

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 72

THE STORM

Lisa picks up the phone. "Hi, it's Sarah. You and Peter need to come to E's. Now."

"Now? Why? What are you..."

"Not me. There's been an...incident. With Carrie."

"Carrie? Is she all right?"

There's a far too long pause, "We're not sure."

"Not sure? What do you mean 'not sure'?"

"It's...look, just come over. We're in Mark's rooms. The corridors will take you there."

"But..."

"Just come over. It'll be much clearer here."

"...Fine. If this is..."

"It's not."

"Fine." she stops the call, "Magic Boy!!! We have been summoned!"

"What?"

"Carrie's done...something, probably something stupid, and Queen Saz wants to see us about it. Right now."

"Just let me..."

"Right. Now."

"Oh, one of those summons."

"Yeah, so she's screwed up something major. Let's go be my sister's keeper. Again."

Moments later, they step out of the door into the backrooms of E's, Lisa's eyes screwed shut. "You can open them now. We're he... Mark's room?"

"Yeah, Sarah said that was where."

"This'll be bad, then."

"Just because he hates both of us." she knocks firmly on the door.

Anne opens the door. "Oh, it's you. That was quick. When she said right now, I didn't think she meant right now right now."

"Our Queen's command..."

"Right, right, uhm."

"What's Carrie done?" Lisa asks, looking away from the naked redhead.

"Uhm...it's not what she's done, it's...you'd better see."

"Why can no one tell me what is going on?!"

"It's...better just to see it."

"What has she done?!" she finally enters the rooms, to find the place rather crowded with Sarah, Tracy, Mark, Anne, and a cup of black coffee sitting on the chair. "So, where is she?" Everyone's eyes turn towards the coffee. "You are kidding me! How?!"

Sarah looks over at Mark, "Fine, fine. We'd just finished rehearsing, Anne was thirsty so I went to the kitchenette..." he waves his arm towards it, "...and I asked if she wanted anything. She said 'Make me a coffee.' so I said 'Sure, you're a coffee.' and bam, like that, she was."

"Was what?"

"A coffee. That one specifically. And no, it wasn't the collar 'cause she wasn't wearing it. We were done rehearsin' so no collar allowed."

"And we know how well you follow the rules." Lisa responds acidly.

"Hey, none of that. I've been good. Relatively."

"Relatively..."

"Lisa, stop that. No fighting until after we get your sister back."

"So, Carrie becomes a cup of coffee somehow. Then..."

"Then Mark called Tracy and then me, because God forbid you and Mark bury the hatchet after all these years, and she said to call you because, apparently, this isn't the first 'oopsie' she's had, which believe

you me, we will be talking about afterwards.”

“Why doesn't he just undo what he did?”

“Because I didn't do nothing! I just said 'Fine, you're a coffee.'! That wouldn't cause anyone to become a coffee. It wouldn't even cause that if she'd been wearin' the bleedin' collar, which, to remind you she wasn't, if I didn't try to make it so!”

“You're the only magician around...”

“And I didn't do it!”

“Fine, you didn't do it.”

“Thank you!”

“So why don't you just put the collar on her and...”

“Not allowed under the contract.”

“Really?!”

“No escape clause for savin' her life. *Someone* probably thought I'd abuse it.”

“Because you would have.”

He shrugs. “So's we're all here to figure out what happened and how to unhappen it, not in that order. And Tracy says their go-to for this is wait a bit and if that doesn't work call you and his lordship. So...”

“I'll take a look.”

“Of course, m'lord, just waitin' on your expertise.”

Peter ignores that and kneels in front of the chair. “It's dense.”

“Yeah. Feels solid.”

“It almost feels like the collar but...”

“I told you...”

“Like the collar, but not the collar. That's adamantine. This is...steel? Still tough.”

“Tightly woven, too. Did you see that? Not a loose, frayed end in sight.”

“Doesn't feel like anyone I know's work.”

“Me neither, right mystery that. And someone doing it in a Keeper's demesne would be pretty ballsy and pretty stupid, as well as powerful.”

“Anyone seen Osbourne around today?”

“Hey, hey, this ain't him. Don't feel nothing like his magic. It's much colder.”

“He is the only one powerful enough, arrogant enough and stupid enough to do this, though.”

“It ain't him!”

“He's a big suspect. He's been sending us threats, after all. We might have to have words with him and remind him there are limits to our tolerance of his...shenanigans.”

“It ain't him. And even if it was, why target me? I'm the only one here who'd give him the time of fucking day!”

“It really does feel like the collar. And that...”

“I fucking told...”

“No, I know it's not the collar, but it has the same...solidity? Finality? Undoing that took...a lot.”

“Uhm...wouldn't it be easier to amend the contract?” everyone turns towards Tracy.

“What?”

“Amend the contract. Carrie said it could be amended if certain people approved, so...”

“Oh, sure, I can see that working well. You'd probably try to get me to...”

“We'd better get Tabitha in if we're doing this.”

“Are we doing this, though? She can't exactly sign a contract like this.”

“That's...actually a good point.”

“Don't sound surprised or nothing.”

“Ok, so amending the contract's out, can't you just give a royal command?”

“To override a written contract? After all we've just been through with the UKAG? No.”

“But...” she quails under Sarah's granite gaze, “Right. There are limits to your mighty royal powers. Got it.”

“How about Mark, uhm, gives someone else the ring?” Tracy suggests

"How would that help? She's. Not. Wearing. The. Collar!"

"It's not like she's going to stop you putting it on her, is it?"

"That's not the point! There's only one person here who has the ability to use it properly. And given what happened the last time he tried messing with this stuff, well, an assistant immune to magic is not a lot of fucking use to anyone."

"I seem to recall someone trying to make it as hard as possible at the time. Carrie won't be so uncooperative."

"Maybe, but whoever did this might object."

"If it's someone..."

"Yeah, you got a better idea."

"...No. I'll give it a try but I don't think it will..."

"Just try not to turn her into a vegetable this time."

"Mark!"

"What?! I'm just saying!"

Peter turns to the coffee cup and starts to try to find the loose thread to undo the change, looking for a particularly small needle in a particularly large haystack.

"Carrie, what have you done this time? *I wish you'd stop arsing a-fucking-round and fix this.*" she feels a chill run through her, but it passes quickly, leaving her a little hollow.

Peter feels the solid wall of magic start to unravel from the inside before his eyes. The coffee cup shivers, ripples and flows outward as the coffee and china become flesh and blood wrapped in cloth until Carrie is sitting back on the chair. She looks around and blinks.

"All this for me?" she focuses on Peter. "So, that's another I owe you."

"I..."

"About that." Sarah interrupts, "What exactly just happened? And what are you owing Peter?"

"I don't know. It's just something that's been happening. Sometimes it goes back to normal on its own, sometimes I need help getting out of it. And I owe Peter for saving my life."

"Saving your...please tell me you are not talking about owing him a life debt."

"No. Well, I mean, not exactly."

"Well, that's...what do you mean 'not exactly'?"

"I don't owe him a life debt, I owe him...how many was it? Five, no, six with this rescue"

"Six?? Six life debts? Six?!! Do you have six lives to give him?!! Right. Everyone, my office. Now. Except you." she points at Anne.

"Me?" Anne squeaks.

"You're the only one not involved in some way in this nonsense so you go find Stuart and get him to the offices. Just in case this needs to become an official thing."

"Wait, you can't..."

"I don't even..."

"What's the..."

"Now!!" she turns on her heel and leads the protesting, argumentative throng through the corridors.

"So, let me see if I understand correctly," Sarah starts, standing with her hand on Stuart's shoulder, Mark, Anne, Carrie, Tracy, Peter and Lisa crammed across the other side of the desk, "you've had six 'oopsies' over the course of the last year or so..."

"No, it's six *major* oopsies, the ones that needed help to get me unstuck."

"Six major oopsies." She repeats, "Do I want to know how many non-major ones?"

"Uhm, give me a minute...8...9...10..."

"Ok, I get the idea. Lots."

"A few."

"Right, we'll come back to those. Back to the six: You got eaten by Tracy; You got turned into a sexdoll; You got turned into a minimal lover;..."

"And *someone* posted me like that to get fixed."

"A good look at your dysfunctional relationship..."

“Hey!”

“...But not relevant to this. You got sucked up into your panties at Osbourne's...”

“That's the only one I knew about.”

“Thank you for helpfully clarifying, and not at all making an attempt to get out of this.”

“And today was the sixth. What was the other one?”

“I got...uhm...sucked into a lamp like a genie and he wished me out. I didn't need him for the side-effects of that one, though.”

“Side-effects?”

“I became a genie, got sucked through the extractor fan and ended up poofing over London until I got sober enough to get home. That didn't kick in until the next day.”

“Poofing around...That was you?”

“Uhm, maybe? What was me?”

“A cloud of pink gas that appeared and disappeared for a couple of hours.”

“Uhm, probably, unless there was another...”

“Do you have any idea how much utter shit we got for that? There was almost a literal witch hunt over that! And when the B.I.B. do a witch hunt they do it thoroughly! We thought we'd actually had a real genie incursion for the first time in centuries and all the time it was just you?”

“Uhm...probably?” Carrie replies weakly, “Would it help if I apologised?”

“For this? No. Apparently, the complete and total disregard for the severity of owing a life debt isn't the most serious offence here.”

“Offence?”

“Offence. This is real problem stuff. So, every one of you is in the shit.”

“Hey! I only...”

“Every. One. Of. You.” she repeats, “Except Anne. And not just because I'm not sure if she counts as an independent being at the moment. So, we need to figure out a punishment that afflicts all of you, so that you learn your fucking lesson. I swear Grace is more responsible than this!”

“Punishment?!”

“Oh, yes. If we don't do something about it, other people will. And whatever we do will be nicer than them.”

“What did I even do?”

“What did...These 'oopsies' are uncontrolled magic. We've been lucky so far that they haven't really occurred in public. But your 'poofing' adventure shows that there's nothing preventing that. So if this continues, sooner or later, you'll break containment and something impossible to explain will happen in public and bam, secret's out and we have a really big fucking problem. I can't believe none of you even thought to report this.”

“I sent Carrie to Dr Baker after the first...”

“And what did Dr Baker say?”

“Ah, well, the thing is...”

“You didn't go, did you?”

“Hey! I resent that. I went to see him...”

“And?”

“Ok, so I might have kinda sorta not really mentioned the whole suddenly being edible thing...”

Sarah's jaw somehow manages to drop lower. “Unbe-fucking-lievable. Right. So irresponsible, reckless, chaotic use of magic that threatens to break the secret. And the rest of you are accomplices to this. So, the only real matter is what we do with you.”

They fall silent for a few moments.

“Yes, that might suit.”

“What?”

“Marital telepathy. Oh, you meant what are we going to do with you?”

“You're not funny.”

“No, this isn't funny. So, I think we've come to a decision on the most appropriate punishment that punishes everyone involved. We're going to give Carrie exactly what she seems to want.”

“What? How is that a punish...”

Sarah smiles, “As of...” she looks at her watch, “...now, Carrie is Peter's property. And will continue to be so until she's served out her debts, which, by my count, will be in four-hundred and twenty years.”

“What?!”

“Carrie is, therefore, until those debts are paid off, no longer considered a member of our community but is simply Peter's prop. And, no, Peter, you cannot just void the debts and free her. Nor can you transfer ownership to her sister so she can do it. We weren't born yesterday.”

“Hold on...”

“You can't...”

“This isn't...”

“Quiet!!” Sarah shouts, “It is done. Whether you think it's fair or not is irrelevant. This is an official ruling. Hopefully you'll all learn something about actually following the community rules now.”

“But...”

“No buts. This is done. It is final. We are the last court of appeal. Unless you think the Bastards in Black will be more sympathetic to you? No, I don't think so eith...”

A firm, insistent knock on the door interrupts her.

“Who is it?”

“Detective Chief Inspector Abraxas, ma'am. 'Ere to see the Keeper on a matter of some h'importance.”

“Of course, Chief Inspector.” she replies, taking a swallow of water, “We're done here.”

“We're...”

“We. Are. Done. Here.”

“But...”

“Done. Now, we apparently have other matters to deal with. So...”

“This isn't...”

“Yes, it is. Ah, Chief Inspector Abraxas, to what..”

“Scuse me, ma'am. Stafford, could you stay, please? H'and your better 'alf. 'Appens h'I might need to talk to you h'as well.”

Peter and Lisa stop as the others sullenly leave. “Peter, aren't you forgetting? You shouldn't leave your prop unsupervised given how much trouble it will get in into.”

Peter sighs, “Carrie, come here.”

Carrie stops and returns, “Yes, Master.”

Abraxas raises a bushy eyebrow. “H'I would prefer this was kept h'as confidential h'as possible, Keeper Drake, sir, ma'am.”

“Peter?”

“Carrie, is there something you can do that would...take you out of...”

“...the way, Master? Way to make your toy feel welcome.” She collapses inwards until a smooth, featureless, slightly shiny black sphere rests on the floor. Peter lifts it up.

“Satisfactory, my Queen?”

“Satisfactory.”

He puts the ball into his pocket.

“So, Chief Inspector, what do you wish to bring to our attention?”

“Well, this morning, h'I was called to Steven Osbourne's residence...”

“What's he done this time? We are going to have to have words with him.”

“Good luck with that, ma'am. Unless you've got a seance 'andy, anyway. 'E was found dead.”

“Dead?”

“H'as the proverbial doornail. Died by h'electrocution. No sign of h'any malfunctioning device nearby. No witnesses. A toy...” he flips through his notes, “Mimi, was recovered, but it was turned h'off and so 'as no knowledge of what h'occurred. Which is h'obviously h'unfortunate. 'Is body was carefully moved so h'according to the h'official record, 'e was a tragic victim of an h'electrical accident. H'I made sure socco didn't note h'any h'anomalies with that h'outcome.”

“But it wasn't an accident.”

“H'I find it very 'ard to believe that h'it was h'anything h'other than a brutal murder.”

“Is there anything to go on?”

“There were some residual magic traces h'on the body. So my h'investigation will be starting there. With Stafford 'ere.”

“What?”

“The traces, what there was of 'em, closely match to your h'aura. Furthermore, you were no friend of the deceased 'and 'is recent move to 'arrassment and conspiracy were targetted at your significant h'other, as well as your close friend, the h'esteemed Keeper. So, where was you last night, Master Stafford? Specifically 'tween the hours of midnight h'and three?”

Hours of questioning later, “I cannot believe this day! First my idiot genius sister gets herself stuck as a cup of fucking coffee. Then my supposed friend not only declares my sister an unperson but says my boyfriend now owns her! And, to cap it all off, my boyfriend gets accused of murder!” Peter slumps back into the sofa, “Sounds pretty accurate. Although, not accused, suspected. Expect to see a lot of DCI Abraxas. He's quite tenacious.”

“Oh, goodie. Now, what are we going to do about Carrie?”

Peter digs into his pocket, pulling out the sphere. “Wake up, Carrie.”

The ball uncurls, flowing out to a thoroughly naked Carrie sitting it Peter's lap like a showgirl in a Martini glass.

“Hello, Master.”

“Carrie!!!! Where are your clothes?!!”

“Does Master wish me to answer that?”

“Yes. Master also wishes you to stop deliberately provoking your sister.”

Carrie pouts, “As my Master wishes.” a black catsuit flows across her body, which covers her completely but does little to actually make things better. “Here are my clothes. Does this please you, Master?”

“What's with the 'Master'?”

“The Keeper made me Master's property. What else should property call it's owner? And clothes hide Master's property from him. Why should property hide anything from it's Master?”

“How are you taking this so well?”

“It's not like I have much of a choice. I've got a looooooonnnng time in this role. If I'm you about it, that's going to be rougher on everyone. So, lemons, lemonade.” she shrugs.

“Arrrrrrgghhh!!!” Lisa turns away, stomping out of the room.

“Ooops. Too far. I'll go talk to her, Master, calm her down.”

“Because that's what you're good at?”

“Hey!...Mostly accurate, but hey, nonetheless.” she rolls off his lap and pads quietly after Lisa, catching up with her just inside Lisa's room

“What?!”

“Hey, don't take it out on me, It's not like I asked for this!”

“You were asking for it, apparently.”

“Hey, don't pick on the poor toy here! Anyway, don't you trust Peter?”

“Of course I...”

“So what are you worried about?”

“I'm not worried! I'm angry!!”

“Always have been. Now, sis, listen to me, ok? You can trust your boyfriend. You will accept anything he wants to do with me.”

“But...”

“A-ny-thing.” she repeats, “You will accept that I am his property. You will accept him doing whatever he wants with me, won't you?”

Lisa blinks several times, “I...I will...I will accept him doing what he wants with you, with...his property.”

"I'll let you get used to the idea. Even magic will take some time dealing with your stubbornness." she walks back into the lounge, her clothes melting across her skin, "All sorted, Master. I am yours. Lise will...accept that."

"How on Earth did you...?"

"I 'talked' to her. And she accepts things as they now are, for as long as they are."

"That sounds unlikely. You magiced her, didn't you?"

"Maybe a little, Master. You can always tell me to undo it if you want." she waits. "Uh-huh. That's what I thought."

"You realise you've just removed your best defence against me."

"As if I need a defence against you."

"I might change. You're mine for a long time, after all."

"Oh, please, Master, Sarah left a loophole you could drive an entire fleet of trucks through. She doesn't intend for me to be your plaything forever...or even for four-hundred years and change. That was the sentence to get the B.I.B. off her back."

"Oh, really?"

"You *must* have noticed. It's blindingly obvious."

"I know. But you'll forget that. And whenever you think you've found a loophole, you'll realise it doesn't exist. There are no loopholes."

Carrie blinks, and blinks again, "Yes, Master. As you say, there are no loopholes. I belong to you until my debt is repaid."