

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 97
CARRIE AND TRACY: CHAPTER 4
WHAT ARE WE?

The day before the hen party, Tracy sits at her suggestively-grained desk, surrounded by lewd living ornaments and gives a little sigh as she stares at the calendar on the femininely-curved monitor. “I get that you have to go, but you don't have to have to go, do you?”

“Oh, sure, I'll just blow off the Keeper's wife. Not to mention my ex-boss. I'm sure that will go swimmingly.”

“Yeah, but, I mean, they'd understand, wouldn't they? I mean...”

“I know what you mean. You mean, won't it be weird, awkward, triggering to see Carrie. Especially like that.”

“Yeah, that.” Mark replies, running his hand awkwardly through his hair.

“I'm going to have to see her at some point. Unless you're suggesting I avoid the wedding, too?”

“I would.”

“I'm sure you would. I also need to start laying the ground to talk about...them.”

“Still don't see what the...”

“Uh-huh. That's why I'm doing the talking. I might be able to prevent Tab from going fully thermonuclear when she finds out.”

“Yeah, I guess she...”

“On the plus side, the bastard's dead so she can't actually kill him for it.”

“He was my friend.”

“And your friend was more of a bastard than we thought.”

“Fine. Do whatever. You're the boss, it's only my club.”

Tracy sighs again, more heavily, as the door bangs on his abrupt exit. “Smooth, Trace. Really very smooth. A+ managing upwards.”

The morning of the hen party, Tracy shoulders her bag for a weekend away, checks her hair and is ready to face the world. One look at Carrie, however, in a white top and jeans, sunlight in her hair, and her heart breaks into a thousand jagged shards tearing at her insides. *Mark was right. I shouldn't...* And then Carrie pounces on her, wrapping her arms around her like an overly-familiar octopus, beaming in her face as if nothing's wrong.

“Hey, cutie!”

“Hey.” she replies flatly, as allowing any emotion in would open the floodgates and blubbing like a baby here, now, is not on her agenda.

“I have been up to so much. And I have so many surprises to show you...”

Tracy blinks, “Are you all right?”

“Nope, half-left and all wrong like always. I just missed you. Did you miss me?”

The words 'more than anything' catch in her throat, coming out as a strangled, “Yes.”

“Well, that's something. I hope you're not running around chasing other girls.”

“Because that's what you'd do? If our situations were reversed?”

“I mean, not immediately!”

“Well, I am seeing someone, as it happens.”

“What?” Carrie's jaw opens and closes in shock.

“She's supportive, always there for me, has my back...”

“I...I...”

“Granted she's an office chair, but...”

“She what?”

“Like you're in a position to cast aspersions. You're a Toy.”

“Yes, Mistress. Sorry, Mistress.”

A faint smile crosses Tracy's face but it's soon smothered as they all head to the train.

During the journey up, they talk about nothing, their hands touching across the Formica dividing table, both hovering on the edge of saying something significant but held back, by reticence, fear or just the presence of the four older women across the aisle, although it's probably a good job they don't use that particular phrasing out loud.

They are no more talkative during the cab ride, although Ola more than makes up for their silence until they get to their assigned room.

"Well, this is a lot nicer than my owner's cupboard." Carrie tosses her bag onto the pristine sheets of the room's single bed. The walls are gleaming white, the locked window letting in a patch of sunshine across the soft carpet.

"Don't. Please, just...don't."

"Don't what?"

"Treat this like it's a game! You're a toy! You belong to someone else! You're not...you're not..." she trails off.

"Not what?"

"Not..." she fumbles for the words, starting as a loud knock bangs on the door.

"Pampering call! We're all going to go get everything polished! You coming with? Or are you getting your own form of pampering?"

"OLAMIDE OYENEGBE!"

"Ooops. Pissed off 'mum'. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"What does that even leave?" Lisa asks, her voice getting fainter as they walk away.

"Alone at..." Carrie's face changes, her smile becoming more serious. "SecretTracy protocol activated."

"What?!"

"Forgive me." Carrie replies evenly, "We need to talk."

"Who are..."

"We do not have long. I will try to explain. I am CarrieResearch, one of the Council of Carries, as CarriePrime calls us. I am a side-personality within her mind. And you need to know things that Carrie is not permitted to remember."

"Not permit...? What are you doing to...?"

"Not me, not us. Carrie has been instructed to think that there is no escape clause in her fate. Every time she finds one, she immediately 'realises' it cannot work and forgets it."

"What?!"

"That such an instruction is needed means that such an escape route exists. However, every scheme Carrie devises is locked away beyond her, or my, ability to recall. Only our Owner has access to those files, those memories."

"But..."

"So you will have to find it. I have implanted a trigger in CarriePrime's mind. When you need to talk to me, to discuss your findings or plans, tell her to 'phone a friend' and I shall be there. But now I must go."

"Wait..."

"...last. Why are you crying?"

"It's nothing."

"Looks like something to me."

"It's...it's just...I miss you." she replies, feeling real hope unlocking for the first time in the months since Carrie...went away.

"Awwwww, I miss you, too, Mistress. But...I am right here. And the bed is right there." she 'seductively' waggles her eyebrows, "And research does say that romantic contact is good for the immune system."

"We can't spend your sisters' time in bed."

"Are you sure? We should test that hypothesis. For science!"

A ghost of a smile crosses Tracy's face, "For science. But, no, not now."

"Oh, come on, I'm only off the leash, even a little, for a couple of days."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"Not...especially. Between being powered by magic and having some level of normal filter embedded for any little slips, I'm 'charging' at like 40% speed, nothing's near popping, and I made sure I was worn out before we got here. Magic stuff with you might charge me up faster but good ol'-fashioned sex and cuddling should be fine."

"Good to know. But not yet. We should get out of the room, at least a little. And they do have a pool."

"My mistress in her tight bathing suit? I'll take that."

"Do you really have a choice, TS1?"

"No, Mistress." she replies huskily.

"Then get changed."

"Of course, Mistress." she shimmers, her clothes sliding around her body, replacing her jeans and top with a deeply plunging, metallic blue one piece.

"What?"

"Clothes are too difficult when you could pop at any time. So I had SAT put in some options for me in the guise of testing."

"You mean..."

"Yes, Mistress." her impish smile is back in full effect, "I've been stark bollock naked all day."

"Carrie!!"

Several hours at the pool later, where, admittedly, not a lot of swimming happened, the pair are walking back to their room, wrapped in towels, the big, soft, fluffy kind that only spas manage to perfect, finger and toes pink and wrinkly, they run, almost literally, into Tabitha as she rounds the corner. She almost immediately puts her hand behind her.

"Whatcha got there, Tab?"

Tabitha sighs and holds up the small pink ball.

"Oh, hi, sis."

Tracy squints, getting a headache from...something.

"You don't think there's anything wrong?"

"No? It's just my grouchy sister. What's supposed to be wrong?"

Tab sighs, "I don't know, the fact that she's a ball?"

"Oh, that. She's always doing..."

"What?!" Tracy looks away from the squishy ball, her headache improving slightly, "No, she isn't. She's..."

"Oh, thank fuck! Someone else sees it. I thought it was me going completely off my rocker. No one's been even curious."

"What are you two talking about?"

Tracy ignores her, "How heavy is that normalcy filter of hers? It's giving me a headache just looking at her."

"Is that what's happening? How are you able to see..."

"I've had a lot of experience dealing with filters lately. I'll explain later."

"Feel free. For now, what are we going to do?"

"Back to my room."

"Why?"

"If we break the filter, do we really want to do that in public? With her like this? You can imagine what they'd do to her."

Tabitha's eyes glance over at Carrie. "Yeah. I guess I can."

Back at Tracy's room, Tabitha places the ball on the dresser, "Now what?"

"Now I get to work. TS1, suit."

"Yes, Mis..." she collapses into a pile of empty skinsuit.

"Was there a particular reason for that?"

"Yes. I need tools to fix this. And as I don't have them, well, Carrie like this is the ultimate multi-tool." she lifts her up, sliding her on, Carrie's skin smooth and shiny, clinging to her like latex as Tracy does her up.

"Way to make a girl feel like she's wanted."

"Maybe after we've saved your sister?" a red lens appears where her right eye would be in the featureless mask, "Now, let's see what she's done." gold, silver and grey threads criss-cross the ball in her new vision, "Wow. That is...that is a lot."

"Do I need to get Sarah?"

"What? No!! That will make it official. Official is bad. Very bad. 'Carrie being made a toy' bad."

"And yet, here you are using me as a thing without even considering..."

"Not now!" the suit's fingertips elongate as Tracy tries to tease the magic threads apart.

"Can I help?"

"Probably not. I mean, your whole thing is being anti-magic and we really need magic right now. Can you go and distract Sarah? Make sure she doesn't ask about Lisa until Lisa's back to placate her?"

"I can do that. If Ola hasn't got her already distracted with all her gossip."

"God praise a gossipmonger."

"Indeed." she closes the door on her way out as Tracy bends over the dresser.

"How exactly did you learn about all this? And get to ignore a normalcy filter?"

Tracy pauses, "Steven Osbourne was an utter and complete arsehole." she replies.

"True. But I don't see..."

"Pretty much everything in his office, and a lot of the club itself, is people. Or was people."

"Every...that is a lot of people to have wanted that."

"If they did."

"If?!"

"I might be reading their contracts wrong, but, if I'm not..."

"Don't leave me hanging. I need popcorn for this."

"Take it seriously, would you? Anyway, the contracts are sleazy. The amount they're paid doesn't cover the 'charges' he adds for accommodation and if they get into too much debt, the contract means they agree to become property of the club."

"Ewwwww. And, of course, no one really reads the contracts if they don't know..."

"Right." she pulls on a grey thread, tugging the loop out. "And, and this is the part I'm not sure I'm reading right, it's in full lawyer language, they also agree that they should be whatever the club uses them for and will 'adapt their self-image accordingly'."

"Oh, that's sick."

"It is." she snips the thread, feeling the normalcy filter dissolve, "Now, what are these two doing?" she examines the silver threads, "Oh, wonderful. Whatever she did to make everyone ignore her, she did it to herself, too."

"What?"

"The silver threads are changes to make her believe this is 'normal'. Because she believes she's supposed to be like this, she hasn't tried to change back."

"Well, fuck, there goes my irony meter."

"So, once we fix that..." she pulls out and snips the silver thread. The golden lines flash and sink into the ball's skin as it unfolds, leaving Lisa human, naked and confused on the dresser. "Hey. There's a lot to explain, but for now, you owe me a huuuuuuge favour."