

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 88

SAUCE FOR THE GOOSE

"No, she hasn't told me, either." Sarah replies, "I am rather put out by that."

"So it's a big secret. Wonderful."

"If you're that worried, you shouldn't have made her your Maid of Honour."

"Because you'd have been a safer bet?"

Sarah raises her finger to object, but decides against it. "That is a point. Although, I'm not sure I'd have tormented you with all this secrecy."

"No, you would've tormented me by hinting and letting me stew in guesses."

"Quite possibly. Anyway, that's not why I asked you here."

"Ah, there's official stuff is there? What's wrong with Carrie now?"

"No, that situation appears under control. Unless there's something you need to tell me?" she arches an eyebrow in query and warning.

"No. She's a good toy. And SAT have her most of the time. Although, how much they're trying to fix her and how much they're just pumping her for new apps now..." she shrugs, "Still, it's not like I have much choice but to trust them on that. After all, their involvement *was* requested by your Majesty."

"Nicely done."

"Her Majesty is an excellent teacher."

"So anything that they do wrong becomes partly my fault."

"Like I said, an excellent teacher. Have they done something wrong?"

"Ah, there's a question. Your new application..."

"Their app. Peter and I just authorised them using Carrie for..."

"I'm speaking of the UKAG's* involvement." (* UKAG are the UK Assistants' Guild, a branch of the International Assistants' Guild, IAG)

"Oh. The magicians have been moaning to you as well?"

"I see you're very sympathetic to their concerns."

"I fail to see why it's a UKAG problem. The app is SAT's, not ours. The uploads come from the assistants, not us. So why am I here talking to the Keeper's wife about it?"

"You do provide the app to the assistants."

"And that means we're responsible for how they use it?"

"Do you tell them not to do this?"

"We didn't think it would be necessary. You have to click something to upload it. Why would an assistant do that without talking to the magician?"

"Why, indeed?"

"You should probably talk to SAT*. It is their app, after all. We can put some advice out to our members not to do something like this without talking to their magician. But all the technical details are SAT's issue, not us." (* SAT are the UK's premier magical supplies crafters. Stands for Sufficiently Advanced Technology, allegedly, but, like IBM, it's now known just by its initials)

"Except..."

"Except?"

"Except SORM* is complaining and they're making it a UKAG problem. So you need to do something to make it less of a problem." (* Society of Real Magicians. The group that represents the interests of those magicians who use actual magic)

"Why do..."

"Because if they make it a bigger problem, I can't just rule in your favour."

"Even though we're right?"

"Even then."

"What was the point of having you involved, again?"

"That's not fair. Or funny. My being involved means there's a barrier. No one wants to piss me off. But SORM is getting such a bee in its bonnet they might push, and then they'll be able to claim I'm biased, and, by inference, so's Stuart."

"Fine. I'll deal with it."

"I'll look forward to seeing that update." Lisa gives her a look, "I am a fully paid up member of the Assistants Guild."

"And got your copy of the app?"

"Of course. It's always good to see what kink's everyone's up to."

That evening, "...and so it's now my problem." she sighs.

"Life is harsh and unfair." Peter agrees, gently stroking her fur-covered back.

"So?"

"So. What do you want to do about it?"

"I want to... What I *want* to do is take every single complaint and stuff is straight down that jerk's throat." her claws pop out, digging into his thigh.

"Maybe don't do that." he winces.

"You think?" she asks with a tilt of her head, the claws retracting.

"It might be considered a little bit provocative. So..."

"So, practically, the first thing I'm going to do is talk to Tab and get something out to just say 'Don't do this'. Which is all I really should *have* to do! Because that's the only part of this which is anything to do with me!"

"Feel better?"

"No. I'm a grouchy kitty."

"So?"

"So, I need to talk to Dr Black and maybe even, God forbid, Stone. About what I don't know. I mean, what are they going to do about it? Ban every assistant from uploading unless they have signed permission?"

"Do you want me to make the arrangements?"

"I'm a big girl, Magic Boy." he presses gently down on her back, his hand covering her. "Ohhhhhh, ok, so not that big at the moment. I'll deal with it. You can deal with getting me calm enough to handle it."

"Massage?"

"Massage." she stretches as she feels him starting to squeeze her away. "Mmmmmmmmm..."

Morning, once Lisa's been restored, showered, loaded up on caffeine and ready to try the phone.

"Why does this have to be me?" she mutters as the hold music grates against her teeth.

"S.A.T. how may I help you?" the pleasant, professional voice on the other end of the line sounds familiar but she can't place it in her mood.

"Lisa McCagherty. I'd like to speak to Dr Black, please."

"I'm sorry. Dr Black is very busy at the moment. Can I know the purpose of your call?"

"I need to talk to her about the app."

There's a pause. "I'm sorry, Sis, but Dr Black is not..."

"Sis? Carrie?! What are you doing?"

"Working. I'm running some work in my background so routing calls is pretty easy. Especially when the instructions are 'no calls'."

"No calls at all?"

"She's, well, I'm not sure she does stressed exactly, but she's whatever the heck that is over the app."

"All the magicians bitching?"

"And SORM. And threatening to go to the Keeper. And compensation. And..."

"I get it. Same as me then."

"No, she's not interested in a mutual commiseration session. She just wants it solved."

"Likewise. Can you tell her I called about the app? UKAG and SAT have the same issue. We might as well try to figure out a common position rather than pointing fingers."

"I'll let her know."

"Thank you." She hangs up. "Wonderful."

That evening, while Peter prepares what passes for a weekday meal, her phone rings, "Hello, Lisa Mc..."

"My apologies for not calling sooner. I have had a nightmare of a day."

"I can imagine."

"Yes. You probably can. I assume you have had a similar discussion to myself with the Keeper's wife?"

"The one that boils down to 'Fix this now'?"

"The very same."

"So, how are we fixing it?"

"First we must detail the problem we wish to solve."

"Magicians complaining that their kinky little tricks are being put up on the app by their assistants."

"That is needlessly editorialising, no matter how accurate. The issue is one of ownership. The magicians feel they have ownership of their tricks and assistants shouldn't be able to do this."

"From the UKAG side, we are sending out a reminder not to upload without permission, but there's the problem of enforcement."

"Indeed. We could ban uploading of any user created material. That would be a simple solution. Although it would likely be unpopular. Even if most assistants can't use most of those tricks."

"They can't?"

"They lack the magic to power them. They can download them, but there is a warning to that effect when they do."

"I haven't seen it."

"Really? That's...interesting. But for another time. Regardless, taking away someone's dream toys is always unpopular."

"It is."

"We could also strike down all the items complained about. That would raise some risk of false strikes and would be a logistical issue besides."

"Yeah. They could use it to strike their rivals' stuff down. Even if they actually approved."

"And some undoubtedly would."

"Undoubtedly. Shame there's not some way of just recognising a magician's tricks."

"Yes. That would be...helpful. Hmmmmm."

"Hmmmm?"

"An idea. I'll have Carrie run the particulars. But that might work."

"What might?"

"If it works, I'll let you know."

"Ohhhhh-kay. But, even if we do manage to identify the magician, what do we do with that information?"

"Well..."

The offices of SORM, several days later, One of the smaller but non-magically accessible conference suites feels cramped with four people crammed along one side and Harold Dini on the other. Lisa sits at one end, Simeon Stone at the other. Between them, keeping the peace, are Tabitha and Dr Black. "Well, I'm feeling a little outnumbered here." Harold says genially. "Ganging up on me?"

"Nothing like that, Harold." Simeon smiles smoothly, "You have issues with our app and how the UKAG are using it. It's only natural that we'd both want to address those. Right?" he asks down the table.

"Right." Lisa replies tightly.

"I wouldn't describe theft of..."

"Oooh, theft is a very ugly word, Harold. Assistants are just uploading their experiences. I admit, we hadn't thought so many of them would, or so many magicians would be impacted, that's on us,

definitely. Now, the UKAG have issued a communication to all their members reminding them that uploading should be done with the magician in question's knowledge and consent."

"Which should always have been the..."

"We're also amending our contract recommendations that this situation is covered going forward, but nothing in the contracts would forbid this." Tabitha smiles as pleasantly predatory as she can, "I checked."

"It can hardly be expected that magicians foresee every..."

"I know, I know. Insisting on following exact wording to the letter, even when the circumstances change, can be so troublesome, can't it? I'm glad SORM agrees with a flexible approach to contracts in the interests of both parties. That will make things so much easier going forward."

Harold huffs.

"And at SAT we are working on technical fixes," Stone interjects, "but we've encountered an issue of attribution."

"Issue? Attribution? What issue?"

"Proving that the magician protesting is the magician who performed the uploaded trick. We wouldn't want people able to object to a perfectly amicable situation out of spite, now, would we?"

"I suppose..."

"And removing the facility all together could pose immense challenges from a technical, R&D, and reputational position."

"You're about to tell me you've got a technical fix that will avoid all that, I suppose?"

"Harry, you know me far too well. We've been analysing the uploads and we can extract what seems like traces of the magician's aura from the effect. So we can now tie an upload to a given aura. There is just one issue still outstanding."

"Oh, really?"

"We don't have a reliable tie of magician to aura. So we can tell that the same magician was responsible, but can't tell who they are."

"Which doesn't solve the problem, does it?" he replies testily.

"Harold, please, let me finish. You should know the trick's not over just because it seems to be done. Of course, we have a solution to that. Which is why we're here."

"Of course. And this 'solution' is?"

"A companion app for magicians. For now, it's basic. It will just register an aura. We can then use that to let the magician know any items on the site that have their aura and we can either take them down or reallocate the payments in a more appropriate fashion."

"That hardly seems that useful."

"I thought the issue was the effects being uploaded without the magician's knowledge or consent. We have a solution for that. Everybody wins."

"I didn't hear a way for magicians to benefit directly. The assistant still has to upload things."

"Effects don't leave as obvious a trace on a magician's aura. Besides which, we were only able to create this for assistants owing to the extreme circumstances of one assistant in particular. If you can persuade some members of SORM to facilitate some more research, we would be absolutely..."

"I still don't see why we can't just prevent this from happening. This application has caused nothing but..."

"Are you saying there is a different problem, Harold? Hardly sporting to let us fix the issues only to bring up something else. Besides, I dispute entirely what you just said, there are benefits galore."

Dini leans back.

"For one, assistants now have an accurate record of what experience they have, something that can only benefit magicians in researching their potential partners. For another, this opens a second income stream for the most innovative magicians, who, I'm sure you'll agree, we should encourage to invent new effects. It speeds up the distribution of the effects, enabling magicians to benefit from their colleague's invention, while still rewarding the original inventor. And anyway, don't you always say that the magic is the easy part of a performance? The app can't copy the presentation. For three, we've been able to develop tools that accurately measure an assistant's mana charge and

recovery, and training games to increase both. Those tools should be easy to adapt to magicians to let them improve, providing another function that benefits everyone. And, of course, we'll allow SORM to distribute the basic application for free to its members, just like we do with the IAG, so there's no worries about cost. I can't think of a better deal, and I'm sure the Keepers will see things similarly, don't you think? Better to get in on the ground floor than try to play catch-up, I say. So," he holds out his hand, "do we have a deal?"

Dini sighs heavily.