

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 42

YULETIDE

"So, magic boy, how do I look?" Lisa twirls, the black cocktail dress clinging tightly to her, dipping across from mid-thigh to her opposite knee, her burnished hair brushed across her shoulder.

"As always, you look wonderful." Peter replies, looking up from fiddling a pair of cuff-links shaped like a fan of cards into his shirt-cuffs.

"Good. Got the presents?"

Peter pats his jacket breast pocket. "All there."

"Doesn't look like it."

"That's the point. Would hardly be secret Santa if you could see people putting their presents in, would it?"

"And, of course, it's not a chance for you all to show off."

Peter checks his black bow tie and cummerbund. "Of course not. How could you ever think such a thing?"

"Because I know you far too well." She replies, absently fiddling with her hair.

"Ok. We're all set then."

Lisa nods, "Good." She turns towards the door and stops, "Right, we're travelling via magic door, right?"

"Right." She turns back to find Peter resolutely not smiling.

"Let's go then." Her heels click on the floor. "So, how bad will this be?"

"Bad?"

"You know what I mean. Strange, freaky...you know."

"Magic?"

"Exactly. And, you know, how....Carrie will things get?"

Peter puts his arms around her. "Some magic, not too Carrie, but, well, I wouldn't rule out some. It's not as if we're as reserved about some things as normal people."

"We?"

He kisses her forehead. "We. Even you're not as bothered by things as most people, Lise. But, nothing will involve you directly unless you want it to."

"Ok, ok, still not letting you do everything you want with me, Magic Boy." She leans into him.

"So you keep saying. You'll trust me one day."

"Maybe."

"And then you'll be sorry. Mwah-ha-ha-haaaaa!"

"Yeah, not likely to be soon if you keep doing things like that."

A quick step through a door that isn't, "You can open your eyes now, Lise."

"Still not used to the corridors?"

"No. As if that's the weirdest thing around here." she looks at Sarah, "Case in point. What on Earth are you wearing?"

"Like it?" Sarah pirouettes, the red micro-skirt already flared out from her legs, edged all around in white fur trim. Similar white wraps around her Santa hat, mantle and around her wrists, the rest of her, from crown to toes covered in skintight red cloth. "Have a very Zentai Christmas."

"A what Christmas?!!!"

Sarah's blank face nonetheless manages to visibly roll her non-existent eyes, "Full-body catsuit is called a Zentai. Peter's neglecting your weirdness education, I see. Tut tut." she wags a scarlet finger at him. "Bought pressies? Good. You can come in, then. There are crackers ready. You are required to wear the silly hats by Royal decree."

"Yes, your Majesty."

"And as you're the last ones and very nearly unfashionably late, we can begin."

"We're early!"

"Exactly. Do not question the ways of Queen Sarah, Princess Chopped Liver. Or I'll use that

nickname in front of everrrrrryone.” she turns from the doorway, “Including your sister.” and Lisa is sure the featureless red mask is smirking. Sarah leads them into a smaller, cluttered room, pointing meaningfully at a large Hessian sack. “Pressies in there.” Peter steps up, dutifully sliding his present from his jacket into the bag without revealing any hint of its nature. “You never let me see what your pressie is.” Sarah pouts.

“Nope.”

“One of these years I’ll put an eye in the sack. That’ll fix you.”

“And spoil the surprise?”

“Spoilsport. Now come on, you know the party can’t start properly without you.”

“You always say that.”

“Because you’re the only one who can handle the drinks orders. Now come on before Tom approaches sobriety and all hell breaks loose.”

“Yes, Queen Sarah.”

Sarah leads them out through a short, dizzying corridor into the bar. Tinsel hangs from the bar, the ceiling, the tree festooned in it, most branches already stripped bare of festive chocolate, the pile of silver testament to the provisions supplied. The fairy on the tree looks sufficiently plastic, and a quick glance around accounts for all the usual suspects, for Lisa not to ask.

Stuart sits at the head of the table, hastily stopping tugging on his black tie the instant Sarah walks in. Scott sits to one side, top hat and opera gloves resting in the space beside him, his tails hanging out the back of the chair, his hair escaping it’s obvious combing. Tom sits opposite, his shirt gleaming white, if looking a little under strain, thick fingers slowly drumming on the tablecloth. Marie sits next to her husband, her hair bound up behind a tiara, pearls resting over the top of her pastel blue ballgown, her fox stole hanging across the chair. Mark sits opposite her, his bow tie rakishly undone, hanging around the open collar. Carrie sits beside him in a little black dress that emphasises little more than dress, especially given the increased swell of her chest. Tracy beside her, looking a little nervous in her white halter-neck dress, one hand on Carrie’s bare arm. Rafi and Jita sit opposite them, Rafi fiddling with his glittering cuff links while Jita sits in a bright crimson sari edged in gold thread, a ruby bindi gleaming on her forehead, looking like she’s concentrating on a spot above Tracy’s head. A tall Scandinavian blonde sits next to Jita, Anton’s arm around his shoulder, lost in the mane of blonde hair. To Anton’s other side is Flo, draped across the chair in a long black dress that looks modest until she moves and reveals just how sheer the cloth is in the right light. Tracy sits next to the other Tracy in a floor-length black gown, her arms lost in full-length black opera gloves, leaving a two-seat gap on her left before the empty chair at the foot of the table. A bright cracker sits beside the cutlery, wine glasses empty, a pint glass standing next to Tom’s setting.

“Alright, Sarah! Back from stuffing the bird already?” Tom asks, Mark laughing beside him.

“Tom, that ‘joke’ hasn’t gotten better since you started using it.”

“Well, yeah, that’s the point, innit? Get the audience bonding over how terrible the joke is.”

“Well, you’ve certainly got the second part down pat.”

He puts his hand over his heart, “You wound me, Sarah.”

“Not yet. Keep going...”

“Eh, I’m not drunk enough to risk royal wrath, but now that our brewmeister has arrived, I’m sure I can work on that. We going traditional and the new birds help out?”

Sarah’s mask narrows, as she takes her place, “When was that the tradition?”

Tom shrugs, “Every tradition’s gotta start somewhere.”

Lisa looks down the table as Peter sets her chair under her, “As one of the ‘new birds’, what would we need to do?”

“Well...”

“Oh, it does not matter,” Flo interrupts, “you won’t do it. None of you will. You are all too English. Far better, as the most desirable woman here, that I volunteer and spare everyone the embarrassment.”

“Oh, please, as if you’d know about embarrassment, you brazen hussy. You’re just looking for an

excuse to flash your bits out.”

“Should I not be proud that my beauty has not succumbed to the ravages of time and gravity, unlike some?”

Marie rolls her eyes, “Everyone's seen them already. Tribes in the depths of the Amazon rainforest have seen them. No one's impressed.”

“What is everyone talking about? How is this about helping with the drinks?”

“I dunno, sis, but it sounds interesting, if nothing else.” Lisa glares balefully at her.

“Well, love,” Tom replies, “you don't seriously expect epicures like us to just drink any old plonk from Tesco's at our Christmas bash, do you?”

“I...”

“Of course not, the very idea. So, of course we're gonna cheat things a little. Or a lot. Your bloke there, well, you know what he can do. And he had the bright idea for getting a living drinks dispenser together. First off was his bird, Vickie, weren't it?”

“Victoria.” Mark corrects, “She hated...hates being called Vicky.”

“Right, right. An' after her...accident, it was the boss, but she found better things to do.” Sarah inclines her head, “So then the girls kind of fight for who gets to be it. Usually fun to watch, if nothing else. Well, some of 'em, anyway. Some prefer not to get into the spirit of things.”

Jita grimaces, “It's not my fault you didn't like my suggestion about the guys joining in.”

“Wouldn't be fair on the others. Who amongst 'em could compete with my fulsome funbags?”

“Riiiiiight.” Jita mutters, a ripple passing across her sari.

“What does that have to do with...”

“Use yer loaf, love. Where do you think the drinks came out of? Genius idea. Wish I'd thought of it or had the oomph to do it. Great excuse for a feel and you get free booze out of it.”

“Peter,” she asks with a dangerous level of calm, “are they saying what I think they're saying?”

“Well...”

“Depends.” Carrie ‘helpfully’ interrupts, “Are you thinking they're talking about using someone's chest as a wet bar? Because that is a really cool idea. And I'd be happy to volunteer.”

“Of course you would.” Tracy murmurs.

“And I bet I can provide bigger portions.” she continues as if she couldn't hear the interjection, taking a deep breath and holding it, her bosom swelling, stretching the already under-pressure dress. Tracy looks down at the table in embarrassment.

“I knew there was a reason I liked you, love. Well, two reasons.”

“Thomas, must you always live down to expectations?”

“Yes, Ms Marie, I must. It's a curse an' all, but someone's gotta lower the tone so folks as want to can feel superior.”

Marie turns her nose up, “Well, if you must, I suppose...”

Carrie takes another deep breath as Jita leans over to her husband, a slight strain on her face, whispering urgently.

“You didn't...” he hisses. Jita nods, flushed a little, “uhm, sorry, we'll be right back. Minor crisis.” he pushes his chair back, both of them taking off at pace. Carrie takes another deep breath, drawing the attention back to her.

“You're going to break out of your dress soon.”

“Never happen, sis. I got changed with the zipper, so the dress is me and I've gone way, way bigger than this without bursting, haven't I, Trace?” she takes another breath and Tracy blushes furiously.

“I concede.” Florencia sits back, “I cannot bear to deform myself so for such an unappreciative audience.”

Carrie takes another deep breath, looking down the table at Marie. “How about you, Ms M? Think you can handle me?”

Marie raises an eloquent eyebrow, “My dear, I know far more about how to handle strumpets like you than you can even imagine.”

“I dunno, I have a pretty good imagination, don't I, Trace?”

Tracy sinks into the seat.

"You mean a perverted imagination."

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean, sis. Wanna join me? I mean, two taps isn't gonna be enough for this lot."

"You'd be surprised, love, those look plenty enough to me. We gonna get to drink from the tap this year?"

"That's disgusting." Lisa mutters, a little too loudly, "She'll probably jump all over the chance."

Marie looks witheringly down the table, "You're a bit of a prude, aren't you, dear?"

"What?"

"A prude. Still a bit shy of others, and especially yourself, expressing their sexuality. That sort of propriety is perfectly acceptable in public, one has to have some standards and you never know what perverts are around you, but, really, amongst close friends and family? It's hardly becoming. It's not as if Thomas would ever actually do anything improper. He's been a complete gentleman during my times serving. Not like this randy old goat." Scott wiggles his bushy eyebrows suggestively, "Honestly, the times he forgets he's not a hormonal teenager any more. I would blame his age but he's been that way at least since I've known him."

Lisa sits in stunned silence.

"I concede. Losing's worth it for that." she looks across at Lisa, letting her cantilevered chest settle for more normal proportions, "So worth it."

"Excellent." Sarah claps her hands, "Not that the floorshow wasn't entertaining this year, but I think after all that excitement we could all do with a drink."

"...or three..."

"yes, Tom, or three."

"And you need to make sure the bird doesn't burn. Maybe give it some more stuffing."

"Thank you for your concern, Tom." she pushes her throne back, the featureless mask doing a very good glower as she does so, "I'll just go check on it, and see where Rafi and Jita went to. They'll be sorry they missed that. Peter, do the honours while I'm not here, would you?"

Peter gets up, walking around the table. "Ms Marie?" he offers her his hand.

"Thank you, dear." she takes the hand, pulling herself up. "Be a dear and unzip me, would you? I can never quite reach." Peter duly pulls the zip down her back. "Ahhhh, that's better." Marie folds the cloth down, exposing her chest. "I am ready, dear."

"Ok." he reaches into his pocket, "I hope you don't mind something a little different."

"How so?"

Peter pulls out a pair of black beer taps. Marie's eyebrows rise. "Like this."

"You finally got round to making them? I thought you were going to stall forever."

"I'm a performer here now, Stu, you can't get rid of me."

"Oh ye of little imagination."

"And, 'course, it's not that you didn't want your bird to get jealous and kill ya in your sleep, at all."

Peter glances towards Lisa as he hands the taps to Marie. "I'm honestly not sure she'd have waited until I went to sleep."

"You always did like to live dangerously, dear." Marie pushes one tap over her nipple, feeling it attach. "Mmmmm. Still feels nice." and then the other.

"You planning on sellin' SAT the designs for them things? I could do with a couple."

"Really, Tom? You want to wear these?"

"Yeah, sure, who doesn't want free booze? Even with their mark up, it'd be worth it."

"Can I put in an order, too? That looks like fun." Lisa scowls at her sister. Who blithely ignores her.

"I'll think about it."

Marie takes her glass, pressing it under the tap and casually pouring sparkling white wine out.

"Now, who's ne...?" Tom's glass is across the table before she can finish speaking.

A few minutes later, Sarah glides back in, followed by Rafi and 'Jita, the latter in a somewhat less elaborate sari and slightly embarrassed look, "Found them. Just in time for the crackers."

"And what were you two doing that needed 'Jita to change her frock, hmmm?" Tom asks, sipping

his beer. Lisa sips very cautiously from her glass, almost as if she's afraid the wine won't be wine when she tastes it.

'Jita colours at that, looking down at the floor.

"Thomas, don't be so crude. It's beneath you."

"Barely, Ms Marie, only barely."

'Jita takes her place, finding a keen interest in the tablecloth, "Drink, dear?"

She looks up at Marie, eyes darting to her taps, "Brandy, please. Double. And strong." she gulps it down in one go, passing the glass across for a refill.

"Now that we've got that sorted..." Sarah holds up her red and gold cracker.

"But I still want to know..."

"As I said, now that we've got that sorted!" she casts a hard glare at Tom.

"Right, we're sorted, got it."

Everyone reaches for their crackers, holding them out, eventually deciding by consensus to share with the person on the right. "Pull!" Sarah shouts and a series of disappointing bangs echo around the table, spilling paper crowns in an assortment of colours, scraps of paper with truly terrible jokes on and an assortment of tiny playing cards, hair clips, plastic toys, tape measures and metal puzzles clatter onto the table.

Soon, everyone is wearing their hat with varying degrees of good grace and style, although some require a touch of magical adjustment to fit, especially as Sarah point-blank refuses to take off her Santa hat, the pale green crepe paper resting on the white fur. The petty squabbling and trading of presents doesn't take long, although one plastic flicker frog does leap into the wine to escape its new home. And then the jokes are read. At least until the groans get too much.

"Look, I'm not putting any of that stuff into my act. It's far too good, I mean, listen to this one, 'What kind of motorbike does Santa ride? A Holly Davidson!'. That's proper class stuff, that is."

"Tom, enough, please, or I fear my very sides will split."

"Sure thing, Sarah, love, just bring me somethin' to put in my mouth and I promise ta shut right up."

Sarah turns her head towards him slowly, "Do not tempt me."

Tom smiles beatifically as she rises. "Hope the bird's nice an' juicy. You got a big one in this year, didn't you?"

The faceless mask glares down the table before she walks out.

"You do like to live dangerously, don't you, Tom?"

"Not a bit of it, boss. She loves me too much to do anything too permanent. Although, speakin' of livin' dangerously, Steveo's back in town. Got some plans to open some kind of shop or club or den or something. Never been good at details has Steveo."

Stuart sighs, "Wonderful. That is just what I needed to hear."

"Just givin' you a head-up, boss-man. Before you hear about it all official-like."

"Who's..." Lisa begins before Sarah comes back in, pushing a hostess trolley of food.

The dishes quickly pass down the table: carrots, sprouts, runner beans, cauliflower, pigs in blankets, roast potatoes and parsnips, and, of course, a platter of steaming sliced turkey with stuffing balls, all of which quickly find their way onto plates.

"Mmmmm. Dynamite bird, love, nice and succulent breast meat. You can tell it was well-stuffed, too. Nothin' but the best. We gettin' any firm thighs later?" Mark smirks beside him.

"Tom, will you shut up about the bloody bird and just eat it? Honestly, you do this every year."

The bird is not mentioned for the rest of the meal, merely savoured.

"Oh, man, I'm stuffed." Tom leans back, hands over his copious stomach.

"No room for dessert?" Sarah teases.

"Don't be stupid, love. There's always room for pudding."

Sarah leaves to get the dessert, coming back with a Christmas pudding, pale blue flames licking over the dark brown mix as it smiles at the table.

"No. Way! That is so cool. You have to teach me how to do that!"

Tracy rolls her eyes as Sarah sets the pudding head down. "Well, maybe if you're a good girl." the

pudding replies as Sarah takes her seat. "Or a properly bad one." she finishes from her chair.

"You expect us to eat you?"

The pudding smiles and the mask twitches. "Why not? In for a penny, and all."

"Because...what do you mean?"

"Well, the bird Tom was waxing so eloquently about was..."

"It was you, wasn't it?"

"It was." she claps lightly, "Stuart, you're doing the dishes. I told you even with Tom trying to spoil things they wouldn't guess."

"Tom spoiling...everyone knew?!" she turns towards Peter, "You knew?! No, don't answer, of course you did. Something else you didn't tell me."

"Don't you like surprises, sis?"

"You can..."

"Hey, hey, much as I'm lovin' the second floorshow, can you save the domestic until after puddin'? I'm starvin' over here."

Tracy picks up the spoon, glancing down the table at Sarah before digging it into the pudding, which makes an unsettlingly pleased moan as the spoon digs through the soft mixture and into a bowl. She swallows nervously, "C-cream or ice cream?"

"Oh, come on, love. Both, of course."

Once the first piece has been passed down, the rest of Sarah's pudding-head is quickly divided, and silent after Tracy pulls the lips into a single bowl and hurriedly passes it away. Lisa's place is the only one empty, leaving some of the pudding left in the centre of the table as the rest tuck in.

"Sure you don't want some, Lise?"

"I..."

"You're not allergic to nuts, are you? Is that it?" Sarah asks, "I can assure you there was only one nut involved in preparing this and I'm not allergenic."

"I..."

"Go on. I'm non-fattening. Promise."

"I..."

"You know you want to. You had seconds of the rest of me. And if you don't, Tom'll finish me up."

"I...alright, fine, you win. Wouldn't want to be a prude, would I?" she takes the last of the pudding, lathering it in cream, and gingerly takes a bite, trying to forget what she's eating, uncomfortably aware of everyone's attention. It doesn't taste nearly as bad as she expects, rich, fruity, perfect Christmas pudding, not even a trace that it's anything else. She swallows and digs the spoon back in.

"Sorry, Tom. No seconds for you."

And with the drama over, everyone resumes eating.

Once pudding is finished, Sarah leaves again, dragging the sack into the room, "Already?"

"Presents after dinner. We're not sure how long Grace will sleep through so..."

"So you want to kick us out early?"

"Yes, exactly that." she rolls her eyes behind the mask. She reaches into the sack, "So, back to important matters: has everyone been good boys and girls this year?" she looks around the room, "Obviously not. That's why you've got me and not the real thing giving these things out. So, who's first...Tom, you're up." she hands him the present.

He rips the paper open, "Oh, sweet. I haven't read Proust in an age."

"Carrie."

The paper flies everywhere in a bright confetti storm. She stares at the Magic Box Set, age range 8+, "Ok, who do I have to kill, I mean, thank for this?"

"It's a secret." Sarah replies, "That's why it's Secret Santa. Duh."

The rest of the presents are fairly standard, chocolates, booze, a wankometer for Mark, calendars and the like, but fairly soon the sack is empty.

"Well, Christmas is over for another year. Time to pack things away." Sarah pulls off her hat and

drops it into the sack. She then starts peeling off the Zentai suit, revealing pure emptiness within until the suit is placed into the sack leaving no trace of her behind.

“Well, I think that's our cue, ladies and gents. Great do, Stu, as always.” he shakes his hand before turning back to Marie. “An' just one fer the road.” And pours a glass from her taps.

“Thomas!”

He grins, gulping the beer down.

Marie plucks the taps off, handing them back to Peter 'before anyone else gets ideas' and leaves with all her wounded dignity wrapped tightly around her.

And shortly, the room is empty, save for Stuart and the sack, “You can come out now, Janet. They're gone.”

The fairy on the tree shimmers and pulls herself off, “I do not know how I let you talk me into doing that. I'll be pulling pine-needles out of my ..out of my Christmas cheer for weeks now.”

“I was fairly sure that was your idea. Just like it always is.”

“Oh, pooh. Don't you be rational about it as well. I get enough of that at home.”

“Heh.”

“So, the only piece of fun I missed was what, exactly, happened to the lovely Ranjita. Don't keep a poor fairy in suspense.”

“Well,” the empty air besides Stuart replies, “it seems she's been practising and decided to wear herself to the dinner. Only she couldn't quite keep it up with all the fun all around. Good thing Rafi got her out of here quickly. She barely made it to the corridor before reverting to normal and losing that wonderfully ornate and complex outfit. I found them as Rafi was coming back with a real sari, and some underwear, for her. I didn't know she was getting that good at things, but I'll obviously have to give her some pointers if she wants to do that again.”

“Quite. We wouldn't want her to make any 'prudes' who happen to be around blush, would we? Now, did you save any of your delicious pudding for little me this year?”



This work by [Paul Watson](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 2.0 UK: England & Wales License](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <mailto:magicbookshelf@blueyonder.co.uk>.