

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 79
TRACY AND MARK: PART 1
WHAT IS GRIEF...

Mark leans back in the chair in Steveo's, no, in his office. The desk is covered in papers that seem designed to frustrate everything. "How did you do this, Steveo?"

"Having trouble, Owner?" his watch asks, a naked woman on the face, her arms acting as the hands.

"Yeah, you could say that. What do I know about this business? I can manage myself, sure, but all these salaries, NI, permits, what am I supposed to do with this? I don't even know what I'm supposed to be asking here, never mind the answers."

"Sounds like you need a business manager."

"Yeah, probably. Know any?"

"Uhhmmm..."

"Yeah. That's what I thought. I'm going to have to pay bloody Slant for this now, aren't I? There goes Steveo's fortune."

"Your fortune."

"Yeah, my fortune. I'm not used to being rich yet."

"Poor Owner. Mo money, mo problems."

"Keep that up and I'll make you into something useful. And quiet!"

"Oh, noooooooo, please don't punish me, Owner. That would be teeeeeerrible. Aaaaaanything but that."

"Ah, shaddup. Ok, let's at least see which of these are bills. Those I can understand."

Frustrating hours later, the papers have grown, spreading widely and chaotically, but at least some have gone into a single pile. "Ok. Bills are ready to be sorted. By who I don't know, but they're ready." he picks up another paper, "What's this? Contracts? For review? Why do I need to review them for? They are good enough before. Later for that nonsense."

"Yes, Owner."

"That's it. I'm done. I'm gonna get a bottle of something and just go to bed."

"Yes, Owner."

"There was a tone there."

"Owner?"

"Definitely a tone."

"Well, do you want me to get Mimi for you?"

"Why would I do that when I've got you?"

Anne brightens. "Yes, Owner."

Mark walks out into the club, which seems to be operating automatically without his input, grabbing a bottle from the bar. He doesn't quite make it half-way.

"Mr Atwell, boss, sir..." the short, dark-haired bartender says, scurrying after him, a loose open black waistcoat indicating her position without actually covering anything and still being more dressed than 90% of the female staff.

"Yeah? What now?"

"We need your signature on the order forms."

"Order forms for what?"

"The bar. The taps are working, but that doesn't help with the real beer."

"Real beer?"

"You know." she shrugs, tossing her ponytail back, "we have to order in the bottled stuff. On tap is sorted, but some people really love having things done properly." her eyes dart to the bottle dangling from Mark's hand but she doesn't say anything.

"Right." he sighs, "What did Steveo do for this?"

"Uhm, he kinda just, well, he was stringing them along but the brewery is getting pissed with us."

"Wonderful. How much?"

"Uhm, well..."

"That much, huh? Fine." he takes the papers, deliberately doesn't look at the number and signs it off.

Hours later, once Mark's managed to thoroughly exhaust himself, and done a fair job of exhausting Anne, the compact toy looks up at him as he downs another bottle. "You're going to drink all your profits at this rate."

He shrugs.

"Still down?"

"Me? Down? Whatever gave you that idea."

"Toy's intuition." she replies lightly, "And, you know, you keep pining after Carrie..."

"I do not!"

"You do once you're drunk. So pretty much every day."

"Is my Toy trying to tell me what to do?"

"Of course not. I just don't want an unhappy owner, what toy would?"

"Sure, sure."

"Buuuuut, if my Owner were down over Carrie, maybe he'd like to talk..."

"I don't need fucking therapy!"

"Of course not. But, maybe Tracy..."

"Oh, sure, she'd just love to see me. Just what she needs, a reminder of what she's lo...not got any more."

"Uh-huh, sure. We're definitely talking about her, though, right?"

"Just say it out loud, for fuck's sake. I cannot deal with you being coy right now."

"Well, maybe, you're talking about how you feel and..."

"If I go to see her, will you stop badgering me?"

"Of course, Owner. And you can always make me stop badgering you. Hard to do that without a mouth."

"Yeah, maybe, but your mouth is so good for other things."

"Why, thank you, Owner, I do try."

The next day, Mark finds himself outside Carrie's old flat, mostly because his very nice suit wouldn't let him walk anywhere else. Yes, obviously, he could have made her, but that's not what he does any more. He rings the bell. "Well, no response, might as well..."

"Owner..."

"Fine, fine." he presses on it again.

"Can I..." it buzzes.

"Fuck off!"

"Babes, it's me, Mark."

"Oh, right, right, sorry. Fuck off, Mark, specifically! And don't call me fucking babes!"

"I told you."

"Try."

"Ok, ok, look, ba...Tracy, I'm just concerned about..."

"Are you going to go away?"

"Uhm..."

"Fine." The lock clicks.

"Well? Go on."

Mark pushes on the door and walks into the corridor, leading to the ground floor flat. He knocks on the door. It opens very slowly. Tracy looks blearily out, her eyes bloodshot, skin red around her, hair matted, pale with no makeup. Mark manages to suppress a gasp.

"What do you want?"

"I'm just...I'm just checking."

"Thanks. You've done that. You can go now."

"Babes..."

"Don't! Call! Me! Babes!" she shouts, "I'm not fucking Carrie! Carrie's Carrie and she's...she's..." she starts to sob.

"Ok, ba...Tracy. Let's get you inside."

"Get off me..." she mumbles as Mark puts his arm round her and ushers her back through the door. The flat is, to be charitable, a mess. Letters are scattered over the floor, opened or not. The sink in the kitchen is piled high with dirty plates. It looks like no one's even tried to clean up for weeks. Mark pushes the door closed, "Get off me!" Tracy repeats, throwing his arm off.

"Ok, ok, I'm off." he takes a step back, holding up his hands.

"Well?"

"Well, what?"

"Go on. You know you want to. Say it. Tell me I'm being irresponsible. That I shouldn't let Carrie's...departure affect me like this. Go on! Tell me!"

"That's not why I'm here, babes."

"Doesn't matter. Nothing matters." she flops onto the couch, finding the one spot where there isn't a pile of letters or crockery.

"She's got it worse than you, Owner."

"Did your jacket just...is that Anne? It is, isn't it? Moved on quick, didn't you? Carrie's not been gone more than a month and you're already..."

"Hey, none of that."

"Oh, fuck you. You've got a new plaything. And I heard you got Osbourne's money. You're doing just fine. I've got nothing!! No job, no love, no...nothing! Just get out! Go on, you've seen me, I'm still alive, worse luck, you can go!"

"Babes, I..."

"I said go!" she fumbles under the papers, pulling out her lightsabre and standing up, shakily. "Go on, get out! Out!!" the blue blade shimmers out and, as she's holding it upside down, neatly severs her leg. "Shit!" she tumbles back onto the sofa, scattering papers onto the existing piles of paper as her leg topples over. "Fucking stupid..." she throws the rod away, the blade winking out as it leaves her hand. "If you're still here, make yourself useful and give me that." she points at the half empty bottle of cheap vodka on the table.

"I'm not sure if that's a good..."

"It's a terrible idea. So what? What do you care? It's not like you'll be sticking around. No one does. My mother hated me so much she put me up for adoption. Then my adoptive parents tell me the truth so they can get rid of me. Then I find her and she's guilty enough to get me a job. But she's still a bitch! So much so I have to quit that job to get away from her. Then, I finally find someone, I'm actually happy, and so, of course, the universe decides that's not allowed and takes her away!! And I lose another job! So, it won't be too long before I lose this place and everything that links me to Carrie!! And I...I..." she breaks down into sobs again.

"Ba...Tracy," he sits on the arm of the sofa, trying to put his arm round her, "look, I'm not good at this, really not good at this."

"Don't bother then. It's not as if it matters."

"Tracy..."

"Just go. Just...go." she reaches out for the bottle.

"Ok, ok. I'm going. But I will be back."

"Sure, sure, whatever." she puts the bottle to her lips, swigging it back directly. Mark leaves the room, look back over his shoulder repeatedly. Tracy doesn't even notice.

"That's so sad." Mark's jacket laments.

"Yeah, well, it's not going to stand. She deserves much better than that. And I am going to see she fucking well gets it."