
Subject: Re: Learning The Ropes
Posted by [Tikatu](#) on Sun, 22 Jul 2012 03:00:07 GMT
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Tuesday, February 28, 7:30 p.m., Mt. Sinai Hospital, New York City

Penelope sat in the VIP waiting room, thumbing through a magazine. She was waiting for Jeff to return from the imaging labs. Since he had been awake for a day or two, the surgeons were now getting ready to fuse the cracked vertebra and the scapula. Penny hoped that Dianne knew of this development; depending on what the imaging labs told the osteopathic surgeon, the surgery might be scheduled quickly.

A discreet knocking on the door caught Lady Penelope's attention. The door opened slightly, and a priest, an elderly gentleman with a sympathetic face, poked his head in.

"Are you with the McBride family?" he asked politely.

"I am sorry, but, no, Father. Perhaps one of the other waiting rooms?" Penelope answered kindly.

"Of course, Miss. Sorry to disturb you. And God Bless." The priest backed out before Penelope could thank him for the blessing.

She picked up the magazine again. It was a news magazine, and, yes, one of the news articles was about the crash and Jeff's hospitalization. There was a picture of the crash site; the helijet had been removed as quickly as was feasible. A portrait shot of Jeff had been included, as well as one of the pictures he had authorized to be circulated of him and Dianne at their wedding. Speculation on his well-being was part of the text, as was speculation about its affect on Tracy Industries and the world's stock-markets. There was a quote from an official news release and a small picture of Scott, asking if he was the "heir apparent" to the huge conglomerate.

The thought of the priest brought a small smile to her face, and she began to remember the personal aftermath of her ill-fated marriage proposal.

Penelope had gone back to Foxleyheath and waited. Waited to hear from Tracy Island. Waited for an apology from Jeff Tracy. Waited... and was miserable.

The staff, even Kat, tiptoed around the house. Penelope's mood swings were sudden and unpredictable. She would burst into tears at the slightest provocation, or get angry. No one would forget when she flung her Wedgewood tea service, one piece at a time, at poor Parker when he mentioned that Kyrano had called to let him know that her Ladyship had left behind a pair of sandals. Fortunately, Penny was more interested in hearing the crockery smash against the wall than in actually hitting her butler/chauffeur.

Finally, Parker decided it was time to do something. He carefully and quietly took a tea tray, filled with Lady Penelope's favorites, to her private sitting room and knocked on the door. He didn't wait for an answer before entering; he knew that if he did, she would just send him away. He found her

sitting in the armchair by the empty fireplace.

"Ere's yer tea, milady," he said in his most respectful tones. It hurt him to see his usually well-coiffed employer looking so sad with dark circles under her eyes and her clothes all rumpled.

"Take it away, Parker. I am not hungry," was her automatic response.

"That h'Oi will not, milady," Parker said stoutly. "Yew need t' h'eat. h'An' Lil, she fixed h'all yer fa-vor-ites."

"Parker..." Lady Penelope warned, turning to him for the first time.

"Milady, 'asn't this gone h'on long h'enough? H'Ain't ye sick o' bein' so miserable?" he asked softly.

Penelope sighed. "I suppose you're right, Parker. But I don't know what to do. I don't know where to turn for advice. I don't know who to speak to about my burden."

"If ye don't mind me sayin' so, Milady, p'raps it's time t' pay a visit t' th' vicar?"

Penelope paused for a long moment, and then seemed to relax. She smiled faintly at Parker. "You know, Parker, I believe you're right. It's time I went to see the vicar." She hesitated and then reached out to pick up the teapot. "I will tell you when to bring the Rolls around. After I have my tea."

"Yus, Milady." Parker smiled and turned to leave.

"And Parker?"

He turned back. "Yus, Milady?"

Penelope smiled slightly again, this time with gratefulness. "Thank you, Parker."

"You're welcome, Milady."

Within the space of an hour, Penelope was on the road in FAB 1, Parker at the wheel. She wasn't going to the nearby village to visit the pudgy, bustling man who ministered to that tiny flock. Nor was she going to see the tall, handsome scholar who had the next largest town as his parish. No, she was going to see her vicar. In the seediest area of London, far from the comforts of Penelope's own home, lived her vicar, shepherding a tiny, ragtag congregation and doing her best to help the people of her parish in ways both spiritual and physical. Penelope's sister confessor and old school chum from her days at Rowden, Keziah Bosman. Her vicar.

Keziah was the oldest daughter of a well-to-do South African Afrikaner man and a Nguni woman. Her parents were shocked to find that their daughter rejected their wealthy lifestyle in her homeland to pursue the seemingly lowly life of an Anglican vicar in what they considered the slums of London. Her defection struck a chord with Lady Penelope, who was turning her back on her life as a pampered aristocrat to follow her heart in the exciting underworld of espionage. The

two became good, if unlikely, friends, a friendship that had remained fresh through phone calls and visits. Lady Penelope came to Keziah in tears when her actions caused the death of someone she was pursuing, and Keziah could always count on Penelope to offer her sanctuary when the pressures of her parish got to be too great for her. Now Penelope was going to her old friend for advice and comfort in the wake of her rejection.

Parker opened the door for her and she stepped out of the Rolls. She knew herself to be the object of some scrutiny and interest by the denizens of the small street where the vicar's home stood, a stone's throw from the tiny church building where Keziah labored. She had timed her visit so that she would find her friend at home. She rang the bell as Parker prepared to take the Rolls away and park it elsewhere. The door opened, and Keziah's eyes opened wide.

"Penny! What a pleasant surprise! Please do come in!"

Penelope smiled and entered the small house. Once inside, the two friends embraced and kissed each other's cheeks. Then Keziah looked at her friend and asked astutely, "Penelope, what is wrong?"

She guided the aristocrat to a chair and offered her a sherry, which Penelope gratefully took; Keziah's taste in wine was excellent. Penelope took a few sips while Keziah made herself comfortable.

"Now, my friend, tell me what is wrong? Is this a personal or a professional problem?"

Penelope sighed. "Personal."

Keziah studied her keenly for a moment, and then made a guess. "Does this have something to do with that Tracy fellow?"

Penelope smiled, a painful smile. "It has everything to do with 'that Tracy fellow'." And she proceeded to open her heart to her vicar.

When she was through, Keziah was silent for a while. Penelope sipped her sherry again, feeling strangely comforted now that she had told her friend what was bothering her so much. Finally, Keziah shifted in her wing chair and spoke.

"You know, Penelope, I don't know which bothers you more. The fact that this man, though he does care for you, does not love you as you love him, or the fact that you went and blurted it out, making a fool of yourself, or what you consider to be such."

"I don't know either, Keziah. I know I shouldn't have gone and done what I did. It was very foolish of me, perhaps not to tell him how I felt, but to ask him to marry me. But, I love him so! And I didn't want to see the other woman get her claws into him. Especially if she wants him only for his money."

"Why do you think she wants him for his money? She is a physician, is she not? She is capable of making a more than comfortable living. She does not need him. Not for that."

Penelope looked thoughtful. "Yes, I suppose that is true. Though the idea of marrying so that one would not have to work might be appealing."

"Not if one loves one's work," Keziah countered. She took a sip of the sherry, and sat forward. "Penelope. There is an old saying that I think might apply in this case."

"Yes?"

"Let me see if I remember it correctly. Ah, yes! 'If you love something, set it free. If it comes back to you, then it is yours. If it does not, then it was never meant to be.'" She fixed her gaze on Penelope until the aristocrat's blue eyes met her brown ones. "Do you understand?"

Penelope sighed. "Yes, I believe I do. I need to let Jeff go. If he turns towards the doctor, then... that is his choice."

"Yes. If he does not, then perhaps there is still hope for you," Keziah said gently. "And even if he does not return to you, you still have something of his."

"What is that?"

"His trust. And his friendship."

Penelope sighed. It would have to be enough.

Penelope looked up to see Dianne's worried face, as she came into the waiting room. She had spent twenty-four hours at the penthouse, as she had promised her stepsons she would, and now she was back to watch over her husband again.

"He's in the imaging labs," Penelope said, answering Dianne's unspoken question. "The surgeons will decide where to go from there."

"Thank you, Penelope," Dianne responded gratefully. "I've really appreciated your support these past few days."

Penelope smiled. "I am so glad I could be here to give it. After all, what are friends for?"

Post by Tikatu on 08/07/2004
