

PETER AND LISA: CHAPTER 88A
TRACY AND MARK: PART 2
THERE'S ALWAYS A TRICK

The offices of the Keeper of London, several weeks ago, "You think we were too harsh?" Sarah asks, dangerously mildly.

"All I'm saying," Mark starts, "is that it hit an innocent party pretty hard. And maybe you should look out for her a bit because of it."

"Us? Haven't you come into money? And wouldn't this risk that?"

"You know about that? Of course, you do. Steveo's clause only kicks in if I work for you.

Petitioning to correct an injustice..."

"Is that what you're doing?"

"It's what I think I'm doing. She's not going to take anything from me. Or you. Or anyone connected to this, but, well, you've got channels to exert pressure to make it easier until she's out of the funk is all."

"And you're not petitioning on the sentence itself?"

"Petition to overturn a verdict? I'm not fucking insane! I'm just saying make sure her rent's covered so she don't get kicked out while she's processing."

"This is surprisingly altruistic of you."

"Hey, hey, I'm not a monster."

"Shall we ask Tabitha about that?"

"I'm trying to make that right. Or as right as I can, anyway."

"We will consider it."

Mark starts to speak and stops immediately, "Whatever you say, love." Sarah's eyebrow rises, "Mrs Keeper, ma'am."

Now. Tracy pulls on a jacket, looks at herself in the mirror, "No, you're right. That's too formal." she exchanges it for a different jacket, "Better, Now it clashes with the skirt. Fine! she slips the skirt off, changing into a tighter one that clings to her thighs and, more importantly, matches the jacket. She turns in front of the mirror. "Good enough. Don't wait up." she closes the door on the empty flat and heads out to her interview.

The Tube journey delivers her early, but not too early. She stops to check her reflection in the Oxford Street windows. "Just don't cry." She walks off into the winding back streets until she comes to the door of Steve Osborne's Magic Emporium. "Showtime." she walks in, the bell tinkling above her.

A bored-looking blonde looks up from the register, her body looking poured into a tight white t-shirt emblazoned with the shop's cheerful logo and jeans. "Welcome to the Magic Emporium. Are you looking for anything..."

"I've got an interview with your boss?" she replies, her voice rising at the end.

"Uh-huh. Name?"

"Tracy."

"Oh, yeah, you're on the list." she reaches under the counter, "The door will accept you."

"Right."

"You know the way?"

"I've been here before." *Although last time was as a dress...* she thinks but that isn't the right thing to say under almost any circumstances, so instead she heads into the back room and from there into the club itself. Her heart beats faster as she looks around the vermilion curtains, her eyes brimming as memories flood in. "Do. Not. Cry. You will not cry." she repeats, dabbing at her eyes. She pushes into the bar itself, much emptier than the last time she saw it, but not entirely empty of clients. She moves towards the door to the office, trying to appear more confident and together than she actually is.

"Ma'am? Ma'am?"

She stops as the bar manager approaches, her too-small black vest hanging open and equally too short skirt riding up.

"You can't go back there, ma'am."

"I'm here for an interview."

"Oh? Oh. Of course, ma'am. Please wait here while I tell the boss you're here. Enjoy a complementary beverage."

Tracy moves to the bar. "What can I get'cha?" the girl behind it asks, topless, her nipples covered by a pair of spigots.

"I don't suppose you've got a diet Coke in those, have you?"

"We've got whatever the customer wants." she says in response, raising the lever on one spigot, giggling as the dark froth spills out into a glass half-filled with ice. "Sorry. Fizzies tickle a lot."

"So I've been told." She tries to reply calmly, but there's a little hitch in her throat. She sips the drink.

"You're going to be our new boss, right?"

"I've got an interview. Doesn't mean I'll get it."

"Uh-huh. Right. Got it." she taps her nose, "It's absolutely not certain you'll get it, Boss."

"What is that supposed to..."

"Ms. Lewis? Mr. Atwell will see you now."

Tracy gives the beatifically smiling server a last look before heading into the office. The décor remains what is best described as magic-porn chic with disembodied breasts decorating most surfaces. Mark sits behind the desk in a suit that he looks uncomfortable in, one hand resting on the computer mouse. Tracy looks around, finally settling on the mousepad, a flattened manga-style redhead looking up from under the mouse, her breasts forming the wrist cushion. "Hi, Anne." The word 'Hi.' appears in the small speech bubble on the pad, but otherwise not even the wide green eyes move.

"How did you know?"

"I knew she'd be around somewhere. So, what am I doing here?"

"Applying for a job?"

"That you asked me to apply for. You know I'm not qualified to be general manager, right?"

He shrugs. "All I know is I certainly ain't qualified and you know more about this crap than I do. That makes you a better bet."

"So it's not just because you feel sorry for me?"

"Babes, I..."

"Don't call me babes. That's going in the contract, by the way. What do you expect me to do?"

"Get this place organised. Once someone has a handle on how the fuck this place works, I can start actually running it."

"Why isn't that 'someone' you? It is your club now."

"Because...look, I'm drowning here. The paperwork keeps multiplying on me. I've got to get someone competent before it all falls apart!"

"And you think that someone is me?"

"You're smart enough. You saw right through me straight away. You've done organised office stuff before. That's more than me. You won't take no bullshit, either. Even from me."

"Most bosses would think that was a problem."

"Yeah, well, I'm used to getting my balls busted by Carr...shit. I didn't mean..."

She takes a deep breath, blinking, "It's fine. I'm not that fragile. So, what's the trick?"

"The trick?"

"There's always a trick with you. Not just you you, all of you."

"Babes..."

"I told you, don't call me 'babes'. So?"

"Ok, ok, so, maybe, Steveo's systems ain't cooperating as much as they should."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning I can't even get some of these drawers open. So there's things in there that Steveo didn't

want people seeing.”

“Which means they're precisely the sort of thing a new owner should see.”

“Exactly.”

“And this will be my office?”

“I mean, sure, whatever.”

“Can I redecorate?”

“If you can find the contracts for 'em all, I guess.” he gestures around at the numerous 'decorations'.

“Ok. Let me see...” she walks around the desk and pulls on the drawer. It remains firmly and stubbornly shut. She runs her finger over the wood grain. “Hmmm.” After a few minutes exploring, she smiles. “There you are.”

“What?”

She holds up her hand for silence and pushes her other palm against the wood. She slowly rotates her hand, pressing her ear against it and whispering. The drawer clicks and slides smoothly open.

“How did you...?”

“I told you, there's always a trick.”

“But...”

“So, I'm taking the job. If you're still sure, you'll have me.” Tracy reaches into the drawer, “Now, I want the contracts for the decorations in this room. And I want them, now.” She thumps the sheath of paper onto the desk. “Good girl.” the desk gives a slight shiver from the sheer force of the papers landing hard on it.

“Good girl?”

“A magician never explains her tricks.”

“Not even to her boss?”

“Especially not to her boss, boss.”

“Yeah, that's fair. Welcome to the team I guess.”

She takes his hand.

Back at her flat, she flops onto the sofa, “I cannot believe I did that! Yes, I got the job. We still have to sign the contracts, but... You'd be proud of me. I was confident, strong, independent. I...” she stops, sobbing into her hands, makeup running, “God, I miss you so much. But I'm getting you back, Carrie. There's always a trick.” she wipes her eyes, smearing makeup across the back of her hand, “Always.”