

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 83
TABITHA: CHAPTER 2
I HAVE A PROBLEM

Tabitha skims over the email, long past the time she should have been home rather than still in the office. The subject line 'I have a problem'. "Well, that's clear and concise." she sighs, "Let's see what 'the Amazing Allie' has a problem with." she starts reading. "He's what?!!"

Mid-morning the next day, the doors to the office open and a tall woman walks in. Her strawberry-blonde hair is tied into a complicated knot behind her head. A man's dress shirt is under her black business suit jacket, faded jeans clinging tightly to her long legs, her boots laced up to the knee pushing her heels up several inches as they click on the floor. Tabitha looks up, "Hi." the woman raises her hand, "I'm Allie. Your email said you wanted to talk about my...problem?"

"Oh, I do, I most definitely do. Have a seat."

Allie looks around, "Just you?"

"We've had some...staffing issues. I'm sure you've heard about them. Everyone else has. But that's not why you're here. So..."

"So..." Allie begins as she sits down, "...first off, I'm a switch. I play magician and assistant, the one under the blade and the one at the other end. And I like both roles."

"With you so far."

"As I said in my email, I perform as the Amazing Allie. Only a small, occasional show but it's where I get the chance to be a magician professionally."

"Uh-huh."

"And I'm a glamorous assistant, emphasising the glamour part, for a magician who calls himself 'the Great Sawdini', but he's really just called Steve. Now, I want to be clear he has not been a problem in the act itself, or the afterparty. He always respects it when I safeword out."

"Ok."

"But now, he's trying to tell me that my AA shows are his. That because I'm his assistant, the show is part of his work and I should be giving him the money from them and he'd pay me for the time."

"I take it he doesn't have any say in the show."

"Does he fuck!" Allie replies sharply, "I was the Amazing Allie before I was his blade bunny."

"So what's his argument?"

Allie pulls out a stack of papers. "He's saying it's part of the employment contract. He's talking like it's standard that any assistant who becomes a magician needs to pay her magician back."

"Uh-huh. Can I look at the contract?"

"Sure."

"How long were you the Amazing Allie before you also became an assistant?"

Allie looks down at the desk.

"Allie?"

"I only had the one show under my belt. And that wasn't exactly great. But that's not the point. Even if I hadn't been a magician, first, so what? I'm not using his equipment, I'm not using his time, I'm not using his name, or his act, or his style. Seriously, what the fuck is it to do with him?!" "Exactly. Can I keep the contract? I'll give it a professional look over and see if there's anything to his claim."

"Do you think there is? I thought I was being careful."

"I'm...familiar with the idea that magicians might be sneaky, controlling bastards and that what you thought you were agreeing isn't what you actually agreed to."

"Yeah. I've..." she looks away, "...I've heard your story."

"Yeah, everyone has. I'll let you know if there's anything there."

"Thanks." she reaches out to shake Tabitha's hand.

Later that night, Tabitha is still poring over the document when her phone rings. She finds it by the

third ring, buried under the papers, “Yes?”

“Ms Weller, you're still up? How, ah, ah, dedicated.”

“Mr Slant. I'm just doing some reading.”

“I see. Well, you may have to put that aside. We have a new client and I'd like you to handle his, ah, case.”

“Ok. What's the situation?”

“A Mr Sawdini is having a disagreement with his assistant over her performing outside work...”

“His assistant the Amazing Allie?”

“Indeed. How do you...”

“I'm representing the Amazing Allie.”

“You're, ah, ah, representing...?”

“I am. I'm just reading her contract now.”

“I see. I suppose I should say good luck, but under the, ah, ah, circumstances...”

“At least the firm wins either way.”

“Yes, yes, that is true, I, ah, ah, suppose.”

The morning, the phone ringing, yawning as she picks it up, “Yes?”

“Is that Tabitha? At the UKAG? It's me, Allie.”

She yawns, stretching, “Sure, Allie, I've had a look through your...”

“I've got a letter. It says I need to be at the offices of Slant, Stoker and Howe on Monday with my legal representative for the hearing!”

“It's ok, it's...”

“It's not ok! Where am I going to get a legal representative by Monday?! Do you...”

“It's fine. I...”

“But...”

“You're talking to your legal representative.”

“I'm...you're...but I can't...”

She yawns again, “Look, it's fine. This is all IAG work but I really need coffee to have a sensible conversation. Meet me at the office this afternoon and we can talk strategy.”

Monday morning, outside the offices of Slant, Stoker and Howe. Tabitha looks at her watch, her platinum curls blowing freely in the breeze. “Where are...”

“Sorry, sorry, Tube was a nightmare.” Allie pants, hurrying to a stop by the stone steps up to the door. She's in a dark blue blazer over her cream blouse, hair tied back, a professional skirt and shoes covering her legs, and dark latex gloves sliding under her sleeves. Tabitha looks down at her hands, “I know how it looks, but otherwise I'll be stressed and picking and picking at my skin the whole time.”

Tabitha shrugs, “Ok. You ready?”

“No?”

“Truthful answers are good. Let's go slay some dragons.”

“Dragons?”

“Don't worry. Motivation for me.” she heads for the door.

“Right.”

They enter the mahogany-panelled corridor, walking past cabinets full of leather-bound tomes of law. Tabitha knocks on the door to the conference room. “Come.” the voice inside calls. Inside, Mr Howe sits behind his desk, a large man with carefully sculpted white hair and thick glasses, dressed like the epitome of a lawyer in a suit that flatters him as much as possible and a waistcoat. His face is a little ruddy, flushed, the collar digging into his chins. The man sitting nearby, presumably Steve the Great Sawdini looks much thinner in comparison, his suit less tailored and more functional. His brown hair is slicked back, his pallor slightly grey, his prominent top lip desperately crying out for a moustache. He stands up as Tabitha and Allie enter, both women standing taller than his reedy frame. “Ah, right on time. I do so love punctual clients. Now, this seems to me to be a simple case.

Don't you agree, Miss Weller?"

Tabitha takes a seat in one of the plainer chairs, "I don't think it needs to be complicated." she demures.

"Quite. So, my client, based upon clause 5, section 27, of your client's contract, clearly has the rights to any revenue your client derives from shows performed pursuant to..."

"A moment. Could we clarify exactly under what basis your client has that right?"

Mr Howe harrumphs, "It says quite clearly that revenue from outside performances..."

"It says derivative performances in the contract. Your client is asserting that my client's shows are a derivative of his, correct?"

"Obviously. Now, as I was..."

"My client contests that definition."

Howe sighs loudly, "Does she now? And I thought this was going to be simple and sensible."

"I believe it is still very simple. Might I know what aspects of my client's shows are derivative?"

"I..."

"After all, she has not used his costuming, his equipment, his playlist, colour scheme, set dressing, advertising, name, patter, nor parlayed her show as an extension of his. So where is the derivation? Her show is as distinct from your client's as any magicians can be from each other."

"Oh, really?"

"Of course, I am fairly new to the magical profession, so there may be something clear that I've missed."

"Miss Weller, false naivete does not suit you. I assume you are going somewhere with this?"

"Indeed." she places a small disc on the surface. "Shall we compare?"

"This is a cheap theatrical point that impresses nobody, Miss Weller."

"I'll take that as agreement to proceed." she taps the disc. "We'll start with some of the Great Sawdini's act, if I may."

The disc glows as a scene projects itself onto the air inside the chamber, overlaying the bookshelves. Filling the scene is Allie, clad in a pink suit of more than skintight latex, oiled to a shine. Her arms and legs are pulled out by the manacles attached to a square metal frame. A large gag fills her open mouth, her chest shiny from perspiration and on display through the ribbed cutout in the suit, her pussy lips glistening equally shinily from some other source. Her green eyes are wide as the Great Sawdini in his classical evening dress adjusts the mammoth drill behind her.

"Now," the illusory Sawdini says, "this might be a little loud, but that will just drown out the screams."

Illusory Allie thrashes in her bonds while regular Allie tries to subtly press her legs together.

The giant saw thunders into life, smoke billowing out of its casing as the bit, as wide as Allie's arm, begins to turn, speeding up until the grooves blur into one. Sawdini grins sadistically and pulls on a lever to let the drill move towards its struggling target. Real Allie licks her lips as illusory Allie stiffens. The drill touches her back and she howls as it bores mercilessly through her body, punching out of her stomach. She hangs limply from the restraints as the drill slows, its grisly work done.

"Now, now," Sawdini smiles as he walks up to her, "no rest for the wicked." he snaps his fingers in Allie's face until she focuses on them. Other assistants unclasp the manacles, removing the frame, leaving her hanging limply from the drill. The other assistants pull her off the drill, a hole bored through her costume revealing the pale skin inside to phantom applause.

Tabitha nods to Allie who taps the device to end the scene. "Now, would you agree that the part of the act we just saw was typical of your style, Mr Sawdini?"

Sawdini takes a sip from the glass of water. "Y-yes."

"Allie?"

She nods.

"So, now to compare to the Amazing Allie's show." Allie reaches out to tap the disc and a new scene fills the room.

This time Allie is standing in spike-heeled boots, her body covered in dark green, shiny material

that clings to her. Her face is free, her red hair flowing down her back in a long pony tail. A dark crop swishes absently from her hand, tapping against her thigh. Clustered fawningly around her are a mixture of slender men and women, all wearing similar outfits in a variety of colours: tiny thongs that barely conceal their contents and a collar of the same colour, a thin strip of latex running down the middle of their chests and backs to connect the collar and thong, mittens on their hands and boots reaching up their thighs. The women have a narrow latex band wrapped around their chests to give them the illusion of modesty while concealing as little as possible. "Now," illusory Allie purrs, "which of you pets wants to volunteer for me?"

There is a chorus of pleas to serve her until she makes her decision, the crop stroking the cheek of a dark-skinned woman dressed in a white outfit.

"You'll do. Up against the 'wall'."

"Oh, yes, Mixtress. Thank you, Mixtress." she gasps as she scrambles to her feet and scampers to a tall wooden wall.

"Turn around."

She does, facing the wall. Allie hands coils of rope to her other pets, "Restrain her. Arms up, legs wide."

To a chorus of "Yes, Mixtress." they swarm over their fellow pet. Her legs are pulled wide, ropes tied around her ankles and pulled taught by the pets. Similarly, her wrists are bound, the rope hurled over the top of the wall, pets scrambling to haul her hands up the wall. She gives a moan as she's stretched out, pressed tight against the wall. Another pet runs back, holding a circular saw proudly. "What a good pet." she pats his cheek as she takes it and starts it up. The saw shudders in her hand as she presses it against the wall, teeth tearing the woodchip into sawdust as she moves it closer to her squirming pet. She raises it a little, the blade ripping into the woman's side. The assistant keeps her pose, trembling as Allie draws the saw through her body.

Soon enough she's through, the saw spitting out sawdust after its passage through the assistant's waist. Allie turns to the pets holding onto the assistant's arms, "Pull!" she shouts and they do, raising their fellow up the board, demonstrating a clear gap between the two halves. Allie turns to the audience, brandishing the saw before she powers it down. "Down!" she orders and the assistant slides down the board to settle back on her waist. "Release her!" The assistant stumbles as her bonds are relaxed, her legs unsteady. Allie scoops her up, planting a fierce, possessive kiss on her lips, bending her back to prove her body is now whole again. The scene fades as Allie presses the disc.

"Now, Allie, is that typical styling for your show?"

Allie nods, her face flushed, her breath coming fast.

"Do you agree with that, Mr Sawdini?"

"Well, I haven't really seen her shows but..."

"But, if it is typical, do you agree that it does not bear significant relation to your own performance?"

"Well, I wouldn't..."

"Are you saying you continue to assert that the two shows are significantly similar and Allie's is derivative of yours?"

"Well, I...I..."

"Well, if you're sure of the similarity, although I admit I can't see it, we clearly aren't going to reach an agreement today. Mr Howe, if your client persists I think we are going to have to have the Keeper rule on this matter. In which case, we will be seeking exculpatory damages for the injury his claims are causing my client and her reputation."

"Exculpatory?! That's preposterous!"

"As preposterous that those two shows were similar and one could be derived from the other?"

"What do you propose?"

"A simple withdrawal of the claim. No damages will be sought by my client and this case closes amicably. Of course, my client also asserts her right under section 14.3 to terminate her involvement in Mr Sawdini's act and to withdraw from public assisting roles while she serves out her gardening

leave.”

“But...”

“Oh, come, Mr Sawdini, you didn't think Allie would stay after you pulled this little stunt, did you?”

“I will need to consult with my client on your proposal.”

“Of course. May Allie and I wait in the reception room while you confer?”

“Yes, yes.” he waves his thick-fingered hand as Tabitha takes the disc and she and Allie leave the office.

Shortly, not even enough time for the coffee to be drunk, Howe calls them back, “My client agrees to your request to vacate his claim of revenue over your client.”

“Yes!”

“However, he believe it is within his rights to request in return that the Amazing Allie does not perform during her period working off the 'gardening leave'.”

“What? That's...”

Tabitha holds up her hand and leads Allie to the far side of the room, whispering to her. They return.

“My client has considered your offer and has instructed me to give you the same response as given in *Arkell v Pressdram*.*”

“I see. Give me a moment with my client.”

This time Howe and Sawdini retreat to the window for a hushed, but more animated discussion,

“My client agrees to your terms.”

Tabitha smiles, “A pleasure to have dealt with you, Mr Howe.”

“I wish I could say the same.” he mutters quietly.

As the principles leave, having signed their agreement to the terms, Howe pours himself a glass of port, “Well argued, Miss Weller. I shall have to be careful with you. How is your time here being paid for?”

“IAG work.”

“Ugh. Pro bono work.” he shudders in disgust and drains the glass.

*=A famous British legal case. Arkell sent a request to cease and desist publishing, later proven accurate, reports of his corruption. The Pressdram Group, owners of the magazine *Private Eye* where the allegations were published, responded: Fuck off