

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 73

THE NEW ABNORMAL

Lisa emerges from her room. "What's up with that face?"

"She's just come to the realisation that her exit strategy isn't going to work like she thought."

"So she's sulking?"

"Maybe a little."

"Hey! I am right here, you know! And I am not sulking!"

"So what are you doing?"

"Thinking! You should try it."

"You'd have been better off doing that *before* you got yourself into this mess!"

"Oh, God, spare me the lecture, I..."

"Yeah, no. I'm not going to have this be a thing. Carrie, unless they'd countermand my commands, you'll obey Lisa and give her all the respect you'd give me as your owner."

"What?! Way to ruin any chance of extracting any fun at all from this."

"It's not supposed to be fun! We're being punished."

"Well, I'm being punished."

"We're all being punished. Lisa has to watch her sister become property. Mark loses his assistant."

"Huh?"

"Tracy loses her partner."

"No, wait, explain..."

"And I am now responsible for making sure you don't fuck up everything my entire community has worked to achieve for centuries, possibly starting a new set of witch trials. So I am really not in the mood for a pity party because you're not having fun with it!"

"No, wait, go back, what do you mean about Mark losing his assistant and Tracy losing her..."

"One, we're all being punished, so that's their punishment."

"No, wait..."

"And for two, because it's far too dangerous to let you out when anything could happen. So you're confined to the flat, and definitely not the warehouse, until that gets sorted."

"What?"

"Confined to the flat. You can't leave unless I give you permission. And I'll only do that if it's under supervision."

"You're telling me I can't leave this place?!"

"Yes. That's what I'm telling you."

"For how long?!"

"Until I tell you otherwise."

"You are really letting this go to your head, 'Master'."

"Hardly. I've been made your Owner, that means any fuckup comes down on my head."

"What am I supposed to do stuck in here all day?"

"Cleaning?"

"I am NOT your maid!"

Peter looks at her levelly, a hint of a smile playing at his lips, "You are if I say you are."

"Which you haven't."

"Yet."

"Riiiiight. Like you'd do that. So, what? I'm stuck in here, with no contact with the outside world, until you see fit to change that?"

"Yes."

"Fuck that. I won't..."

"Sit. Down."

Carrie drops to the sofa. "Hey! You..."

"Mute."

Carrie's mouth seals over, reducing her to silence.

"Now, you're not getting this, so let's be clear. This is not a situation where you have any say whatsoever. You belong to me. You obey me. And if you keep this up, I'll put you in sleep mode and leave you there for a few months until you learn your place."

Carrie's eyes widen. Her shoulder slumps. She points at the blank skin under her nose, holding her hands in prayer.

"Unmute."

"So, what happens now?"

"Well, for starters, I'm going to need a list of all the 'oopsie bonuses' you've accumulated. See how bad an issue I'm dealing with."

"Ok, Master. Get a pen and paper ready."

Quite a long list later, "You have been busy."

"I didn't choose this!"

Peter doesn't reply to that, "So, what do you think is causing it?"

"Why ask me? I'm just a humble plaything."

"You're also supposed to be a genius. You have ideas about it."

"Well, Master, it's clearly something to do with breaking the collar last year. Nothing's happened to Tracy and nothing happened to me like this beforehand. Since then, anything magical I've done might come back to affect me at random."

"At random?"

"The first time it's random. After that, I kind of know what to do to replicate it at will, but things just...happen. There isn't a trigger I've noticed. It isn't just the most recent thing, or the most frequent, or the most potent. I was only sucked into the lamp once, and, yet, suddenly I'm a genie."

Peter pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs. "Ok."

"Can I call Tracy?"

"What for?"

"What for?! To let her know what's happening?! She'll be worried."

"Fine. But I'm still not letting you out of the flat. In fact, if you're out of the flat without permission, you'll poof back into the cupboard immediately."

"You are not a nice master, Master."

One phone call later, "I love you, too." the call ends. Carrie wipes a tear from her eyes. "Well, that's her heart thoroughly broken. Happy now, Master?"

"You think I'm happy about any of this?"

"So, let me guess, that was my last phone call."

Peter takes a deep breath. "No. I'm not trying to be a monster. But no physical contact."

"No conjugals? God, I'd be better off in prison."

"Believe me, if Sarah's wasn't being so lenient with you..."

"Lenient?! This is supposed to be lenient?!"

"You're alive, pretty much human, your mind is still intact and there's a prospect of being released..."

"In four centuries!"

"That's still a prospect. Considering what you did..."

"What? All I did was..."

"Breaking secrecy is bigger to us than murder, so, this is lenient. But, as you still don't get that, if anyone other than Lisa, me, Stuart or Sarah comes in, you'll poof into the cupboard and ball up."

"Really? Really really? Man, you want me on the shortest leash possible, don't you, Master?"

"The shortest leash possible is to just ball you up, toss you in a drawer and forget about you."

"Riiiiight. Hey, what about Uni?"

"No."

"What?!"

"Too risky."

"But...but...but..."

"No."

"But I need..."

"As a person? Sure. You need it. But you're not a person anymore. And it's too risky while you could just do some random magic at any moment."

"But..."

"Anyway, when you're released, it's not like that knowledge will be at all relevant. It would be like Galileo dealing with relativity."

"Peter..."

"No, this is what has to happen."

Lisa blinks several times, "I accept that. It just doesn't feel fair."

"It might not be fair. It is what it is. Security over fairness."

"Jawohl, mein Meister. Security uber alles."

"Not helpful, Carrie."

"I don't feel very helpful when you're destroying my whole life."

Peter sighs. "Sleep mode."

"Hey!" Carrie manages to get out before she collapses inward into a tennis ball sized sphere.

"That's going to be handy when I need to shut her up. However, it's a bit Master knows best, isn't it?"

"Et tu, Lise?"

"Hey, I accept this, but I don't have to like it."

"You and me both."

The next day, after work at the 'offices' of the IAG, "Uhm, boss? Lisa?"

Lisa looks up, "Tracy? How are you..."

Tracy sniffs. "I...I'm here to tender my resignation."

"You're here to what?"

Tracy stands a little straighter, "Tender my resignation. I...I can't do this, protecting assistants' rights, when Carrie's..." she pauses, sniffing, "...when Carrie's being mistreated like she is and there's nothing we can do."

"She's not being..."

"Of course, she's being mistreated! She's not a person any more! She's been made into Peter's plaything! Even if he doesn't do anything to her, she's a thing! For the next four hundred years! And I'm supposed to smile and say 'yes, that's fine' and carry on with my life?! I can't! I can't believe in this while that is going on. And you don't need me getting in the way, just going through the motions. You need a...a crusader here. And that isn't, that can't be, me right now."

"Tracy I'm..."

"No, I get it. There's nothing you can do. No matter how much this must be killing you, too. But this whole situation is bullshit! And I can't...I can't do this. I can't smile and be nice and listen to people complaining while Carrie's...Carrie's...she might as well be dead! So," she wipes her eyes, fighting to hold back the tears, "I'm resigning. And you can't change my mind. And you know you don't really want to. If you miraculously get this sorted out, call me. But, if not, I can't be here. Good luck." she turns and walks quickly out before she can dissolve into sobs.

Tabitha watches her flee past and walks towards Lisa.

"You heard?"

"Hard not to."

"Yeah."

"So, how are you handling this?"

Lisa sighs, "On the surface, surprisingly well. Carrie's under Peter's care, so it's not like she's with someone I can't trust. But..."

"But. Exactly. It's...not a comfortable situation for anyone."

"Tell me about it. I don't suppose there's an appeals process?"

Tabitha smiles thinly, "There is. But..."

"There is? We might be able to overturn..."

Tabitha holds up a hand, "It isn't used."

"But...why?"

"Because the chances of it working are...remote and the costs are harsh."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning you can appeal to the Concave itself. They're the only body above a Keeper, but they won't overturn a Keeper's decision without actual proof of malfeasance, which there isn't here. The decision is harsh, but you can't exactly argue Stuart and Sarah have it out for you, or Carrie. And if you do apply, there's a good chance, according to the records, that they'll make the sentence harsher. So, no one's risked it for centuries."

"So exactly what Peter says. It might not be fair, but it is what it is."

"Under the screwed-up right of kings justice system we apparently have? Yeah."

"Are you going to leave, too? This has to hit close to..."

Tabitha looks up, "Leave? Now? With all this going on? Not on your life. This isn't something that will drive me away, it's fuel to drive me forward, all guns blazing. So get steamed, get angry, and we can get to work."

"Thanks for the pep talk."

"You're welcome. And here's the latest batch of things to deal with..."

That evening, Lisa stumbles into the flat, "What a fucking day!"

"That bad?"

"Tracy quit."

"She quit? Why?"

"Why do you think? She, for some strange reason, has a problem with what happened to her girlfriend. Weird, huh?"

"Ah."

"Speaking of, where is she?"

"She's sleeping."

"Sleep...you've left her as a ball all day?"

"Kinda."

"That's..." she blinks, "...that's acceptable, I guess."

"Sarah called for you."

"Yeah. No. I am not in the mood to talk to her yet."

"She..."

"Magic Boy, stop. Not. In. The. Fucking. Mood. I can kinda sorta see why she did it, really I can, but she still made my sister into a thing! I do not want to talk to her now. I just want to sink away and not worry about any of this" she pulls out the collar, "And you'd better not 'accidentally' mix me and Carrie up or try to merge us together, or any other mad science magic while I'm gone!"

"Of course not, dear." he replies as she collapses into a small black ball on the couch.

He picks up the other ball from the table, "Now, what am I going to do with you?"