

# TLC Showcase

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MERRYL FUTERMAN

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## Introduction to *Don't Make a Scene*

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Maddy Sparks dashes around London fulfilling ordinary and extraordinary requests for a roster of demanding celebrity clients. A throwaway comment to Casper, a bitchy screen writer she looks after, sees him enlist her help on his failing TV series. She gets a taste of what she could be capable of, but Casper is determined to keep her in the shadows. After a brush with the law, Casper expects Maddy to smooth things over like she always does. Backed into a corner he pressurizes her into compromising her integrity for the recognition she craves. How far is she prepared to go?

Having worked as a Celebrity PA I have cherished the unpredictability of my role, agonised over setting boundaries, watched as stories of coercion have played out in the media and heard the shared experiences of the PA community. I wanted to write a fun, fast paced piece of commercial fiction that also addressed the very real dangers assistants are placed in by their clients. The #MeToo movement struck many chords and I wanted to write a story that could empower women to draw a line.

Scribbling away but overwhelmed by the task I had set myself, I contacted Joe Sedgwick at TLC and opted for the Premium Chapter & Verse Mentoring Programme. Being paired with Thalia Suzuma was the turning point. Thalia combined practical advice with challenging my processes, and by fully engaging I found the impetus to not only push through to the end, but also to go back and edit, pulling all my strands together and coming out with a novel I am now in the process of submitting to agents. A second read by Angela Clarke brought a new and invaluable perspective and I am deeply grateful for the care and attention I have received.

I would not have found my way out of the woods without Thalia showing me the path.

## Extract from *Don't Make a Scene* by Meryll Futerman

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**Text from Dani 7.13am:**

**Babe, its freezing. Can you get my parka?**

Such a straightforward request means I can turn over, keep dozing. This state of bliss lasts about a minute until I remember Dani is in New York and I'm in Muswell Hill. Getting the parka to her is going to take more than a sprint up the Archway Road. My mind starts whirring, working it backwards: Start with getting hold of the bloody coat, a mental scan of my bijou office for supplies and which courier will get it there by tonight, latest. What is abundantly clear is that I can kiss the rest of this morning goodbye.

Head down, thinking about jiffy bags, I bump into my flatmate, Ella, on my way to the bathroom. She is suited and booted, ready for work.

'Not used to seeing you up this early Maddy.' There's a note of surprise in her voice. She also happens to be my best friend. We've known each other since secondary school. I was obsessed with her neat handwriting, so when she admired my curly hair, the deal was sealed. I made her giggle, and she made sure I did my homework.

'Yeah, text from Dani first thing – she needs her coat.' I'm still distracted by the logistics of it all.

'Thought she was in the States.' Her tone is genuinely puzzled.

'She is, but she's cold.'

'Seriously? Please tell me you are joking. Can she not buy herself a coat in the whole of bloody New York?' Ella's a high-flying lawyer, and whilst she's too polite to say it, I know she finds aspects of my job ridiculous.

'Her show opens in a couple of days, she's just stressing'. Ella's logical suggestion didn't actually cross my mind, but my clients aren't looking for the most reasonable solutions.

Entering the bathroom my breath turns to steam; the radiator isn't pumping out much heat, so I grab the screwdriver I keep on the windowsill for just this purpose.

I pride myself on being practical, Ella's more of a thinker than a doer, plus it makes me feel better about my mate's rates rent. I twist the screw to bleed it, fire off 'I'm on it' with my free hand and so begins a fairly typical day.

Flinging my Dani bag into the passenger seat, my thoughts turn to my delicious boyfriend Ed and the fun weekend we had together, it's a shame we're now living on opposite sides on London or I'm sure we'd see each other more. And then I'm off, like a FedEx ninja. First stop packing materials, next stop Dani's flat.

Each of my clients has their own bag to keep life simple. It holds the essentials for that person, so I can be out the door without faffing around – their keys, my notebook, stamps, cigarettes, whatever they might need. I take pride in finding a bag that suits, and that's why my passenger seat is currently home to a shiny pink pleather one with gold stars embossed on it. It's tits and teeth and jazz hands in bag form, and it screams Dani.

I summon up my imaginary documentary host, Davina, with a hand mic in my passenger seat, and we begin:

'So, Maddy' –

Decide I will use my full name for the purposes of my pretend TV career.

'So, Madeleine, how are you finding today's challenge?' She turns to me expectantly.

'Well, this morning was a wakeup call, literally' (raise eyebrow to camera, pause for laugh), 'but I feel confident I've got this. Barring unforeseen circumstances, I expect a satisfactory outcome by tonight.' I am keen to make it clear that I am at the top of my game.

'You think Dani will have her parka that soon? Impressive'

'As you know, I take my clients' welfare very seriously. I will do my absolute best to keep Dani warm on the chilly streets of Broadway.'

I do realize pretending your life is a reality TV show is what happens when you spend too much time alone, and there are definitely times when I miss having colleagues but am saved by the bell. My phone is ringing through the Bluetooth. Caller display shows its Casper, this afternoon's client.

'Hi Casper, how are you?' Hoping it's nothing urgent.

'Depressed. My ratings from last week are shite. I'm a failure.' He's such a drama queen.

'That's not true, you were up against the football – you have to factor that in.' Having tuned in for the new series, I did notice it didn't crackle quite as much as I recalled. The first was such a massive success, the second was bound to be under scrutiny. Best to change the subject 'Isn't this a bit early for you?'

'Another reason I'm depressed. I've got a new trainer coming, can we shift our meeting a bit? I'll need a lie down once he's gone. I fucking hate training.' It's all black and white with Casper, he doesn't really do grey.

'That's fine, but why did you book him?' Relieved I'll have a bit more time to sort the parka situation.

'You'd understand if you saw him, he made me an offer I could not refuse.' I can picture the glint in his eye.

'To train you?' I'm keeping the tone professional.

'Got to start somewhere' with a dirty laugh.

'I'll see you at two then, do you need anything?' Like I said, professional at all times.

'Alcohol? See you then, Use your key.' And he's gone.

I should remind him to send Dani something on opening night. They've stayed in touch since she had a cameo in a show he wrote years ago. They share a similar sense of humour and similar love of a good night out. The tabloids know they'll get a good picture if those two are at the same event, and if you look really closely you might see a blurry image of me lurking in the background, probably carrying bags or coats and juggling a phone. The glamour.

Pushing Dani's flat door open it's obvious there's a huge pile of post behind it. Might as well run through it while I'm here, but first things first - locate the notorious parka. I'd expected to see it hanging on the hall coat rack, but it isn't. Not in the cupboard under the stairs either. Head upstairs to check out her luxury walk-in wardrobe.

Running out of ideas is making me anxious, there will be real drama if I don't find it soon.

Not in the wardrobe either – last possibility is by the back door in the kitchen and I'm crossing everything it's there, but it's not. A band of anxiety is starting to squeeze my chest and I'm readjusting my timings whilst wondering where on earth the damn thing could be. Decide to make a cup of tea and have a logical think about its possible whereabouts before freaking out.

It does cross my mind that Dani might be testing me. She has massive trust issues, and who wouldn't if several mates and half your family had sold stories on you. In the early days I felt she was constantly trying to catch me out, but I thought we'd got past all that.

## About the Writer

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Merryl Futerma started her career in publishing, working in the press offices of Virago and HarperCollins. Lured by the bright lights of showbusiness, she moved over to the film industry, but quickly realised the lifestyle didn't suit her. Having recognised her skill set as forming individual relationships, she set up as a freelance Celebrity PA, truly believing it was a role she had created. Over the last twenty years she has supported some of the biggest names in UK entertainment, including Jonathan Ross, Anne Robinson and Julian Clary (current).



During the pandemic her work dried up, so she turned her full attention to the novel she had been working away at for years, having previously attended classes at the City Lit and online with CBC.

Whilst she has never signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement, Merryl is keen to point out that all the characters in her book are entirely fictional, although many of the situations her characters find themselves in are based firmly in reality.

Merryl has a high profile in the professional PA community and has appeared as a speaker and panel member at PA conferences at Olympia London and Excel. She has written articles for Executive Secretary, PA Life magazine and various blogs.

There is a sequel on the way.