

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 91

PICKING A SIDE

Tabitha enters the 'office', "Well, boss, we've got more applications. Are we going to put any... what are you doing?"

Lisa looks up and the four lights hovering in front of her swirl wildly. "Practising." she scowls. "Practising what?"

"Peter won't let me do anything big until I'm able to keep those stable. So...practising."

"Won't let you?"

"Won't teach me. I guess turning my arm to pudding made him a bit reluctant."

"Pudding...?" she sits down, "Spill."

"It's nothing..."

"Arm to pudding. Sounds like something to me."

Lisa rolls her eyes, the lights drifting around her head like a halo.

"Fine. My first I can do magic lesson..."

"Your first what?! Why am I only now hearing about this?"

"Ok. Backing up a bit further. Apparently I have a lot of magic. So much so that Holli thinks I should be a magician and..."

"A magician? You are not leaving me to do all this work! Not when it's your idea!"

"I'm not. Even if I can do magic, I'll still be an assistant."

"Well, all right then." she sits back, mollified. "So, you're some kind of super-assistant. And then?"

"And then Peter's giving me lessons..."

"Brave lad."

"Oh?"

"I mean, I always figured you were basically unteachable."

"Thanks."

"So, how does this lead to you having pudding arms?"

"Just one arm."

"One would be more than enough for me."

Lisa sighs, "Me, too. I was trying to take it off. Peter thought that would be something simple."

"Right, simple. And?"

"And I got distracted. And then..." she shrugs.

"Pudding arm."

"Pudding arm. So now he won't teach me anything like that until I can show I can concentrate."

"If it helps, you've still got the lights."

Lisa looks up. The lights stop, hovering in front of her. "Yeah. Keeping them around doesn't seem that hard. But getting them to stay still takes focus."

"You'll get there."

"You seem much more sure than I am."

"I know you. You'll have a ton of hilarious screw-ups along the way, which I expect you to tell me about, but you'll get there."

"Well, that makes me feel better."

"I do what I can, boss."

"You only call me that as a joke."

"I know."

"Thanks, Tab. Really."

Tabitha smiles, "So, about the new applicants..."

Mister E's a few days later, where Grace is happily gurgling, snatching her pudgy hands at the floating points of light spinning above her head. "...and that's why I'm asking your Majesty's help. You have far more experience with this and..."

"Pardon one moment, I need to note this down in the diary. Are you admitting to not having the

answers?”

Lisa scowls half-heartedly at her. “Yes.”

”Marvellous. Although I don’t know why you’ve come to me. I don’t do...” she gestures at the floating lights, ”...things like that. Although given how much Bug is enjoying them, maybe I should learn.”

”You don’t? But she said...”

”She? Which she?”

”The fairy. She said...”

”And we’re taking the word of a fairy now, are we?”

”She said you were probably more powerful than most of the magicians.”

”Well, maybe we can trust her just this once.”

”So?”

”So, yes, I probably am.” she shrugs, “Up until recently the power scale was always rather vague. No one’s fighting duels directly these days. So, let’s say I am. So what?”

”So what?” Lisa boggles.

Sarah shrugs, ”I can see where your mind’s going. If I put the work in, I probably could do it. But it’s never interested me. I’m perfectly content that my magic more or less stops at my body. I don’t need to enforce my will directly on the world.”

”I see.”

”And you do. There’s not a cat in Hell’s chance you’d be content relying on Peter or an official position to get things to happen. Not when you can bludgeon through it yourself.”

”Why does everyone always use blunt force analogies for me?”

”Because you’re a wrecking ball.”

”Thanks.”

”Maybe a bulldozer.”

”I get the picture. So you can’t help?”

”Not as such. Not with this sort of thing. If you need help to avoid pudding arms, I might be able to help.”

Lisa’s shoulders slump, “Of course Tab told you.”

”Of course she did. It was far too much fun not to share.”

”Great.”

”If I may offer a little advice, though?”

”Can I stop you?”

”Probably not. Well, if you’re as powerful as all that, you might be able to, but you wouldn’t. And if you did, there would be trouble, no matter how powerful you were. Anyway, you have an astonishing tendency to get in your own way. You don’t need to have iron concentration or control every single aspect all the time. Well, you might, but it’s making it harder. Relax. Enjoy the power. Then let it flow.”

”Very zen.”

”Unconscious action. Learn some meditation. Let it go. And if you dare mention bloody Elsa, who some bug is entirely and completely attracted to...”

”Elsa! Elsa!”

Sarah sighs disgustedly, “That’s my own fault, I mentioned the E-word.”

”Elsa, mummy! Elsa!”

Sarah’s body slims, her clothes becoming an elegant, ice blue dress, her hair paling into a near white blonde that coils into a braid, her eyes getting big and blue as Grace claps excitedly.

”If you mention this to Peter, or anyone, I will make sure you get to watch the next Frozen marathon with us.” Grace toddles over, swept up in Elsa’s arms, icy jewellery forming a web across Sarah’s chest. “All three rewatches of it.”

Lisa’s poker face struggles not to crack, “Yes, my Queen.”

”Also...”

”Uh-oh.”

"Shush. Why is Holli Kim calling me, asking if I know someone to take over the IAG?"
"I'm not leaving! Why does everyone think I'm leaving?!"
"Well, if you're a magician now it really wouldn't do..."
"I'm not leaving. You should know me better than that."
"Oh, I do. They'll have to break your fingers to get you to release your grip. But Harry's also asking about you..."
"What? Why?"
"To see if he can lure you away to SORM and kill two annoying birds with one stone, I'd assume."
"Oh, Dini. I thought you meant Abraxas."
"Oh, no, the Detective Super is still nosing round but hasn't found anything yet. It's quite irritating him. And he wasn't exactly sanguine to begin with."
"Sorry."
"Unless you're actually the one who rid us all of that bastard, no apology necessary. And if you are, for God's sake, don't tell me. Or I'll have to take action."
"I didn't do anything!"
"Good."
Grace squeals with joy, finally catching one of Lisa's whirling points of light.

Back home, the door slams against the wall, "Trouble?"

Lisa just growls.

"Big trouble."

"Why does everyone think that learning magic means I'm going to quit being an assistant? And especially that I'm going to quit being head of the IAG?!"

"Magicians don't tend to take the subordinate role in..."

"Oh, really, my magical master? Poor little me, all subordinate and submissive before your mighty magic wand. Whatever shall I do?"

"When was the last time the assistant got top billing? Most don't even get a name check."

"Yeah, but we're not like that."

"We're not. But we're decidedly unusual."

"Yeah, I'd figured that much out. So, what you're saying is being an assistant is inferior..."

"I am not stupid enough to say that where you can hear it." she raises an eyebrow, "Even if I believed it."

"You realise this is just making me more determined, right?"

"To learn magic."

Lisa conjures her lights, holding them above her palm, "Learn magic. Drag this place, kicking and screaming if necessary, out of the sexist bullshit it's mired in."

"Well, at least you didn't decide on world peace or something *hard*."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. But..." she bites her tongue.

"But?"

"Something Carrie said in my first 'lesson', if you can call it that. Assistants are also called apprentices or acolytes..."

"Those are old-fashioned terms. Like calling a taxi a Hackney carriage."

"Well, we're bringing them back then. Apprentices are people who can do anything the teacher can do, once they've been taught. Assistants just have to assist. They're always second fiddle, helpmeets, one step up from servants."

"Uh-oh. I'm seeing a plotting gleam there."

"Me? I'm just a poor helpless assistant, a helpmeet, to my big strong masterful magician. How could I possibly be doing anything like plotting?"

"Yeah, that's exactly what I meant. So, what are we doing?"