

THE TEST

By Andy(ArT)Trigg
(andy@washerhelp.co.uk)

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"You will do it for me won't you?" asked Karen. Tracy was shocked.
"You're joking right?"
"No. I need to find out for sure, one way or the other."
"Yes - but seducing your husband? It's a bit drastic isn't it?"

Karen took a deep breath and sighed.

"I have to know if I can trust him. I need someone to test him for me."

Tracy looked across the room at Dave's photo and her heart stepped up a gear. She jerked her head round to face her friend.

"I'm not sure it's a good idea. I mean what if he..."

"All I want you to do is flirt with him - not shag him - just dangle the bait and tell me if he bites" said Karen.

Tracy detected desperation in the plea and wavered before the proposition. Looking again at the photo she felt hot blood raise the temperature of her face and wondered just who'd be tested the most, her or Dave.

Karen produced a magazine and offered it to Tracy. As she reached out to take possession Karen narrated the headline, "TESTING YOUR MAN". Instead of releasing it to her, Karen kept a firm grip and as Tracy started to scan the article it was withdrawn and tossed aside like discarded wrapping paper to the floor.

"There are people who do it for a living," she informed. "They chat up partners to test them."

Tracy disapproved. "But the woman in the photo said it finished her marriage."

"But only because he failed the test. He would have cheated on her anyway - at least she knows now, and is rid of the bastard - I'll pay you of course"

"Don't be daft," said Tracy. "I don't want paying."

"So you will do it then?"

Tracy felt cornered.

"Well if you're really serious..."

"Thank you Tracy. Thank you. If he won't have anything to do with you I'm sure I could learn to trust him. If he cheats on me, at least I'll know."

A few days later, Tracy turned up as arranged. After a little hesitation she knocked timidly on the door. Dave looked surprised when he answered.

"Hi Trace."

She looked nervously over his shoulder, half expecting to see Karen.

"Is Karen there, Dave?"

The question was fake, but took on genuine overtones as she half-hoped Karen might have backed out at the last minute. "No but come in," said Dave. She's gone to her mother's for the weekend. We had a bit of a bust up." "Oh," she replied. "Perhaps I'd better go." "Don't be daft," he insisted. "Didn't she tell you? At least have a coffee."

Tracy sipped nervously at her coffee, wishing she'd rejected Karen's proposal. She caught Dave's brief but penetrating glance up her skirt and felt uncomfortably hot. She needed to get out of this insane situation and fast. As Dave took the remote and aimed it at the TV she tugged pointlessly at her stupidly short skirt. "No need to turn it off on my account," she said half-heartedly. He turned it off anyway.

After a while, she allowed herself to slowly relax. The purpose of her visit wouldn't leave her thoughts but she knew she wouldn't be able to go along with the test after all.

She hadn't realised that as usual, she was flirting effortlessly and effectively with him anyway. Eventually she did realise that Dave was flirting blatantly and panicked. Gathering the empty coffee cups together she took them into the kitchen.

"Leave the cups," he insisted as he followed her there. "I'll see to them later."

"It's no trouble," she replied, trying to avoid eye contact but failing. She was torn equally between falling into his arms and getting out of there fast. As they play-argued over who was going to wash the cups Dave grabbed her arm.

"Look," he said with a smile as his eyes invaded her. "I'll do them later." Tracy's heart pounded as his firm hands pulled her gently away from the sink. All thoughts vacated as she looked into his eyes.

She wasn't aware of how they ended up in the passionate embrace. Whether Dave had pulled her to him or she'd fallen into his arms was unclear. Maybe it was a combination of both.

"Did you lock the door?" she asked trying to fall back on some logical thought. He lifted her skirt the short distance needed to expose her indecently. The rush of cool air excited her further and swept her past the point of no return.

When Tracy eventually left for home Dave asked if he could ring her and she found herself saying yes. She slept deeply. In the morning as she opened her eyes her heart resumed pounding as she recalled what she'd done. The phone sprang to life like a fire alarm and she lunged at it to silence it.

"Tracy it's me - Karen."
The female voice jolted her further.
"Oh!" she replied
"Are you alright Tracy? How did it go last night?"
Tracy sat up and forced herself to stay calm.

"He didn't want to know," she heard herself lie. "The bastard," she added in mock indignation.

"What - he didn't try anything on?"

"Nothing."

Tracy could barely cope with the tension. It was all she could do not to over-cook the situation but she was so scared she was unable to think of what to say.

"That's brilliant," Karen said, and the cloud lifted immediately. "I can't thank you enough," she added.

Tracy felt bad and relieved at the same time. Her wits made a sudden and welcome return.

"It was very awkward really, I didn't stop long."

Karen pursued this point.

"You did make it clear to him didn't you?"

"I think so. Yes, I'm sure. He had the opportunity and didn't do anything. He's not a womanizer." She'd relaxed enough now and felt comfortable. She continued, "Has he done anything before? I mean, I don't understand why you don't trust him."

"It's OK I can now".

A few minutes after putting down the phone it rang once more. This time it was Dave.

Tracy found the guilt hard to deal with over the coming weeks. It wasn't her fault she protested to herself as their relationship developed. The reason they were eventually caught was typically stupid and Karen's confrontation about the affair was tough on Dave.

"How could you do this to me?" she screamed at him. "And that bitch was supposed to be a friend."

Dave's reaction was unimaginative but sincere.

"We didn't plan it - it just happened."

"I'm not interested in your pathetic excuses. I want you out. It's over". Dave felt unexpected relief at these words. They had a venomous tone but they also brought a glimpse of freedom.

"I want a divorce," he demanded sheepishly.

The way Karen laughed both angered and humiliated him.

"I want you gone but you're getting no favours from me" she scorned.

His position felt weak. Then she threw a surprise proposal at him.

"OK then, I want the house. Take your stuff and leave me the rest. Then you can go live happy-ever-after with the slag.

Despite its instant appeal, Dave pretended to give the proposal serious consideration before giving a response.

"OK. I care about Tracy not the house. You've become too cold for my taste."

"Whatever," she replied nonchalantly.

Dave's guilt gave him a nudge and he attempted to control his tone.

"I'll get my big stuff picked up later," he sighed. "I'm sorry."

Karen's tone was maintained.

"Whatever."

She slammed the door behind him and turned the key.

After pouring a large drink she sank into her chair with it. After looking around the empty room for a few moments she reached over for the phone and dialled.

"He's gone," said Karen when it was answered.

"Fan-bloody-tastic," was the response. "And the house?"

"It's mine. All mine now."

There was no reply.

"Of course I meant ours darling," she added apologetically.

"Can I come round?"

She took a large gulp of her drink and exhaled slowly before replying.

"You know you can't Richard. We have to stick to the plan. You know we can't *meet* yet." She put down her drink, blew kisses into the phone and sank deeper into the chair. As she put down the phone and finished her drink, she couldn't prevent a satisfied smirk breaking out.

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