

PETER & LISA: PART 3

GOING HOME

Lisa opened her eyes and immediately shut them again. “Not this dream again.” She moaned, wondering why the scruffy, clutter-filled bedroom kept coming back into her thoughts. She snuggled deeper under the dark blue duvet and tried to get out of the dream for the fourth time that she could remember. She was a little put out at the dream. She normally couldn’t remember a thing about her dreams, and suddenly she could recall every detail of the room: CDs and books in haphazard piles all over the floor, shirts hanging off the doors to the cupboards, it could be called a mess if you were feeling very, very charitable. At which point she woke up fully and realised she wasn’t dreaming. She remembered staying at Peter’s and remembered what they’d done. But she didn’t remember changing into the black silk pyjamas she was wearing. And that got her worried about other things she might not have remembered. She opened her eyes properly. She turned towards the door, shut, thank God, and started to get up when there was a knock on the door. Lisa immediately scooted back under cover, leaving only her head visible. “Come in, Peter.”

“You up for breakfast?”

“What time is it?” Peter looks down at his watch.

“About ten.”

“What?! We’re late.” She grabs for the duvet.

“Not unless they want us in on Saturday. And they haven’t told me they do. So, do you want breakfast?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“In bed, or shall I see you in the lounge?”

“Where are my clothes?”

“Oh, they’re still out here. Give me a second.” He disappears, and tosses in her clothes. “I’ll see you in a few minutes.”

“Hold on, I’ll need a shower.”

“It’s the next door down. I’ll be in the lounge. Don’t worry, the door locks. And it’s pretty clean in there.”

Twenty minutes later, the door unlocks and she comes out, a faded blue towel wrapped around her head, her long black dress looking faintly ridiculous against it. “What would you like?” Peter asks, turning the radio down.

“Hot croissants with butter, orange juice and corn flakes, please.”

“Full fat, semi-skimmed or skimmed.”

“Semi.”

“Right.” He sets his toast down on the low table. He reaches for a silver platter, placing a silver cover over it. He balances the whole thing on his fingertips like a waiter.

“Stop pissing about. I’m getting hungry.” He bows, still balancing the tray.

“As you command, madam.” He says in a nasal voice. He takes hold of the cover and pulls it off, revealing a bowl of corn flakes and milk, a glass of freshly-squeezed orange juice and a plate of croissants

with butter oozing out of them, still steaming. "Here you go." He passes over the tray. Lisa takes it carefully, and stares down at the food as if it was going to bite her. "Come on, it won't hurt you." She sips the orange juice.

"This is good."

"Don't sound so surprised, I do know what I'm doing." He says in theatrical offence.

"Sorry. Can I have a coffee, too?"

"Sure." He pulls a full mug of steaming black coffee from under the table, where there certainly wasn't one earlier.

"Will you stop with the magic act? For just five minutes?"

"Nope. When I'm off work and entertaining a beautiful woman, I figure my real personality is a bit dull."

"How about when you're off work and irritating a beautiful woman?"

"Then I'd suggest that I take the beautiful woman home. So, would you care to be taken home, m'lady?" Lisa says nothing, licking her fingers clean of butter. "M'lady?"

"No. Not yet."

"Ah, one for the road, m'lady?" Lisa looks away, blushing. "If m'lady would care to accompany me?" he holds out his hand.

"I'm eating."

"Forgive me. I shall wait." He reaches for his toast. Lisa continues with her breakfast, quite surprised, as the cereal remains crisp and the croissants hot all the way through.

A little later, Peter opens the door to Storage. "OK, we'll try a couple of little things now, and then I think you'd better go home before someone thinks I've kidnapped you." Lisa starts to protest. Peter holds up his hand. "I'll fix something up, OK? Let's just do the tricks and we'll sort the rest out later."

"OK. For now."

"Excellent. Right. Have you heard of an illusion called the 'Interlude'?" Lisa nods.

"That's the one where the girl gets her body vanished, right?"

"Nope, that's the 'Disembodied Princess'. 'Interlude' is the one where the magician is shackled into an A-frame and the assistant pushes out of his stomach from behind like something out of Alien. Only we're going to do it the other way round, with me pushing through you."

"Let's get on with it."

"OK." He wheels out the frame. "Just stick your feet in here." he indicates the hollow metal legs of the frame. "Right That's it. Now hold your arms out to the side and settle back onto the frame." Lisa leans back onto the solid metal frame, "Now take a deep breath." He places a flat 'A' of metal over the frame, enclosing Lisa in metal, apart from her stomach and the middle of her chest. He wheels out a full-length mirror in front of her. "Just so you can see what's going on. I'm told it looks pretty impressive."

"Whatever you say." He takes a small metal frame that matches the gap in the frame and stretches a piece of white paper over it. "What are you doing?"

“I’m getting the prop ready. You ready?”

“Yes, I’m ready. Now get on with it.”

“Okey-dokey.” He pushes the frame over her stomach and walks behind her. “Now, this might sting a little.”

“Cut the...” she gasps as his arm rips through the paper. The tingling surges through her stomach, a small tingle filling the area under the paper and a sharper sensation along the length of his arm as it reaches through her body. Then he waves, sending the intense tingling sweeping through her stomach. She looks in the mirror, and sees an arm coming out of her stomach, waving to her in the mirror. She starts laughing. He pulls the arm back, and the paper looks completely untouched, but the light tingling still persists.

“Ready for a little more?”

“Yes.” something shoots out of her stomach, a bulbous black head with a small mouth filled with needle-like teeth. It chitters and screeches, turning up, appearing to stare up at her. Lisa screams. Peter laughs. “What the hell is so funny?” A hand pushes through the paper and pulls the alien hand puppet off his other hand. “You, you, bastard!! That wasn’t funny.”

“Of course it was. Besides, you were getting far too comfortable with me. Just thought I’d give you a shock.” Lisa imagines him smiling his ‘sinister’ smile (patent pending) and smiles. Then she gasps as the arms push further forward, pulling Peter’s body through her. She looks down, staring down at the back of his head, tears blurring her vision as the tingle fills up her body. Peter rolls over, smiling up at her. He leans up, wrapping his arms around her neck. He pulls himself through, and steps aside, to show that the paper is still undamaged, despite having a grown man pull through it. He pulls the small frame away, showing that, at least, her dress is also untouched and then places it back. He turns the frame 90°, putting Lisa out of sight of the mirror. A sense of worry, refined quite highly over the last day starts sounding warnings.

“Peter, what are you doing?”

“Just removing the frame, Lise. Nothing to worry about.”

“And I believe you, because?”

“Good, you’re learning.” He smiles, and pulls out the paper. Lisa immediately feels the tingle vanish, only to have it replaced by a warm glow, filling the pit of her stomach, right up into her chest. She works very hard not to smile and scowls down at him.

“What did you just do?”

“Just removed the paper from the frame. Why do you ask?”

“Just get on with it.”

“Certainly.” He pulls out the frame and then reaches for the sheet of metal. He removes that and offers Lisa his hand, helping her out of the frame.

“Now, are you going to tell me what trick you pulled back there or not?”

“Nope.” She glares at him, “But I will show you, if you like.”

“That would be very nice of you.” She replies icily.

“Just step in front of the mirror and you’ll see.” She looks at the mirror and gasps. Where her body had

been covered by the smaller frame, she no longer had a body. Her stomach was restricted to a pair of thin strips at her sides, the vanished body extending up, stopping at a point between her breasts. “And, if you are still disbelieving...” he pulls out a thin black cane, sticking it through her empty stomach and brushing it along the edges of vanished flesh.

“Cut that out. It tickles.”

“Of course. Would you care to be restored now, or would you like to participate in another trick first?”

“What trick?”

“Another version of the Interlude.” He holds up his hand again as she starts to protest, “This time, you’ll be climbing inside me, and you’ll do it from the front, OK? No more missing body parts when you come out the other side, either.”

“OK, but there had better not be another trick in this.”

“Would I dare?”

“Probably, if you thought you could get away with it.”

“Which, of course, I don’t.” he smiles, making a lie of his words. “I’ll set up the frame.” He pulls out a sheet of black paper, slipping it into the smaller frame. “Now, I’ll just get into the frame, and you push that into place, then climb on in.” he steps into the frame, slotting the metal sheet into place. “Whenever you’re ready.”

“Why is it black this time?”

“To make sure that it works. Using white was when I was doing the trick to you. Now that I’m enabling you to do it to me, it should be black. No trick.”

“Fine.” She steps up, looking carefully at the black paper. She raises the frame, very carefully slotting it into place. She steps back. “What does it feel like?”

“It’s a bit like cold and a bit like static electricity. It’s quite hard to describe really.” Lisa nods and walks up. She pushes against the black paper and it parts. Inside the darkness, her hand feels warm. The feeling is vaguely familiar, but she can’t place it. She pushes in further, placing both arms in up to the shoulders. She sticks her head into the blackness. She stops. Surely her hands should have come out by now but they just feel warm, like her arms and now, her head. She then recognises the warm sensation. It’s exactly the same as the one in her missing stomach. She starts to pull out, feeling the air of the storeroom over her hair. Then she feels a pair of hands reaching down to grab her by the back of the head. She tries to struggle, but with her arms trapped inside the blackness, there is very little she can do. The hands push her further in, the darkness swallowing her a piece at a time, until, with a futile kick at the hands, her feet vanish into the blackness.

She flounders around, finally seeing a small regular shape of light. She tries walking towards it, but finds nothing solid. She scowls, making all sorts of promises of hideous tortures she’ll visit on Peter when she gets out. A very small, scared voice in the back of her mind says ‘If’. She tries to swim, and finds that a lot better as she gradually moves towards the light. And then the light vanishes. Lisa drifts in the darkness. She is almost reassured when she hugs herself and finds all of her under her fingers. Of course, she is still trapped in an empty nothingness with no way of getting out, but at least she’s in one piece. She laughs, giving in to the absurdity and the warmth. The warmth helps, making all her fears seem silly. After all, if you were going to trap someone in a place forever, you wouldn’t make them this comfortable. She tries listening, turning to all her other senses as the impenetrable blackness blocks out her sight. But the darkness is silent, and tasteless, and insubstantial. All she can do is wait, listening to her heartbeat. It crosses her mind that some people would pay huge amounts of money for this: sensory deprivation in the

extreme. She smiles at that.

Outside the darkness, Peter pulls the small frame off his chest, coinciding with the removal of Lisa's escape hole. He pulls up the metal plate and steps out of the frame. He pulls the paper out of the frame and shakes it, the paper flapping like paper. He walks up to the mirror and sticks the black paper onto it.

Inside the darkness, light returns, only a few inches away. Lisa turns towards it, feeling her hours of loneliness recede. A hand reaches in and she grabs it, trying to pull Peter in with her. With nothing to push against she fails and tumbles out through the black hole in the mirror out into the storage room. She glares at Peter. "What the hell did you leave me alone in there for so long for?"

"It was only a minute, three at most. It's easy to lose track of time in there, though. Or so I'm told. Did you enjoy the tricks today, madam? Truthfully?"

"Yes."

"I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that." Lisa slaps him across the cheek.

"Did you catch that? Good. Because if you ever pull anything like that again without warning me, I'll rip off your bollocks and feed them to you."

"My, what a foul mouth you have on you, my dear. Shall I wash it out with soap?" a bar of pure white soap appears in his hand. Lisa stares at him, and giggles helplessly. "I guess not." The soap vanishes. "Now, would madam care to go home?"

"OK, I guess. Can I come back later?" Peter smiles a broad, genuine smile.

"But of course, I'll sort something out for you. Now, where do you live so I can take you there?" she gives him his address. "Ready."

"Yes, but it'll be a long, boring journey across town after this."

"Oh, I don't think so." He pulls a handful of powder out of nowhere. "Now, hang on." He tosses the powder down and the world vanishes in a flash of brilliant light.

When Lisa's vision clears, she finds herself standing outside the front door of her flat. She fumbles for her keys, opening the door quietly, sure that her flatmate would be asleep (and really praying hard that she would be). She is. She beckons Peter in, pointing down the hall to her bedroom. Peter creeps silently along the hall and into her room as she shuts and locks the door behind her. She creeps after Peter and closes her door.

"Where would you like your new door, Lise?"

"New door?"

"You know, the one that connects to my place so you can drop round whenever you want. It had better be somewhere a bit hidden. We don't want anyone else stumbling in on us by accident, do we?"

"No, I guess not. What's the door look like?" Peter pulls out a black circle out of his pocket, its edge wrapped in a red line. "Oh, no. You think I'm going to trust you with holes after what you did to me just now?"

"Well, I did rather hope. It's not a hole, either; it's more of a tunnel. I've stuck the other end on the outside door of the storage. When you step through this end, you'll come out there, and vice versa. If either isn't attached to anything, the other won't work."

“Hold on, you want me to put a door inside my bedroom, letting you come in whenever you like?!”

“Well, when you put it like that, I guess it does sound a bit suspicious. Why don’t you just roll it up and unroll it when you want to come on through. That way, you have control over the doorway.”

“OK, I guess.”

“Anyway, now that I know where it is, I can come here at any time anyway.”

“Oh, that’s reassuring.”

“But honest. Don’t worry; I won’t come here without your permission. You have my word.”

“And I accept that, why?”

“Because I’m not a magician now, I’m just me. And I don’t go back on my word.”

“Fine. Give me the hole, then. I’ll put it in one of the drawers until I need it. I’ll probably put it inside the wardrobe to keep it hidden when I use it.”

“Good idea. Now, would you like to do something non-magic this evening or tomorrow? Say, a trip to the theatre? I have two tickets for the Lion King and a restaurant I know would be happy to give us seats afterwards.”

“A restaurant you know? McDonalds more likely.”

“I assure you, it is a proper restaurant with metal utensils and waiters.”

“OK. It might be nice to get to know the dull, boring, normal side of you.”

“Excellent. I shall pick you up at five then. The show starts at six, but traffic’s going to be murder.”

“Traffic? Why don’t we just, you know, appear there?”

“One: we’re not doing magic things, remember? And two: drawing the attention of the general public to magic is not a good idea. The last time that happened the result was the witch finder general and we don’t want to go there again.”

“OK, I get it. I’ll see you at five. Anything special I should wear?”

“Just look dazzling. Shouldn’t be too hard. I’ll see you later. Could you open the door for me?”

“Huh?” Peter points at the black hole in her hand, “Oh. Sorry.” She unrolls the hole onto the wall.

“See ya.” Peter walks into the hole and vanishes. Then his head pops back. “Don’t forget to hide the hole.” He vanishes again. Lisa peels the hole away from the wall and rolls it up, slipping it into the bottom of her underwear drawer.



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