

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 54

SORRY SEEMS TO BE...

Day 0 of the Apologypse, “Ok. Nothing to it.” she picks up the phone and stares at it, “Nothing to it at all.” she flicks through her contacts and dials. “Answerphone. Wonderful. Hi, Saz. Just phoning to say I’m sorry you were offended by what I said. Hope to hear from you soon. Ok, bye.”

Day 2 of the Apologypse, “You'd think she'd have phoned by now.”

“Who?”

“Sarah.”

“And why would she be phoning?”

“I apologised and...”

“Oh, right. It's only been two days. I wouldn't worry for at least a week.”

“Why not?”

“Because that’s the minimum time Sarah lets people stew. You have noticed our fair queen does love her some drama, dahhhhlk, right?”

“Ugh. That’s putting it lightly.”

“Speaking of...” he pulls out a thick black rod.

“Excellent segue, magic boy.” she claps slowly, “I hardly noticed the join.”

Peter bows from the sofa, tossing it across the room. “Give it a try.”

“What have you done to it?”

“Nothing. But I can’t see how Carrie’s got hers to do all those colours...”

“So I’m testing it.”

“Well, I can’t, can I?”

“Why not?”

He holds out his hand, his own lightsabre slapping into it. A blade of shimmering rainbow colours emerges, swirling through the spectrum. “I mean, **really, little Jedi?**”

“We’ll talk about that later. Ok, here goes.” The lightsabre sputters, a shower of orange sparks raining from the hilt, winking out as they drift to the floor.

Day 7 of the Apologypse, “Still no phone call. Well?”

“I said 'at least'! Given how good you are are pissing people off...”

“Watch it, Magic Boy.”

“...it could be another week. Maybe more. The record for a friend is 3 months in Coventry.”

“3 months!”

“Don't worry, I'm sure you can beat that.”

“Why do I put up with you?”

Day 9 of the Apologypse, Peter picks up the phone, “Hi, Stuart... Yes, she's here... How big a radius?” he passes the phone over.

“Hi, Stuart...”

“Just so you and Sarah know, I am getting involved in this nonsense just this once and under protest.”

“Oooooo-kay.”

He clears his throat, “Her Royal Majesty has received the apology of Princess Chopped Liver,”

“Hey!”

“...and, regretfully, deems it insufficiently deferential and sincere. She recommends that to receive absolution, you endeavour again with more flourishes.' And now I'm done. You two can work this out yourselves.”

“Right.”

“I recommend at the least going full on 'Your Majesty'.”

“Hey! No helping, traitor!”

Lisa can practically hear the eyeroll as she says goodbye.

"Insufficiently deferential and sincere! Who does she think she is!"

"The Queen?"

"Not helpful! I thought I could expect some more support from you."

"Sorry." he moves to hold her, "So, what message did Stu have to convey?"

"My apology wasn't good enough, apparently. So I need to start again."

"Oh, I see. She's playing with you, is she?"

"Probably." she sighs, "So let's play the Queen's game."

Day 10 of the Apologlypse, "Your Majesty, I humbly request your most gracious forgiveness for my gross act of impertinence to your regal personage."

"That will work better. But it could do with more needless flattery."

"Your friends are a lot of work."

"Well..."

"If the next words out of your mouth imply I am as well, you'll regret it."

Peter closes his mouth.

"Very wise."

Day 11 of the Apologlypse, "Fine. But if this doesn't work, I'm going to wait it out." she picks up the phone, "Your radiant Majesty, your subject humbly requests your most gravious forgiveness and mercy for the gross and shocking act of impertinence and offence to your regal personage. I abase myself before your magnanimity in hopes you may find in your most generous and kindly heart the compassion to relieve me of the burden of my guilt at injuring your feelings with my crass thoughtlessness."

"Laying it on a bit thick, aren't you?"

"With a mechanical fucking digger. If she wants abject deference, she'll get it."

"Couple of questions."

"Yes?" she raises her eyebrow dangerously.

"When did you get so good at understanding Saz's psychology?"

"Heh. And two?"

"Who are you and what have you done with the real Lisa?"

"Oh, fuck off." she curses half-heartedly.

Day 14 of the Apologlypse, the phone rings, "Peter Stafford. Oh, hi, Tracy. Yes, she's here, why...oh." he passes the phone over, "Official courier. Be nice."

"I'm always nice. Hello."

"H-h-hi. The Queen has a m-m-message for you."

"Ok."

"She a-a-accepts your apology and invites you t-t-to attend her at your earliest c-c-convenience to d-d-discuss restitution."

"Oh, thanks. Was there anything else to the message?"

"N-n-no. That's it. I p-p-promise."

"Thank you, Tracy."

"N-n-no problem."

She closes the call, turning to Peter, "Well, it appears I've been forgiven."

"Oh?"

"I just have to go see Sarah."

"So not fully forgiven then. Did she say you need to make restitution?"

"Yeeessss." her eyes narrow, "What aren't you saying, magic boy?"

"It would spoil the surprise."

"Oh, there's a surprise. How wonderful."

"Told you, our Saz loves drama."

Day 16 of the Apologlypse, the backrooms of Mister E's. Sarah leans back in her chair, "I understand." she mumbles in her best Don Corlione, "You had a good life. You didn't need a friend like me. But now you come to me and say 'Please, Queen Sarah, forgive me my trespasses.' But you don't ask with respect. You don't offer friendship. You don't even think to call me Godfather." Lisa finally fails to keep her eyes from rolling, "I don't call you a drama queen hamming it up for all you're worth, either, so I think it evens out."

"You see, that's exactly the blatant disrespect that's got you into this situation."

"I thought you liked blatant disrespect."

"I like some disrespect, it's a sign of spirit, but only up to a point. And certainly not as blatant as some people seem capable of."

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Better."

"Am I forgiven?"

"Maybe. We still have to discuss how you can make it up to me, after all."

"From that smile, you have...ideas."

Sarah's smile widens to full Cheshire Cat. "Oh, yes, so many wonderful ideas."

"Oh, goodie. Come on, then."

"Don't worry, I've narrowed it down to the perfect thing."

"Uh-huh."

Sarah hands her a small, folded piece of paper. "Just sign this."

Lisa looks up at her sceptically and unfolds it, "Permission slip." her eyebrows rise, "I,, hereby give Queen Sarah unrestricted permission from the day until the day! No."

"Don't worry, we'll fill in the dates before you actually sign. It'll only be for a weekend."

"That's not the problem and you know it."

"Well, we are dealing with your trust issues...."

"My?!"

"...and what better way to prove you trust me than to put yourself into my hands?"

"I don't trust Peter that much!"

"Oh, well, I'm not a monster. Have a week to mull it all over and come to a decision."

"I've come to a decision!"

"Well, you've made a judgement, but I hope you use the time to reflect and change your mind." she rises, "This audience is dismissed."

"But..." she sighs, "yes, my Queen."

Day 17 of the Apologlypse, "You think I should do it, don't you?"

"I..."

"Why? Why would I, why would anyone, put themselves in that position?!"

"I..."

"I'd be completely helpless, that's the point of those things, isn't it, and subject to whatever she wants to do!"

"She..."

"And this is why I don't trust her! I've got to humiliate myself to get into her good books again? Not worth it."

"It wouldn't be that bad."

"Oh, really? And you know how?"

"One, I know Sarah and she's not malicious, so wouldn't be trying to hurt you. Play with you, push you, tease the fuck out of you, sure, but that's it."

"That's..."

"Two, the whole purpose of this is a trust exercise, right? To show that you not trusting her was misplaced. Turning around and abusing that at the first opportunity just seems counterproductive. Three, remember this is a game. It's not life or death."

"No, it's..."

"And four," he continues, "because she's right. Friends are supposed to trust each other. You'd lend her money without thinking about it, let her arrange a night out, do all the normal sorts of things friends do. Well, with us, that includes trusting friends to not seriously abuse agreements."

"Seriously abuse?"

"Well, if you're sloppy, it would be irresponsible not to point this out as directly as possible, wouldn't it? Isn't that why you agreed to let me do that with you?"

"That's different," she huffs.

"Of course, but similar enough."

"So, you think I should do it."

"I do."

"And what will she do if I don't?"

He shrugs, "Probably continue to ignore and snub you, but as you think every conversation with her is a minefield of traps, wouldn't that be better?"

"Stop trying to confuse me with facts and logic!"

Day 19 of the Apologypse, a Costa Coffee on Chancery Lane, where Tabitha huddles in the corner, her blouse hanging loosely, hair tied back, peering over the coffee held in both hands, trying to avoid the attention she drew as she strutted in, "So, are you asking my opinion as a friend, a lawyer or as someone who knows the dangers of unrestricted power better than anyone?"

"Do they give different answers?"

"Well, as a lawyer, it's time limited so the potential for real abuse is rather limited. I mean, it could be an unpleasant weekend if she wanted that, but it would be one weekend, so I wouldn't necessarily advise against it. It would depend on how important to you her good graces are. And given the majestic approach to the law they...we have, being in with the local aristocracy is a better idea than it should be in the 21st century."

"That sounds like you support it."

"As a lawyer, it isn't an inherently abusive contract so I wouldn't automatically advise against signing up. I don't support or not, that's the client's decision. I just lay out the facts."

"So, other opinions?"

"As a friend, naturally I'd support you in whatever stupid arse decision you made. But, I would say I told you so if you make the wrong one."

"Which one's the wrong one?"

"Well, as a, I don't want to say it, ok, fine, a victim of magic, I'd say it wouldn't be a problem."

"What?!"

"Keep it down. You're drawing more attention than me, which is a nice change, but still not great."

"But..."

"Oh, you expected me to be on your side about this? Sorry, but I work with Sarah and she isn't anything like that bastard. The contract isn't the issue here, it's the person enforcing it. And I'd trust Sarah to enforce it fairly. She's treated me well ever since...anyway, she'll have fun pushing all your buttons, well as many as she can, it is only for a weekend..."

"Hey!"

"Please, you have more buttons to push than NASA mission control. Anyway, she'll have fun, but she won't push hard enough to hurt."

"Just embarrass me."

"Probably. Although, she's not likely to try to damage your trust. That is the point of this, isn't it?"

"You sound just like Peter."

"Ohhhh, I get it, I'm just your attempt to find support so you can argue with your boyfriend?"

"No!"

Tabitha raises a pale eyebrow, "Oh, really?"

"No...not just that."

"The prosecution rests, your Honour."

“So, you think I should do it as well?”

“I think it wouldn't be a terrible idea, it might even be fun. Although, I don't think it will be comfortable for you.”

“Why not?”

“Because you're who you are and Sarah's who she is. She likes pushing and you really don't like being pushed. Even if she doesn't do anything magical, and how likely is that, she'll make you look at yourself in ways you don't appreciate.”

“But you still think I should do it?”

“Of course. You're her friend and a goddamn grown-up. If you don't trust her, at least be honest with yourself, and don't pretend you're her friend. You don't have to agree with her. And it isn't as if this is going to be a regular thing. Unless you find out you were wrong and actually like it.”

“Not a chance.”

“Uh-huh. Take it from me. Sometimes you can surprise yourself.”

Day 21 of the Apologypse, Lisa sighs, leaning back in her bed, “Marvellous. Everyone thinks I should do it. I just wish I knew what to do.” she sighs again, “that was your cue, ring.” the ring remains stubbornly silent. “Wonderful.”

“Honestly, I know patience isn't one of your virtues, but give a girl a chance to get dressed, will you?” Lisa looks up, a faint glow hovering above her, straightening her stockings, “Now, what did you want to know about?”

“Doesn't matter. You'd approve anyway.”

“Oh, would I? And just what do you think I'd approve of that you clearly don't? It really is a little rude to summon someone and then just ignore them.”

“Fine, fine, I'm sorry.”

“Accepted, dear. So...why did you use the w-word?”

“W-word?”

“Wish. So, again, why did you wish for advice?”

“Long story.”

“Talk quickly, then, dear. I have other things to do than look after you.”

“Fine. I insulted Sarah.”

A tiny eyebrow raises, “Oh, really?”

“And to regain her trust, apparently, I have to sign up to be her toy for the weekend.”

The other eyebrow rises, “Oh, really?”

“And everyone else thinks I should go along with it!”

“Everyone?”

“Peter.”

“And?”

“And Tracy. And I don't even need to ask Carrie to know her view.”

“No, probably not. Your sister wouldn't need an excuse, would she?”

“Exactly.”

“And you don't want to do this, I presume?”

“Why would I?”

“That's a very good question I'm not equipped to answer. I have no idea why you wouldn't.”

“Of course you don't.”

“But I'm not you, so what I think is quite irrelevant. Becoming a toy for an insult does sound a little...much, though, even for Mrs Drake. It must have been some insult.” she tilts her head, inviting a response.

“I...I tried to get her to agree not to trick me into an agreement.”

“And how did that go, dear?”

Lisa scowls, “Well, she didn't trick me, I suppose.”

“True, but, really, in a community founded on trust and the importance of oaths?” she shakes her head, “You really should have expected it would be bad.”

“So, I deserve this?”

“I didn't say that, dear. Just that it's not a surprise Mrs Drake is rather annoyed with you.”

“So, it is my fault.”

“Ok, that's it. I'm done. Enjoy your misery, dear.”

“Wait.”

She stops, “Quickly, then, dear. And without so much self-pity.”

“Fine. I don't understand why everyone thinks I should do it.”

“And, naturally, you conclude it means they're all wrong?”

“What am I missing, then?”

“Well, the important point is: it's not as if you're in thrall to someone who will ignore your boundaries. She might get uncomfortably close to them for your liking, but, you are friends, aren't you?”

“How can I...”

“You are friends, aren't you, dear? If that's true, that's how you know.”

“This is more control than I let Peter have!”

“Oh, quite right, dear. He's your partner, after all. But that doesn't apply to Sarah. Unless I've been missing out on some really serious juicy gossip. Anyway, Mrs Drake is a flirt, in magic and pretty much everything else, but that's all she is, just like your sister. She'll tease more than actually crack the whip at you.”

“But...”

“You know yourself best, dear, but what are you really worried about? Solve that one, and you'll find the answer.”

“What do you mean?”

“You're afraid of the loss of control. But are you afraid of what will happen? Or how you'll feel about it?”

“I...”

“And I really do have to go, dear. Good luck with your decision, whatever it is.” the glow fades, leaving Lisa in the dark. In every sense.

Day 23 of the Apologlypse, “Ok. Try again.” the lightsabre sputters, yellow sparks dripping out.

“Nothing.”

“I wonder why it works for Carrie but not for you?”

“Oh, now you're hurting my feeligns, magic boy.”

“Sorry. I...” the phone rings, floating over to him, “Peter Stafford. Oh, hello, your Majesty. Yes, she's here.” the phone drifts across the room.

“Your Majesty.”

“Come to a decision?”

“Yes.”

“Annnnnnd?”

Lisa sighs heavily, “Fine.”

“Fine what?”

“I'll sign the slip.”

“Oh, goodie. See you this weekend, Toy.”

“I'm going to regret this.”