

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 61
GIRL WITHOUT A FACE

"So, where is it?" Carrie asks, looking around the living room as Lisa leans back on the sofa.

"Where's what?" She asks innocently.

"You know very well what." Carrie pouts, "Where's the suit?"

"I don't know what you mean." Lisa replies, trying to keep her voice level, "I thought we'd concentrate on some sleights of hand today."

Carrie folds her arms, "Of course you did. Where is it?"

"Aren't I supposed to be the grouchy one with no sense of humour?"

Carrie opens her mouth. And immediately closes it. "That...is a surprisingly good point. So?"

"So, I thought we should get some ground rules straight before we get to that."

Carrie rolls her eyes, "Goodie. More rules. You know how much I loooove rules."

"I do. First rule:..."

"Yes, Mistress."

"Stop that. First rule: Reciprocity. Anything one of us does to the other, they get to do back."

"That...seems fair."

"Good. Second rule: Modesty mode stays on. I do not want to see you like that, and I especially don't want you seeing me like that." Carrie nods, "Third rule: Safewords."

"Safewords?"

"You know, escape words when things get too..."

"I know what a safeword is! I'm just surprised you do. Peter must really be getting you into kinky stuff."

"Shut up."

"Speaking of, where is our lord and master?"

"He's busy. And, before you ask, that's why we're not in the warehouse. You can't be trusted without proper supervision."

"That's not...hang on, aren't you 'proper supervision'?"

"Moving on."

"You're not, are you?"

"Moving on."

Carrie smiles victoriously.

"Anyway, safewords. The suit has, buried in the legalese, the ability to set up safewords. Even if you're muted, you can say that and it'll undo everything that's been done. Once you're in, we can set up your profile with it."

"In?"

"In the suit."

"Yes, Mistress."

"I said stop that!"

"What are you going to do, Mistress?" she smirks, "Punish me?"

Lisa pulls the collar out of her pocket and throws it at her sister. "Oh, just put it on."

Carrie snaps it closed, "Yes, Mistress." she smiles, snapping off a salute as the collar expands under her clothes, pressing against her skin. "Mmmmm. That feels good." she holds up her hand, turning it in the light, "Shiny."

"Hood up." the black sheen melts up over Carrie's face, "Create profile: Carrie. Set maximums, four."

"Four? Why four?"

"Because that's how high I've got mine set to and I'm not taking the chance of you using reciprocity to get me any higher before I'm ready."

"Rassum frassum rassum..."

"Bad girl."

"Ow! Fuck! That hurt."

Lisa smiles thinly, "That was level one. Still want me to put the maximums up?"

"No, I guess that's ok."

"Good."

"I will pay you back for that, though, sis."

"Of course you will. What safeword do you want?"

Carrie pauses, the blank face looking aside, "Sunstone."

"Sunstone?"

"Yup."

"Fine. Set safeword: Sunstone."

"You can ask why. I know you're dying to know." she smirks as she starts to undress.

"And you're dying to tell me. Go on, then."

"It's a webcomic..."

"Right."

"A really cute romantic love story..."

"Right."

"...starring adorkable BDSM lesbians."

"Ri...what?" Carrie's smile is almost audible. "Never mind. Now..."

"What's yours?"

Lisa pauses, "Blatherskite." she finally replies.

"Blatherskite?"

"If it's good enough for Gizmoduck..." Carrie snorts a laugh at that, "Now, mute." and the laughter goes silent, "Save as default for profile. Much better. That's you set up."

Carrie gives her a silent thumbs up and points at her mouth, tilting her head questioningly.

"Would you want a running commentary when I'm in there?"

She shakes her head, giving a shrug and another thumbs up, followed by a four-finger beckon.

Lisa walks up, staring into the smooth featureless face, and pokes her finger into it, working it around to form a pit. She repeats it and then carves out an arc to form a smiley face. "Much more you." the smile pulls down into a frown. "Huh. Didn't know you could do that. Still, if you don't like it..." she pushes hard against the face, smushing it into a crumpled lump. "Better?" Carrie shrugs and points at the misshapen lump of her head tapping where a mouth might be reasonably located.

"Fine. Unmute." A pair of lips open in the black surface.

"Better. Although if my Mistress wants a response, she shouldn't mute me."

"True. But I'm mostly just talking to myself. Mute."

"Yes, Mis..." and her mouth seals shut once again.

"Now, where were we?" she lifts Carrie's arm and crumples it up. She proceeds to do the same all over Carrie's body, smoothing her sister into a smooth black ball a couple of feet across.

"Still a bit big for what I want." The ball doesn't respond as she begins to knead at it, pressing it into a smaller and smaller area.

Several minutes later, Lisa wipes the back of her arm across her forehead and holds up the tennis-ball sized sphere in her palm. "Now, let's see how well you bounce. Fix." She thinks she feels the ball quiver in response before she drops it onto the faux wood flooring, bouncing it up into her hand. "Pretty good. I'll have to see if Peter plays tennis." She bounces the sphere a few more times before letting it land, putting her foot on it to stop Carrie rolling off. "Restore." The ball stretches, limbs flowing out as it expands into Carrie's normal shape, Lisa's foot pressed on her stomach. Carrie looks down her body, her faceless head looking up quizzically before she points at where her mouth should be. "Fine, unmute."

"Ooooh, a little more, Mistress. Nice pose. Very dominatrix. Maybe I was wrong and Peter needs the safe..."

"Oh, shut up. Mute."

Carrie falls silent, the impression of her shit-eating grin fading away like the Cheshire Cat's smile.

"Now, for the next test..."

Carrie's hand clutches into a grasping 'for science!!!' claw. She shrugs at Lisa's questioning

eyebrow.

"Stay there. Lie flat. I need to get something."

Carrie nods, stretching herself out, staring up at the ceiling, arms straight by her sides, hands flat on the floor.

Lisa returns with a large roller. "Still there. Good girl."

Carrie shivers as the suit rewards her. Lisa takes hold of Carrie's ankles and steps along her body, putting a foot on her waist to bend her neatly in half, her legs pressing against her chest. "Good, now hold that pose." She walks back, lifting up the roller and shoving it onto Carrie's raised butt. She starts to roll back and forth, squashing Carrie down.

Later, Lisa looks at the flattened shape on the floor, about half as thick as when she started and much more spread out, Carrie's figure becoming obscured, "This is a lot more work without magic. Still, onwards and upwards." she leans on the roller again as the phone rings, "Don't go anywhere." she crosses the room, picking up the phone, "Lisa."

"Ah, good, you're there."

"Hey, Saz."

"Ahem."

"Sorry, 'good afternoon, your majesty'."

"Better. You're not busy are you?"

"I'm in the middle of something but I can probably take a break for a chat."

"Well, that's good, but it's more of a favour..."

"Uhhhhhh-huh."

"You sound suspicious."

"Uhhhhhh-huh."

"Good. But this isn't anything bad. I've got guests flying in and I need someone to pick them up at the airport..."

"And everyone else is busy?"

"No, no, no, you're at the top of my list for this. Well, near it, anyway. Not in the bottom half, by any means."

"Uhhhhhh-huh. So, who am I picking up?"

"Jean and Penny. They perform as the Faceless Magician. Coming in from Oz."

"Australia? Or Emerald City?"

"The former. As far as I know, the magical Land of Oz does not exist. But if it does, avoid having a bath while you're there. We don't want you melting away. Anyway, they're here for a little something I'm organising."

"Oh, really?"

"I'll tell you about it when you get them to E's."

"I haven't said I'll do it yet."

"No, but you will. Or I'll have to pull out the pouty voice."

"Fine, fine, I'll get them. Give me the details of their flight. Just let me get a pen."

"Excellent..."

A few instructions later, "Ok, got it. I'll go pick them up." she turns back to her sister, to find two prominent bulges about halfway down her flattened body, "What are you doing? No, never mind, I don't want to know. Restore. Sorry to cut it short, but I've got a mission from Queen Sarah, you can play with me when I'm back."

Carrie nods her head as she grabs for her discarded clothes. "Sure. Although...you could always squish me right up and take me with you."

"Not a chance. You'd just do the same to me."

"Obviously." she finishes dressing, letting the black sheen retreat into the collar. She hands it over.

"So, who are we collecting?"

"We?"

"You'd let me stay here unsupervised?" she asks innocently.

"Good point. Let's go."

Later, crammed into Peter's commuter car on the way to the airport, "So, what were you planning for me? Before our secret mission for the crown?"

"Yoga mat."

"Yoga mat? Me? Well, that's wilder than I thought it would be."

"Surprised?"

"No! Actually, yeah. Partially that you'd do such things to your poor innocent little sister, and partially because it means I get to do them to you!"

"I've been told I need to relax and have fun with this more."

"I've been telling you that for months!"

"True, but I've been told it now by someone I respect."

"Ouch. That hurt, you know, really hurt."

"Yeah, yeah. And what were you playing at?"

"Moi?"

"Toi. With the..." she gestures vaguely with one hand.

"Expanding boobies. I thought I'd give you more to work with."

"Thanks." Lisa replies flatly.

"So, why can't you explore your boundaries with your boyfriend?"

"I could, but..."

"Buuuut?"

"But I have more control with you and I'm not sure I want them broadened as much as Peter probably can. And, if I really don't like something, I'm much more comfortable hating my bratty little sister for it than my boyfriend."

"Hey!!"

"You were the one with the expanding breasts so I'd get embarrassed."

"That's...ok, that's fair, I guess. Fine, I'll be your scapegoat for your own perverted desires."

"Hey!"

"That's what you said!"

"It is not what I said at all."

"It is! More or less."

"Fine."

"Fine."

Minutes of stony silence tick by, "So, this Faceless Magician..."

"Yes?"

"You've heard of them."

"Of course, hasn't everyone?"

"Clearly not. So..."

"So?"

"You are infuriating!"

"Thank you. I try."

"Yes, you're very trying. So..."

"So, they're Australian assistants cum magicians. Jean usually performs as the magician and only performs if her face is blanked out like your kink suit. Or at least, that's how the Faceless Magician performs. You'll like her style. It's classy and elegant and doesn't lean too heavily on Penny's attractiveness. They're involved in magical politics..."

"That's a thing?"

"Oh, it's definitely a thing. They're working with Holli Kim for assistants' rights."

"Holli Kim?"

"You haven't heard of Holli Kim? Ok, ok, so she's kind of a big deal, I can't believe you haven't heard of her. She was with some creep called Arnold Lassiter and his Troupe of Everlasting Beauties way back in the seventies. Nice guy, got his assistants on lifetime contracts, and I mean lifetime. Eternally young, as long as you work for him, and Holli's the first person to get out of one. About

10 years ago.”

“But that's more than...”

“Uh-huh. Even I'd probably have popped him one if he'd tried that. Anyway, Holli found a way out and has been organising for assistants' rights. Or, at least, once she'd got herself together she did.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning it's hard being 'under contract' for that long. Need to adjust back to relative normal.

Anyway, Jean and Penny teamed up with her after some bad business and they're extending things

Holli pioneered in the States Down Under.”

“And what are they coming here for?”

“Who knows? Something for that? Performing? Something secret secret?”

Lisa sighs, “Whatever.”

“Exactly. Ours not to reason why...”

The airport, bright antiseptic lights, stark vertical lines, oceans of white tiles, smells of coffee and expensive cheap food, and people exhausted or exuberant depending on exactly which flight they've arrived on or are waiting for. “So, what do they look like?”

“Penny's tanned and had a blonde bob last time I saw them online. She's usually in pastels, I guess.

Jean's got really long dark hair and is paler than you, seriously, she looks like she's allergic to sunlight, and likes dark stuff.”

“And how will they know we're here for them?”

“Well, I guess, hmmm, maybe, no, that wouldn't work, actually, that's your problem. I'm just a tagalong.”

“Thanks.”

“You're welcome, sis.”

“Ugh. There must be a Smiths here.”

“Over there.” she points at the store, up an escalator. “After you.”

“Thank you so much.” she walks up to the escalator and steps onto the rising metal steps.

“You're welcome. I wonder what it would be like to get stuck and pulled under on this thing...”

“Pretty sure that only happens in the X-Files and bad horror movies.”

“Well, sure, but, you know, I might be able to...”

“Carrie!”

“It's just theoretical. I'm not going to feed myself to the escalator gods in public.”

“I heard that 'in public'.”

“I know.” she steps easily off the end of the escalator with a sigh, “Not this time.”

“I'll be right back. Don't cause trouble while I'm gone.”

“Of course not.” she circles a little halo above her head and smiles in the face of Lisa's glower, “It's no fun if you're not there to annoy.”

“That, I can believe.” Lisa mutters as she walks into the store.

A few minutes later, she emerges with a murderous expression and a pack of Sharpies. “Well, that's half the problem solved.”

“Not in the mood.”

“Of course not. What are you going to write on?”

“I don't know! They don't have any big greeting's cards in there, just tiny little things! I could buy a couple of boxes of fucking shortbread but no paper!”

“That is a problem.”

“Not. In. The. Fucking...”

“I have a solution.”

“What?”

“For a price.”

“What price?”

Carrie's grin widens, “Oh, not much, I promise. We alternate who goes first in our little games.”

“What?”

"You know, you go first and I suffer your twisted whims, then I go first and..."

"No, I mean..."

"Oh, don't tell me you weren't planning on always going first so I could only go as far as you did."

"That's not the..."

"Exactly. The point is you need a solution now and I have one. And I'm only asking for a little something in return."

"Fine. If your genius plan works."

"Oh, ye of little faith."

"Try none."

"Appreciate the confidence, sis, fortunately I have enough for both of us. Follow me." She heads towards the toilets.

"Why the toilets?"

"I need a bit of privacy so no one sees me doing this. Duh. You don't have to come in."

"Good."

"Just wait for me out here." she heads into the gleamingly white-tiled toilets.

Lisa leans against the corridor wall and waits. And waits. And waits. She checks her watch. "What are you doing in there, Carrie?" she mutters.

A little later, Carrie finally emerges holding her hands up awkwardly in front of her chest. "There you are! Finally! So, what's this wonderful solution?"

Carrie pulls her arms apart, revealing a pale swath between them, holding onto it tightly. "Ta-da!"

"What is that?"

"The solution. I stretched myself a bit. Just write on here, and then I can hold it up and it'll look enough like a sign from a distance."

"Right. It's just an excuse for you to play!"

"Well, yes, obviously, but, it's better than what you've got now, right?"

"Fine." She pulls a black sharpie out of the pack. Carrie fights back a giggle as the nib touches her skin. "Stop squirming!"

"It tickles!" she giggles back, her hand unclenching, the flap of skin she was holding across her chest snapping back like a manic roller blind, knocking the pen to the floor and leaving a black streak smeared around her arm, "Ooopsie."

Lisa stoops to pick up the pen, glowering, "Did you have a plan B?"

"Plan C. Plan B is boring. Do you have your lightsabre with you? I left mine at home."

"Why?"

"Well, I didn't think I'd need it today, given we were going to be playing with the suit and..."

"No," Lisa snarls in frustration, "why do you need it?"

"Grouch. Ok, how about I stretch myself out again..."

"Because it worked so well last time."

"Yeah, yeah, but then we use your lightsabre to cut the skin off and..."

"Subtle."

"Do you want to listen to this plan or what? Anyway, after we've pulled the skin off, we make the sabre brown and..."

"I can't do that."

"Sure you can. It works the same way as Tracy's and mine. Anyway, we do that and make the skin into paper for a bit. It doesn't have to last that long."

"No. It's just an excuse for you to get freaky. And I'm not sure you won't claim this is part of our session."

"I wouldn't..." Lisa looks down her nose sceptically, "...ok, so I might have, but I promise I..."

"What's plan B?"

"Oh, don't make me tell you plan B, it's dull!"

"Carrie..."

"No. Won't do it." she folds her arms.

"Carrie..."

“Nope.”

“Just tell me!”

“You go to the Clinton's over there, get a really big card and use that. Like I said, boring. And I'll get you back for that when it's my turn. I mean, as using voice of command is allowed.”

“What are you...you know what, never mind. I'll be right back.”

“Oh, I won't mind one bit.” She grins to herself, “You, on the other hand...”

A few minutes, Lisa returns with a large birthday card under her arm to find Carrie listening to her phone, perched on the edge of the chair. “Whaddya get?”

Lisa holds up the curved card, a cartoon dog wishing whoever receives it a happy birthday. Carrie almost keeps her smile under control. “I know! But it was the largest they had without a message!” she plonks herself down, ripping off the cellophane. She tears the card in two, consigning the dog to the bin and carefully writes out 'FACELESS MAGICIAN' on the card. “There.”

“Like I said, borrrrrring.”

“I heard.” she rises, heading for arrivals as Carrie grabs her stuff to follow.

After several delays, announcements about the delays, one coffee run, complaints about how bloody much airport coffee costs, more announcements about the delays, and an increasingly diminished amount of patience, the flight finally disgorges its human cargo out of customs, “Finally!”

“Has anyone ever told you you have no patience, sis?”

Lisa scowls at her, lifting the improvised sign up to her chest.

A sea of humanity surges past before a willowly woman walks towards them, her long black hair cascading down her back. “Hi, you're here for me?” she asks, looking down at the sign, dragging a wheeled suitcase behind her.

“Are you the Faceless Magician?”

“I prefer Jean when I'm not on stage, but I am she.” she extends a hand that looks like it last saw the sun sometime in childhood, pale freckles dotting her skin.

“Where's your partner?”

“Penny? Oh, she's here, don't worry. She doesn't like long flights, like, at all, so we compromise.”

“Compromise?”

“Show you later, huh? Had a lonnnnnnng flight.”

“Sure. Are there any other bags?”

“Nah. All that got portalled through. So much easier for community shows, you know.”

“Sure.”

Jean lapses into silence as they walk, her boots squeaking on the polished tile, her hand reaching up every few seconds to brush straying locks out of her deep blue eyes. She yawns, “Scuse, Penn has the right idea for those flights.”

“She's in the case, isn't she?”

“No. What an idea.” a hint of a smile flits across her face before they enter the tarmac and concrete of the car park. “Something you'd do?”

“Something she'd do.”

“Hey!”

“You wouldn't?”

“Of course I would! But it's rude to point it out in front of guests!”

They reach the car, “Huh. Kinda dinky, don't you think? Good thing I did portal over the gear.”

“It holds more than you'd think.”

Jean looks over at the car again, “If you say so.”

Lisa pops the boot open. Jean looks at the small space skeptically, but lifts up her case, sliding it into the back. “Huh. Never heard of a magic car before.”

“Really?”

“Not like that. I mean, magic bags, sure. Magic rooms that are full on TARDISEs, TARDI, TARDodes, whatever, no problem. But I hadn't heard someone putting it on a car. Seems like a waste. Way too small.”

"Nuh-uh. You could probably hold a party in there."

"I'd like to see that!"

"Maybe you could perform for it."

"Maybe. But you couldn't even fit one person in there. That would just be excessive."

"Sure you could!"

"Sure, sure, prove it."

"Huh?"

"Prove it. Bet it can't even fit you in there."

"But..."

"You heard her, Carrie. In you get."

"Traitor!"

"Yup. But you said it, and she is a distinguished visitor..."

"Fine. I'll get you for this."

"Hey, you said it, not me."

"Fine." she clambers into the boot and keeps crawling in until she vanishes entirely, "See?!"

"Yup. See you later." she slams the boot shut with a firm click, before unlocking the doors for Jean to climb in.

"So, you two're, you know...lovers?"

"No! She's my sister!"

"Oh, yeah, that makes sense, too. You're really going to leave her there?"

Lisa shrugs, "She'll be fine. She'll probably enjoy it."

"Yeah, sure. I hadn't even thought of putting Penn in the boot with the luggage."

"Speaking of..."

"Oh, all right." she digs in her pockets, squirming as she pulls out a jangling set of keys and then leans the other way in the seat to pull out a small velvet ring box. "Here you go. Penny...and Penny." she shows the box and holds up the keys, revealing the key-fob twirling. The fob looks like a tanned woman in a teal t-shirt and purple leggings, her legs and arms plaited around each other behind her back. A blonde bob falls around her face, eyes closed, mouth hanging open.

"I don't..."

"Penny 1 is Penn's body, but Penny 2..." she holds up the box, "...contains Penn's mind. She can't stand being on long trips, keeping still, being normal. For 14 whole hours? So not happening, so she does this instead. It takes her a while to readjust when I let the half-Penny's rejoin, though, so I'll be keeping her safe and sound until we get where we're going."

"That's..."

"It is. Totally. But that's Penny." she smiles wistfully, carefully replacing Penny's body and mind into her pockets, stroking along the tiny woman's limbs with her finger.

"Right."

They set off, Jean staring into the middle distance as they make their way out of the airport and onto the motorway heading into London.

As they cross the M25, Lisa glances across, "So, why are you here? I didn't get an explanation from her Majesty."

"Her Maj...oh, you mean Sarah, right? You call her 'her majesty'? Is that a real thing? She won't be offended if I don't, will she?" she asks, her hands wringing in her lap, "I want to make a good impression."

"Don't worry, it's not a real thing."

"Oh, that's good, that's good. Meeting the Keeper of London is nervewracking enough. If I had to deal with royalty too..." she fans herself with her hand, "Still, she sounds...fierce?"

"She's a pussycat."

"Oh..." she lets out a sigh of relief.

"Pampered, self-centred and liable to scratch."

"Eeep!"

"Kidding. She's great. A bit over-dramatic at times, but you learn to play along with that."

"Oh, ok, I see."

"What do you need to ask her for, anyway?"

"Oh, oh, she didn't say?"

"She barely said what flight you were on."

"Oh."

"So, what..."

"Oh, yes, sorry, right, right, Penn and I, we've set up, well, helped to set up the IAG for Australia and Holli thought if we could get the UK on board it would help spread it, but she couldn't make it over, and so Penn and I are here and we need to persuade the Keeper to at least allow us to try, but we really want to get some support and she wants us to perform and so I've got to worry about that as well as trying to make a good case and..." she finally runs out of breath.

"Sarah isn't the Keeper."

"She's not? But..."

"Stuart's the Keeper. Sarah's his wife. So, she isn't in charge. Officially, at least. You'd never know that by how everyone acts."

"But..."

"Pretend she is. It won't hurt."

"But won't the real Keeper be annoyed by that?"

"He's married to her. What's he going to do?"

"Oh, yeah, I guess, yeah, I guess, that is a good point. But..."

"But it doesn't help you."

"No, no, it's not, ok, it's that...I just don't want to mess it up! We've worked so hard to get here and if I get it sideways..."

"It'll be fine. They're not ogres."

"That's a relief, but they're, she's, he's the Keeper! Of London!!"

"So?"

"So? Don't you understand what that..."

"Assume I don't. Enlighten me."

"You don't? But...ok, so you know the Keepers are a deal, right? Like huge?"

Lisa nods.

"Well, London is kind of a big deal in those big deals!"

"Meaning?"

"Well, it doesn't mean mean anything, it's not like the Keeper of London can boss the others around or anything, but, London is an old Keepership. Like Tehran, or Beijing, or Constantinople, or...or Paris! So if they say something it carries, I don't know, weight? Importance? So if we can get him to support the IAG, it would make the others so much easier but..."

"Don't you have that from the Keepers in Australia and America?"

"The Keeper of Dreaming gave support, sure, not that anyone's going to care, but Vegas only let us proceed. And that was with Holli taking the lead. I'm not her. She's famous and practically a force of nature!"

"You'll be fine. You've got passion on your side."

"Yeah, but still..." she sighs, "I wish..." she trails off, looking back out the window.

"You wish?"

"I wish someone else was doing this. It sounded such a good idea. Helping assistants like Penn. Improving things. But now, who's going to listen to me? We should have got the Samhain girl to do it."

"Samhain girl?"

"Oh, come on, you're not going to tell me you don't know about the Samhain girl! I may be from Down Under, but I'm not stupid. How could you not at least know about it after Samhain last year?! It happened here, for Christ's sake! Everyone was talking about her!"

"Oh?"

"Yeah, I mean, standing up like that, taking that sort of risk for someone else, was a big thing. That

really gave Penn and me a push, you know. If she could be that brave, so could we.”

“That wasn't brave! I just didn't know what I was doing.”

“It wasn't brave?! Of course it was! She...wait, say that again.”

“Say what? That I didn't know what I was doing?” she replies, staring straight ahead at the road rather than her passenger.

“You didn't...you're her?! You're the Samhain girl?!?! And you just let me gush?!”

“I didn't know I was being called that! I didn't even know it was that big a thing! I was out of it for days afterwards!”

“You were? But...”

“That didn't make it into the story, did it? Freeing Tabitha nearly killed me. And my sister. And my boyfriend. Not quite the grand heroic fable it got spun as.”

“Maybe. But you did risk slavery to free her in the first place, right?”

“I didn't...”

“Yeah, yeah, you said. You didn't know what you were doing, but you did it, right?”

“Well, I guess...”

“Well, that's close enough, then. Oh my God, I can't believe I'm getting driven in by the Samhain Girl! Penn is going to be sooooo jealous when she finds out. She'll just plotz.”

“Uh-huh.” she replies non-committally.

“Ok, ok, sorry, sorry, you don't need me fangirling, it's just, well, ok, maybe a little fangirling, but what you did...”

Lisa snorts. “I did something really stupid because I didn't know better.”

“Thin line between bravery and stupidity.”

“Maybe.”

“Ok, no more bugging you about the Samhain girl thing. Promise. Ok, just one more. Can you come to talk with Penn and me before we have to talk to, you know? Or after? Please? It would mean so...”

“Ok, ok. I'll see you before you leave.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you. I still can't believe...”

“Neither can I. I'm going to have a 'talk' with Sarah about this.”

“Sorry. What was that?”

“Nothing. Just talking to myself.”

“Oh. Ok.” she yawns, “God, I'm going to sleep for a month as soon as I see a bed. And I've got so much to...”

“You don't have to worry this much, you know, she's not going to eat you.”

“I know but...” she yawns again.

“Go to sleep.”

“I can't sleep in a car, I just...”

“Sleep.”

Jean's eyes flutter and she slumps forward into the seatbelt.

Lisa pulls into the parking bay at the back of E's, and looks over at her sleeping passenger, “Ok, sleepy-head, time to wake up. [Wakey-wakey.](#)”

Jean slowly blinks and stretches, bumping her hands on the car roof, “Oh, maaannnn, already? I was just getting comfy. Thanks for that, though. I never sleep well after a flight. You're not available for when we're on tour, are you?”

“You couldn't afford me.”

She smiles, “That's not a no...”

“Let's get your stuff out of the boot.”

“Sure thing. We can check on your sister, make sure nothing's eaten her.”

“It would get indigestion.”

They open the boot, pulling out Jean's bags. Carrie crawls out, her face a mask of blank skin. She tilts her head, arms spread in question.

“What did you do?”

Carrie points at her chest, her pose an outraged denial.

“Uhm, is she alright?”

Carrie gives a thumbs up, and stares meaningfully at Lisa.

“I didn't do this.”

Carrie taps her foot impatiently.

“I didn't! Ok, let's see what...you've copied the suit, haven't you?”

Carrie shrugs.

“One of these days...fine, let's see if that works. Unmute.”

The featureless face melts, “Well, that was easy. No payment for you.”

Lisa sighs, “Stay here. And stay out of trouble.”

“Ma'am, yes, ma'am!” Carrie saultes, standing to attention.

Lisa rolls her eyes as she escorts Jean inside.

“Yep, you two are definitely sisters.”

Lisa sighs, “Yes, we are.”

“There you are! I thought you'd been kidnapped.”

“No, your Majesty. Just traffic. In London, even. Who would have thought?”

“Quite so, quite so. And you must be Jean.”

“Uhm, yes, I, I mean, yes, your Majesty.” she pulls off a shaky curtsy.

“Oh, she's just darling. But you must be tired after your flight. We can talk shop later.”

“Actually, your Majesty, I'd like a word or two about now.” Lisa interrupts.

“Of course. Stuart, be a dear and show Jean to her rooms, would you?”

“Oh, sure, right, of course. Ummm, see you later?”

Stuart leads Jean away as she continue to stumble and fluster over her words, the occasional squeak of embarrassment carrying down the corridor.

“So?”

“You could have mentioned I was famous!”

“Ah, Jean mentioned that, did she?”

“She did. When were you planning on telling me?”

“I wasn't. You're handling the news about as well as I expected, but perhaps we shouldn't have this discussion in the corridor?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, your Majesty.”

Back in the office, “So?”

“So, I didn't tell you because 1) it isn't something that's local. The Samhain Girl name only took off when reports started circling internationally. Peter and Mark were already known, the former more than the latter, of course, but you weren't so you got a nickname. I doubt Peter's even noticed, to be honest.”

“I...”

“2) Because we did have rather more important things to deal with at the time, including three people unconscious and one attempting to beat Mark flat with her bare hands. 3) Afterwards, it quite slipped my mind until talking to Jean about her visit. 4) Because I knew you'd read far too much into it and react like, well, like this. And there we are. I wouldn't worry about it, unless there's a repeat performance this Samhain, which there won't be, will there, it will probably die down.”

“You still could have warned me.”

“Possibly. But that would have made the conversation with Jean and Penny much more awkward.”

“Or you could have sent someone else.”

“Why would I? You needed to meet them.”

“Why?”

“You do know why they're here?”

“Something about an assistants' union.”

“We prefer guild. IAG, International Assistants' Guild.”

“Right that. They want your ok to it.”

“Oh, that's a given. What they really want is our endorsement and support.”

“Because you're a big fish.”

“Something like that. Official endorsements from any Keeper carry weight, but some animals are more equal than others.”

“And what does that have to do with me meeting them?”

“Well, if we endorse it, someone's going to have to run the local branch. They can hardly do that from the other side of the...”

“Me? Who said I was going to do it?”

“Why wouldn't you? Tabitha is going to provide the legal work, and you get to protect poor assistants from the clutches of those evil, predatory magicians.”

“I have a job already.”

“Fair enough. I'm sure I can find someone else.”

“Reverse psychology? Really?”

Sarah smiles, “Oh, no, I really can find someone else. You're my preferred candidate, though, and not just because after all the shit you've given me for not doing enough, I really want to see you try and wrangle the herd of cats that is our little community.”

“Well, that's encouraging and motivating and will definitely make me more likely to take this whole ambitious, impossible shitshow on.”

“I was hoping honesty might work on you. Just think about it.”

“Yes, my Queen. I'll think about it. I'll just pop in to check on them before I go and give it serious thought.”

“You do that.”

A few moments later, Lisa blinks at the new door, “Never get used to that.”, and knocks. Jean opens, a pair of fuzzy black triangular ears poking through her hair, twitching nervously.

“Yes? Oh!”

“Hi. Can I come in? Is Penny...up?”

“Uhm, well, that is, she...kinda?”

“Is something wrong?”

“Oh, no, nothing's wrong, it's just, she's just come back and...”

“BLORB!”

Jean turns back into the room, “No! No blorb! Not 'til we've met and talked to the Keeper.”

“Blorb!” the hidden voice demands.

“No. You know if you do that straight after you've been mindless it takes you forever to remember how to human! You told me not to let you!”

“Blorb?” the hidden voice begs.

“No, no blorb until later.”

“Blorb.” this time the hidden voice comes across as a plaintive whine.

“No, love, no blorb until later. I promise you can later.”

“Fine. But I'm not happy.” a body thumps down onto the sofa.

“Oh, thank God. I guess you come in.” she opens the door wider than a crack to let Lisa in. Penny lies across the couch, looking much the same as she did as a keyfob only a lot bigger. Her wide hips support three legs crossing each other but not quite to the point of braiding. A pair of arms rest behind her blonde head, another pair folded on her stomach. An unpaired hand reaches up to wave from behind her.

“Hiiiiiii!”

“Hi.” Lisa replies, pulling her eyes away before it can be called staring, “What's a blorb?”

Penny's tanned cheeks colour a little. “Oh, you, you heard that, huh?”

“You were pretty loud, love. A blorb is what Penny calls being a blob.”

“Blorb!”

“A blob?”

“You know, boneless, almost liquid, your whole body just stretching like it's silly putty.” she sighs wistfully, “I could spend forever like that.”

“Which is why you can't spend time like it now, love.”

“I know, I know, I have to be responsible and grown up. Blah!”

“Everyone has to sometime.” Lisa adds.

“Don't like it.” Penny huffs.

“No one does. We've met but haven't been introduced.” she holds out her hand, “I'm Lisa.”

“Penny.” The unfolded arm reaches out to shake hands.

“Have you told her?”

“Told me what?”

“Oh, something Jean found out in the car on the ride in.”

Jean shakes her head, her eyes shining, “Can I? Can I?”

“Sure.”

“She's the Samhain Girl!!!!”

“She's what?!”

“She's the Samhain Girl!”

“Really? You're the Samhain Girl?”

“So they tell me.”

“Oh, wow, that is so cool! Sorry for being a grump.” she pushes herself up, “I had no idea you were...”

“I didn't know either until Jean told me.”

“You didn't...how can you not know something like that?!”

“I was kind of in a coma afterwards and apparently the 'Samhain Girl' thing isn't a thing here. I guess because people know me enough not to need to give it a name? Or my marketing budget was spent overseas. One or the other.”

“Oh, still, Jean's told you what an inspiration you are, right?”

“She tried. But I didn't...”

“Yeah, you did. Even if you didn't mean to, you did. So you're going to have to accept being a hero.”

“A what? I'm not...” seven arms enfold her in a breath-crushing hug.

“My hero, my rules.” Penny replies, “I'm so glad I got to meet you before the meeting. Now I know it'll be fine.”

“You know she's going to agree to you operating, right?”

“She is??”

“I've talked to her.”

“Oh, my God! Oh, my God!!! Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

“She was going to allow it, anyway. I didn't do anything.”

“Uh-huh. Sure. You never think you do anything, do you? Just like Samhain. You don't think that was special.”

“I just...”

“You just risked your life for someone else! How can you not see what a thing that is?! If Jean and me hadn't heard about you, about what you did, we'd never have had the guts to even think of doing this.” she throws all seven hands up in the air, “Ok, rant over. Thanks for the good news. Now maybe someone will stop stressing quite so much.” she reaches over, scritching Jean between her cat ears. The ears flex, Jean purrs as she closes her eyes, stretching up against Penny's scritching fingers, her own hands stroking along Penny's arm. She looks at Lisa and her pale cheeks go bright pink as she shrinks away.

“Oh my gosh! Penn! Not now!”

“You won't let me blorb. I've got to punish you somehow. Would you prefer tickling?” she flexes her fingers.

"I think I'll leave you two to it. It's good to have met you while you're...awake, Penny."
"Likewise. I'd hate to have missed meeting the Samhain Girl."
"Don't go."
"Why not? I'm certainly not joining in."
Jean's blush deepens, "No! Not that! I just, we have to perform today and we've got to get ready and practice and..."
Penny pouts, "Ok, ok, no blorbing. But your punishment will be more severe afterwards for getting too nervous before a show."
"How long?"
"Oh, it'll be a short thing, I'm too tired for a full show today. But in a couple of hours, Stuart said, just him and Sarah."
"And me."
"Well, it would make me feel better knowing..."
"Ok, ok, I'll be there. Probably with Carrie, so I hope that doesn't put you off too much."
"Whoever that is, I'm sure we'll cope." Penny replies, Jean starting to squirm in her arms.
Lisa closes the door, speeding down the vertiginous corridor.

Outside, "Ma'am, reporting for duty, ma'am!"
"Oh, get inside."
"Inside..."
"E's. We're staying for a show."
"We are?"
"We are."
"Ok, free shows are good. What are you doing?"
"Not me!"
"So who's putting on a freebie for us?"
"Jean and Penny. And technically, it's for Sarah, we're just..."
"Gatecrashing?"
"Pretty much."
"Well, I suppose we have a bit of time to kill, so I could take my..."
"No."
"Grump!"

A couple of hours later, the lights in the theatre dim, the stage outlined in dry ice fog. Music swells and two figures dance onto the stage, spotlights picking them out as they pirouette towards each other. One wears a teal shirt, purple dress swirling out as she turns, her short blonde hair bobbing. The other is in a navy blue cheongsam, golden and silver stars twining around it, long dark hair carefully pulled into a braid. Neither have a face, just smooth skin framed by their hair. They meet, clasping each other's hands, their solo dances turning into a waltz around the stage, starting slow and gradually speeding up with the music, whirling around each other until they're almost a blur of blues, Penny's feet lifting off the floor as she whirls outwards. The music slows, the dancer following suit and as it finishes with a crescendo, the Faceless Magician swirls her teal and purple cloak around her shoulders, bowing as her lover quivers against her back. The small audience starts to applaud, but she holds up her hand to stop them. She swirls Penny around again, briefly hiding her from the audience's view. The cloak collapses flat to the stage. Stuart rises from his seat, approaching the stage. He lifts up the cloak, revealing one side to be teal and purple, the other navy blue studded with stars. He takes hold of two corners and unfurls the cloak out, teal and purple side on top. The cloak settles over something unseen on the stage, snuffling around the stage in undulating motions. Stuart returns to his seat, watching the unseen thing make its slow circuit. Suddenly, the Faceless Magician stands up from under the cloak, that now shows teal and purple on

both sides. She repeats Stuart's actions, the cloak snuffling around the stage before Penny unfolds herself into first a handstand, then folding her legs forward to roll up to standing, her faceless head beaming. The Faceless Magician takes her hand and they bow into the applause.

Back home, “And Carrie just let you drop her off without playing?”

“She said something about 'best served cold', so she's plotting something to make it worse, for sure.”

“Of course.”

“What a day! I'm Internet famous. Sarah is bound and determined to get me to run this IAG London thing.”

“Poor baby.”

“Oh, shut up!”

“Do you want to?”

“Want to what?”

“Run the IAG.”

“Me? Run...I wouldn't know where to start.”

“Who would?”

“Do you think I should?”

“I think you could. Should is up to you.”

“I don't even know what it means.”

“So find out.”

“You want me to take it.”

“I am smart enough to know that any answer to that will get me in trouble.”

Lisa swats half heartedly at him. “Whatever.” she reaches across the bed, gripping the collar, letting it close around her neck. Her body shrinks smoothly into it's small, cubic form.

“Good night, dear.” Peter kisses her smooth latex skin, placing her on the bedside table. “Fix.” He rolls over and they drift off to sleep.