

THE EXCHANGE

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

- PETER A young man who is eager to impress the girl he hopes to marry, but is suffering from bedroom performance anxiety that he would like to cure prior to proceeding with said marriage.
- KAREN A young woman who was told that they are going to obtain a unicorn that will provide a magical blessing to ensure that they have a long and happy marriage.
- ELF An elf (any gender) who, despite promises to the contrary, was not able to procure a unicorn, and is now hoping that humans are really gullible.
- SECOND ELF Another elf (any gender) who has somehow gotten shanghaied into being part of a hairbrained scheme to pass off a hobby horse as a magical unicorn.

SETTING

A forest glen in a post-apocalyptic world where ancient, pre-fallout technology is very rare. Oh, and there are elves.

SCENE

(It is a forest clearing. An elf enters furtively, looks around for a moment, then nods in satisfaction and motions to someone offstage to come on. Suddenly he hears something from the other direction, and starts excitedly motioning for that other person to back away while exiting himself.)

A moment later, a couple of humans – Peter and Karen – enter. Peter is holding a map, and has a belt sack, or some other carrying container. They are dressed in ragged, peasant-style clothing.)

PETER

I think this is the place

KAREN

I don't know about this, Peter. I mean, I *want* to, obviously, but...

PETER

You worry too much, Kar. Honestly, what could go wrong?

KAREN

You're not serious? What could go wrong? Well, for starters, we're supposed to bring them one of those ancient cell phones from before the fallout.

PETER

We're bringing them a cell phone.

(Karen looks at him hard.)

It's a phone. From before the fallout.

KAREN

It's Fisher-Price.

PETER

So?

KAREN

So? So? You don't think they're gonna notice that you're giving them a wad of plastic made for a two-year-old?

(Near the end of the next line, the elf returns.)

PETER

Nahh. It'll be fine. Besides, what's the worst that could – oh, hello.

ELF

Hello. You're Peter?

(During the next line, the elf just stares at him, and Peter babbles, awkwardly trying to fill the silence.)

PETER

Yep. That's me. I'm Peter. One hundred per cent Peter. Oh, and this is Karen. Karen's my girlfriend.

KAREN

Hi.

PETER

Yep. She's the reason. You know. For this little traderoo. That we're *(rhyming it)* gonna do. Me and you.

ELF

Right.

PETER

So... Where is he? Did you bring him?

ELF

Sure. I brought him. Where's the tech?

PETER

Now hold on there, elfy boy. You were supposed to bring me a unicorn, and I don't see any unicorn around here.

ELF

He's here. Close by.

PETER

Well I don't see him.

ELF

He's back there.

(The elf glances back over his shoulder, making sure, and then steps over to Peter and points.)

See. Right there. Between the two big trees.

PETER

I don't—

ELF

Right by the brown bush. You can see his horn.

(Peter strains to see it.)

PETER

I don't... You mean...

(Peter thinks he sees the unicorn, and starts to walk towards it, but the elf immediately jumps in the way, stopping.)

ELF

That's close enough. Let's see the goods.

PETER

I don't know. This stuff is really hard to come by. I think I want to see the unicorn up close before I hand anything over.

ELF

No way. Give me the phone.

PETER

I... don't think so. You said you'd bring a unicorn, and all I've got is your word that you did.

ELF

It's right there.

PETER

I can *maybe* make out a horn...

ELF

You can't see its ears? What are you, blind?

PETER

Well, even if it *is* a unicorn, I only have your word that it can... you know.

ELF

Don't worry, my friend. It'll solve your *little* problem.

(Peter reacts like the elf has said something terrible and embarrassing.)

KAREN

Problem? What problem? What do you—

PETER

He didn't say 'problem'. *(To the elf...)* You didn't say problem, did you?

ELF

Uhh, no.

PETER

See? No problem.

KAREN

Then what did he say?

PETER

He said that it'll solve our... solve our... little... okay, he said problem, but he was just talking about our lack of... assurance that...

KAREN

Peter Oliver Tubman, you told me that we were going to get a unicorn so that it could bless our marriage.

PETER

I did— It will. It will!

(The elf snorts in amusement.)

Do you mind? *(Back to Karen.)* Trust me, this unicorn is the secret to us having a happy marriage. *(To the elf.)* Isn't that right?

(The elf looks over at Peter, then for a moment glances down to his waist region, then back.)

ELF

Yep.

PETER

See, Kar? It's fine. Now, you. I want to see the unicorn before I hand over the goods.

(There's a "psst" sound from where the elf came in. The elf glances over, and is suddenly irate. He motions for someone to leave, but they obviously don't. There's a second, louder "PSST".)

ELF

Excuse me a moment.

(The elf starts to exit, but a second elf tip-toes in to meet him. At the same time, Karen pulls Peter to the other side of the stage.)

KAREN

Are you telling me the truth?

(Peter shushes Karen, and they start to talk in whispers as...)

SECOND ELF

(Whispering, nervous.)

There's a problem.

ELF

(Also whispering)

Yeah there's a problem. Get back there before you blow everything.

SECOND ELF

But the horn.

ELF

I don't care—

It fell off. SECOND ELF

So glue it back on! ELF

I *can't*! SECOND ELF

Then *tape* it! ELF

(Second elf starts to inject, but...)

Da da da! I don't care if you have to hold it on with your teeth, just get—

It's gone! SECOND ELF

What!?! ELF

Gone. It fell, and before I could get it, some badger or something rushed out, grabbed it, and ran. SECOND ELF

A badger? ELF

Or something! SECOND ELF

You were outsmarted by a badger?! ELF

It was really *fast*. *Really* fast. SECOND ELF

(Peter and Karen have finished their little spat and returned.)

Who's that? PETER

ELF

No one. He was just leaving. Now do you have the phone or not?

PETER

What's that? Right there.

(Elf turns to yell at Second Elf, and while he does, Peter dashes off stage to get the "unicorn".)

ELF

Do *not* tell me that you brought it—

SECOND ELF

I didn't want to leave it. What if the badger—

(Peter returns with the "unicorn", which is just a hobby horse, i.e. a plush horsehead on a stick.)

PETER

What's this?

(There's a stunned pause, then...)

ELF

Ta da! It's a unicorn!

PETER

What?

ELF

A unicorn! You know, gonna make all your little wishes grow into big—

PETER

This is not a unicorn.

ELF

Sure it is.

PETER

It's a hobby horse.

ELF

Nope. It's a unicorn.

PETER

It doesn't even have a horn.

(The Elf gives the Second Elf a dirty look, then turns back.)

ELF

Not right now it doesn't. But it will. When it grows up.

PETER

You don't seriously expect me to buy this load of crap, do you?

ELF

That depends.

PETER

On?

ELF

How much information you want me to share about why one might *want* a unicorn.

(There's a silence, and the Elf and Peter both glance down at Peter's nether regions, then their eyes meet again. After another awkward pause...)

PETER

Look, honey. A unicorn!

ELF

Not so fast. Where's the phone?

PETER

It's here. In the pouch.

ELF

Let's see it.

(Peter looks at the Elf, then the hobby horse, then his pouch, then back to the Elf.)

PETER

Okay. Sure. You can just take the whole pouch, okay.

ELF

Enough games. Show me the phone, or I start sharing unicorn trivia.

PETER

Okay, okay. No need to get hasty. I'll show it to you.

(Cautiously, slowly, Peter reaches into the pouch. He is frantically trying to find some reason to not take out the phone, but can't come up with anything. Finally, he withdraws a Fisher-Price-style phone and presents it.)

ELF

(Wary...)

This is it?

PETER

Yep.

ELF

A real phone?

PETER

Oh yeah.

ELF

That I can use this to make phone calls.

PETER

Uhhh... absolutely.

ELF

How does it... work?

PETER

Simple. You just... you know, talk into it. *(He holds it up to his ear.)* Hello? Yes, this is Peter. How nice of you to call.

ELF

Let me see that.

(The Elf grabs the phone and holds it up to his ear.)

Hello? Hello?

PETER

Don't tell me you can't hear anything. Most humans know how to use a phone by the time they're two. But maybe if you can't—

(The Elf glances over at Second Elf, and is clearly uncomfortable.)

ELF

I can hear just fine. Hello? Yes? You're coming through loud and clear.

SECOND ELF

Let me try!

(Elf holds it away from Second Elf.)

ELF

It's mine!

PETER

So we're good?

(Elf and Peter stare at each other, both realizing they've been had, but neither ready to lose face by admitting it.)

ELF

Yeah.

PETER

Good.

ELF

We're good.

PETER

Good

ELF

Great.

PETER

Well, see you.

Right. Bye.

ELF

Bye.

PETER

(They start to head off in opposite directions. As Peter and Karen are leaving...)

I can't wait to hear you explain what just happened here.

KAREN

Yeah. *(Just as they are walking off stage...)* Me too.

PETER

(Lights out)