

WATER TORTURE

A MagiciAnne Story

By Paul Watson

"How long can ya hold your breath?"

"Huh?" Dell looks up and the doll hanging in the air in front of her drops to the floor with a soft flump.

"Hmmm, need ta work on your concentration, ah see."

"No fair! You..."

"...asked ya a question is all. Gonna need ta multitask better."

"Yes, 'Boss'."

"So, how long?"

"You really want to know?"

"Wouldn't have asked otherwise, now, would ah?"

"I don't know. Who knows how long they can hold their breath?!"

Anne shrugs somewhat, "Ah do. Make's a big difference 'tween dramatic an' drownin'."

"Drowning?!"

"Water acts got a bit a extra risk to 'em."

"Risk?"

"Ya gonna just repeat every scary word ah say?"

"Hey! You're the one talking about drowning! How would that even work? Don't you have a spell to breathe water?"

"Well, yeah, course ah do. But spellin' needs concentratin' and when you're strugglin' ta breathe concentration is really not what you're good at. 'Sides, it's always best ta have a back-up plan or two. Spellin', holdin' ya breath, air pockets, even a sneaky air tube like the norms get ta use. No harm havin' 'em all. But ta use any of 'em, ya need ta be underwater, which means holdin' ya breath is real important. 'Specially if the spellin' gives ya gills. Hidin' them can be fun, an' even more so if ya overclock it an end up a mermaid. 'Less ya can finesse that as what ya meant ta do, a' course."

"And you're asking how long I can hold my breath because?"

"Ah, suspicion's back, ah'd missed ya."

"So?"

"'Cause there's a real impressive trick ta knock ev'ryone's socks right off ah know, but ya need ta be part of it."

"And it's a water trick."

"Yup."

"Which is more dangerous."

"Yup."

"And where I could drown."

"Yup. Theoretically. Boss'd kill me if ah actually let ya. 'Less he decided ta get creative."

"Oh, that makes me feel sooooo much better."

"Come on, ah can't kill ya. That'd make me the baby 'round here."

"I am not a baby!"

"Well, sure, ya ain't, not unless ya really annoy me."

"You can't do that!! Can you?"

"If ya're good, ya'll never find out. Buuuut, Marcel an' Sam could sure use some..."

Dell stares, first open-mouthed, then with more of a fixed glare. "Ya see, ya're learnin' already."

"Yes, Boss."

“So, let’s get yer trainin’ started.”

Shortly and nearby, as water gushes into the clear tank, “Ok, so why are we doing this?”

“What do ya mean?”

“You know what I mean.”

“Ah can guess. Ah'm doin' it because havin' a trick that gets everyone talkin' means more of 'em'll see the show. which means you're Uncle Tony gets more money, which means he's more likely ta keep us on, or put in a good word if we move. You're doin' it because it keeps ya here, away from your dad and it means ya trainin' continues until ya get ta the point where ya can do some scary stuff. Close?”

“Maybe. And, specifically, why do I have to take part? It's dangerous, right? And you can already do it, so...”

“Do ya not want ta?”

“It's dangerous!”

“It's more dangerous than a standard trick, sure. Barely. But ah ain't gonna do nothin' ta hurt ya. Least not without just cause.”

“Just cause?”

“Yeah, like ya not doin' what ya're damn told.” Dell's eyes go wide and she takes a step back.

“Oh, come on, cain't'cha take a joke?”

“It's kind of tricky when I don't know if you're joking or not.”

Anne smiles, steepling her fingers, “Eeeeeexcellent.”

“Yeah, that's not creepy and the exact opposite of reassuring at all.”

“Ok, ok, the reason ah'm doin' this is 'cause ya're good enough ta do it. Ya might, might, be better at veilin' than ah am an' ya got possessin' down, both in an' out. This'll be good ta get ya goin' further.”

“So this is what? A teachable moment?”

Anne shrugs, “Pretty much. Got ta take 'em when ah find 'em.”

“Fine. What am I learning, oh wise teacher?”

“Ok. We're startin' transformation 101.”

“Transfor...finally!”

“Don't get too excited. We're startin' on just ya an simple stuff. Ah ain't teachin' ya the good stuff just yet.”

“Well sure, you're not now.”

“Ah, that's some confidence in ya're skills an' mah lack a' self-preservation. Ok. That's enough water, ah reckon.”

Dell yanks the faucet closed. “So, what am I turning into?”

“Nothin'. We're just getting' ya gills. Ya're good enough at veilin' a'ready ta hide 'em on stage.”

“Just gills?” she replies disappointedly.

“Unless ya get real good real fast, just gills. An' don't be poutin' when ah turn around or we ain't even doin' that.” she turns around to find Dell looking angelic. Guilty as sin, but angelic.

“Yes, Miss.”

“Close enough ta respect, ah guess. Ok. Try an' do what ah do.” She climbs into the tank, and slips under the water. She stays there, gently sculling her arms to keep herself down for thirty seconds, 60...90...2 minutes... and then bursts out, gasping for breath, “That's the 'gasp' without spellin' version. Just for 'pant' emergencies, but ah'll need ta see how long ya can go.” she murmurs music under her breath and sinks down again. Gill-flaps ripple along the sides of her neck as s she calmly stays beneath the surface.

A minute passes.. Two...five...ten and she breaks the surface, her hair plastered to her head, dripping into the water, letting the flaps fade away as she leans on the edge of the tank. “An' that way is much easier once ya've got the hang of it.”

“Oh, simple.” Dell says unconvincingly.

“Simple? Sure. Easy? Not so much. But I'm told nothin' worth gettin' is.” Anne replies, clambering out of the tank, “Now, fetch me a towel or three and we can get your turn startin'.”

“Yes, Boss.” Dell replies, scampering off.

Some time, and several attempts to breathe water without gills, later, “I thought 'gasp' you said you weren't trying to 'gasp' kill me?!”

“Ah'm not tryin'! Ya keep tryin' ta do the spellin' after ya get in. That don't work too well.”

Dell splutters, coughing up some more water, “I hadn't noticed.” she gasps.

“Ok, ok, slow down. Spellin' first, then let go and breathe. Wait till ya feel the change, ya're goin' in full tilt. It takes a second'r so. Take a real breath an' only then go fer your Atlantis impression.”

Dell starts the words under her breath, feels her body tingling, pins and needles all the way down to her toes and slips under the surface of the water.

“Maybe just a liiiiiittle bit less hard next time?” Anne holds her finger and thumb almost together as the goldfish in the tank opens and closes its mouth at her. “Although ya ain't drownin', so ah guess this counts as progress.”



This work by [Paul Watson](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-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>.