Then I could claim there wasn't one. But as you did, end of January?"

"What year?"

"That's better. Next year. And I promise nothing over Christmas."

"Why not over Christmas?"

"It's Christmas. I'm not such a Grinch that I'll try to piss you off then."

"Ok. I think. Is there anything else I should be worried about with the agreement?"

"Well, apart from me playing magician on you, not really. Except for the end-date, it was pretty reasonable. Not water-tight, but verbals are never going to be. Don't worry, trying to lawyer up on a verbal is really bad form. Maybe be a bit clearer on who's acceptable to supervise. I imagine you'll be thinking Peter most of the time, but it wouldn't hurt to say so."

"Lawyer up?"

"Going through the minutiae for loopholes. You can still exploit a sloppy one..."

"Like you did."

Carrie feigns looking hurt for a moment before continuing, "...but if they're reasonably tight, you won't get far with it. Now, stop stalling. The hour doesn't start 'til we do."

"Ok, ok."

"So, Pete, what have you got around here that I can do?" she starts looking around, "I mean, if I have to search this place, we'll be here for months. At least."

"Great, so whatever you do to Lise will be my fault?"

"Pleeeeeeeeeeease?"

"Fine, I'll find something. Don't touch anything. And don't kill each other."

"Don't forget she only said it couldn't be too humiliating!" Carrie calls after him.

"What?!"

"And no maiming, either! That means you, Lise." he vanishes into the stacks of magic.

Carrie turns, "So, as we can't kill each other, what are we going to do until he gets back?"

"I don't know. We might have to talk to each other."

Carrie's face becomes a mask of horror for a moment, hand over her mouth, "Surely things can't be that bad." She breaks into a grin, "It won't kill you to talk to me, sis. You can't catch anything."

She looks around, "Of course, that doesn't mean we have to just talk."

"Meaning?"

"Well, he won't be back for five or ten minutes while the poor boy tries to find something I can do that you won't hate and I won't protest is too easy on you. Having a boyfriend that willing to please must be nice. So we can see what's in the immediate vicinity."

"He said don't touch anything."

"That he did. And I know how you always do what you're told. Right?" she walks around the cabinets. "Oooh, a trunk. Wonder what's inside."

"If you get turned into a frog, or worse, it's your own fault."

"Yes, 'mother'. Ooooh, tingly." She takes hold of the trunk's lid.

"Carrie, are you sure..."

"Of course I'm not sure. That's part of the fun. Besides, the ward on this isn't going to be nasty, Pete's not like that. At worst I'll be something humiliating for a bit until he turns me back so I can 'learn my lesson'."

"And you don't mind?"

Carrie turns from the thick, aged trunk, "Of course not. It's only temporary. If it was forever, yes, I'd mind quite a lot. But for a few hours? Why worry?"

"Which explains how you can work with..."

"Yeah, it does. What happens on stage, stays on stage. He's a lot nicer than you'd think."

"Yeah, for a slaving creep, I'm sure he's a prince."

"People change."

"Really?"

"Yeah, sometimes. You used to be fun, for, instance." The lid creaks open, "Now let's see what's inside."

"What do you mean I used to be fun?"

Carrie turns from the open trunk, "I mean you used to be fun. Who got me my first underage drinks? You did. Who took me out dancing when you were supposed to be watching me? You did. Who not only didn't tell Mum when I had sex for the first time but got me enough protection to last for a year? You again. Not to mention you telling me stories that Penthouse wouldn't print about your latest escapade. Now, you spend your whole time telling me what a stupid, irresponsible reckless fool I am." She turns back to the trunk, "Ooooh, shinies."

"I..."

"Shhhh. I know you're trying to look out for me. Really, I do. But I'm twenty-three, sis. I can look after myself now. I love you, really. When you didn't wake up after, well, you know what after, I was so worried, but you are getting to be a grade A pain in the arse. Loosen up a bit. Have some fun. Let your kind, generous, safe, magic boyfriend play with you a bit more." She pulls out a glittering tiara, "Think this will suit me?"

"Put it back. You don't know what it will do."

"See what I mean?" she looks over her shoulder, "Fine, fine, 'mother'. I'll put it back. What else? A brass oil lamp. Think a genie'll come out if I rub it? Nah." She pulls out a sleek red cocktail dress, cut dangerously low, a dipping white band around the waist. "Now this is sweet. It's silk, too. Wonder what it's doing in Pete's trunk."

Lisa starts to reply, feeling a growing, tingly warmth in her cheek, "You might want to close it up. He'll be back soon."

"How do you know?"

"I just do, ok."

"Ok, ok." She carefully puts the dress back and shuts the trunk, sitting on it as Peter comes around the corner, dragging a four-legged frame after him, a thick cloth draped over it.

"You might want to get off that."

Carrie looks down at the trunk, then up at him, "Why?"

"In case the wards get a bit twitchy."

"What wards? What is it, anyway?"

"Family stuff. If you're not family, trying to open it would be bad."

Lisa and Carrie exchange a furtive glance, Lisa's slightly smug, as Peter turns back to the equipment and Carrie climbs off the trunk. "But I was just sitting on it!"

"Yes, but my dad's wards are old and might get twitchy. It shouldn't be a problem but better safe than sorry."

"So, what have you got for me?" Carrie practically skips over to the frame, "Oooh, knives. Always a good sign. And restraints. Always knew you were only pretending to be normal."

Lisa suppresses a sigh, "Ok, Magic Boy, what do I do?"

Peter pulls the cloth away, revealing a black box, edged in red, numerous slits barely visible through the sides, splitting the glittering silver diamonds in the centre of each face, "You put your head in there..."

"And I get to shove these through it."

"What happens to my head?"

"It vanishes as soon as the first knife goes in. You're not in any danger."

Lisa rolls her eyes, "I know that. Just checking this wasn't a gruesome Halloween special. And Carrie's going to be sticking those in?"

"You bet. Don't worry, I'll be gentle. To start with, anyway."

"Very reassuring. Don't keep me gone too long." She steps under the platform, pushing her head up into the box and her hands through the holes carved into the thin metal.

"You're taking this remarkably well."

"As if either of you'd do anything bad. Tease? Yes. Torment? Provoke? Absolutely. But you won't actually hurt me."

"And you're getting to like it."

"Ok, I admit, it, yeah, I'm getting to like it."

"So why all the fuss earlier?"

"Just because you won't hurt me doesn't mean I'd like what you'd do to me if you had free reign."

"You haven't even tried it yet!"

"I know what you're like, remember?"

"Yeah, yeah, you say that now..." She walks up to the contraption, closing manacles around Lisa's wrists. "And now you can't get away...mwah-ha-ha-ha-haaaaaaa!"

"Great. She's going to add 'evil genius' to her CV." Lisa mutters.

"Maybe." Carrie flips the front of the box closed and picks up one of the blades. "Now start counting and let me know if this hurts."

"1...2...3..." Carrie lines the blade up and very slowly slides the point in, "4...5..." Lisa's hands spasm, and everything goes quiet from the box.

"Can we check? You know, just to make sure? I mean, no screams is good, but..."

"Push it all the way through. Better not to have it hanging in mid air."

"Oh, right. Ok." She pushes the blade the rest of the way through, the tip poking out the box's other side. "Done. So, did it...?"

Peter pulls the front of the box open revealing the dagger shoved through the box, and nothing else.

"Cool." She reaches in, pushing her hand right to the back of the box. "She can't hear us, right?"

"No. Or see us. It's just like being vanished."

"Can she still feel?"

"She should be able to. It depends."

"On...?"

"Some people go completely blank when you vanish their head; others still think and control their body just, you know, without a head; and a few change completely and the body takes charge. No one's quite sure why you're one and not the other."

"Let's find out while she can't do anything about it." She reaches down, grabbing the base of Lisa's t-shirt, and narrowly dodges the foot that swings up at her, Lisa's hands going wild. "Yeah, she's a take charge one. Oh, well." she flips the head box closed and begins gleefully shoving daggers through, finally plunging one longer blade through the top of the box. She opens the front of the box, revealing the forest of gleaming blades inside, "Ta-daaaa!"

"Very nice."

"So, now that we've got some privacy..."

"Privacy? What?" he swallows, blushing heavily, "What do we need privacy for?"

"Oh, not that! Honestly, what kind of girl do you think I am?"

"So what...?"

"Simple. Without my big, overprotective sister to get in the way, we can talk about a couple of things, debtor to debtee."

“What sort of things?”

Carrie smiles, stepping closer, “Mostly trying to get you to agree to use your new toy a bit. Not much, and not necessarily anything hot and sweaty, but come on! Why do you think I insisted on owing you this?”

“But...”

“I know, I know, it's serious business. Got it. But I knew that and still chose to reward you like this for getting me out of Tracy and I'm a bit miffed you haven't even tried to do anything with it. Especially given Sarah keeps giving all sorts of great stories about what you can do with a willing accomplice. So, here I am, a willing accomplice in your imagination, ready and eager to take part in whatever wild and crazy stuff you want, all the stuff my boring mundy sister would throw a fit over.”

“It's not that simple.”

“Well duh. If it was that simple, we wouldn't need to talk about it, would we? So, what's the problem?”

“You know what the 'problem' is.”

“Yeah, my sister. That's why we're talking now. She doesn't have to know about it. You're the one I owe the debt to, not her. Nothing to do with her.”

“She won't see it like that. And I'm not going to go behind her back to cheat on her with her sister.”

“Cheat on?!! I'm not asking for that! I've got quite enough sex and sexual magic between Tracy and Mark, thank you very much! And even if I didn't, I wouldn't! I can't believe you think I'd...! You know what, forget it! Forget this entire fucking thing!” she turns away.

“Carrie, wait, I didn't mean...”

“Oh?” she turns back, glaring at him, trying hard to ignore the wetness in her eyes, “So what did you mean?”

“I mean that, to Lisa, doing that sort of thing, especially with you, would be cheating. And so, it's cheating. And I won't do that and I know you wouldn't ask me to.”

Carrie sniffs, blinks and looks at the floor, “Oh. I thought you meant, oh. Ok. I get it. So I need to convince sis to let you play with me. Sheesh. Maybe after I've created a perpetual motion machine or achieved world peace. Start with the easy ones.”

“It won't be that bad.” He steps up to her, putting an arm around her shoulder.

“You are a sweet man, but you're a lousy liar. She'd go ballistic at the thought.”

“Maybe a little.” he holds his thumb and finger out.

Carrie snorts, “Ok, ok, I'm better, I'm...sorry. I'll just have to get content with Mark and his one-track mind playing with me on stage until Tracy can handle some of the toys.” she sighs disappointedly.

“Sorry.”

“Oh, it's not that bad, no matter how I sound. I mean, Tracy is great. she's sweet and kind and caring and I love her soooo much, but she always lets me take the lead, you know. And Mark's great at making me his sexy plaything, but, well, I never thought I'd say this, but there is such a thing as too much sex-play magic if that's all you do. Sometimes Cyndi Lauper's right, you know?. And with all the stories I've got from Sarah about what crazy stuff you used to do with her and Stuart, I guess, I thought, never mind.” she looks up at him, “And if you tell any of this to Lisa I, well, I can't actually do anything, but don't, ok?” she sighs again, “So I guess we'd better bring her back, right?”

“Can't ask her without a head.”

“Oh, I dunno. She'll probably be easier to talk to.” she tries to smile, “Ok, ok, I'll ask her first.” she walks back to the still trapped body of her sister. “You are such a pain in my arse, sis.” she closes the box, wiping her eyes on the back of her arm. “Ok. Let's do this.” she grips the vertical knife hilt and yanks on it, jerking it out. Quickly the other blades follow and she flips the door open. Lisa blinks in the head box.

“Wow. How long was I gone?”

“Not tooooo long.”

“How long?”

“Only a couple of minutes. What? Don't you trust me?”

“Just let me out.”

“Sure. We need to move on to the next trick anyway.”

“Next trick?”

“My hour's not up and that cloth that Pete brought along could be used for something I want to try out.”

“What?”

“A proper vanishing. I mean, making your head go away is cool, but it's all in the box.”

“And you think you can make me vanish with just a cloth? I thought we could only use magical things.”

“I'm sure. I mean, I understand how it works, pretty much, so I'm sure I can pull it off. All that time looking at your portal gave me ideas but no way to test them.”

“So you're experimenting on me?”

“Yeah.” she grins. “That's kind of the point. Peter's here and I'm sure he can bring you back in the unlikely event I screw up.” Come on, I'm the family genius. I know what I'm doing.”

“Ok, ok. Just get me out of this contraption first.”

A few minutes later, “Ok. So what do I need to do?”

“Just stand there. Let me do the rest.” Carrie gathers the sheet, draping it over Lisa, fussing around until she's completely covered.

“Peter, make sure she does it right.” comes from under the cloth.

“Hey!” Carrie stands up, taking hold of the cloth at the top, “And for my next trick, I'll be making my rude, annoying, grumpy sister disappear. If she's lucky, I'll bring her back.” she whips the cloth away before Lisa can reply. “Ta-daaa!”

“Carrie! What have you done to me?”

Carrie turns around, and looks at her sister, still there, but as transparent as a pane of glass. “Uhm, I guess I didn't figure it out quiiiiite right yet.”



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