

Quiet, Please...

Miranda's note:

I originally set the scene where we first discover about Tom and Anya's breakup at a 50th Birthday party with guests who complain about the noise of the band (you'd be surprised how often this happens!) In this scene, you also get to see Elliot, who was another band member (the bass player before I made Wren the bassist) eventually cut to streamline The Pinstripes. Jack's girlfriend Sophie is also here – she was 'retired' from the regular line-up of the band in a later edit (although she demanded to be able to play at the Millionaire Gig!)

'I'm sorry, you're still too loud. People want to talk and they can't hear themselves over the music.'

Elliot smiled his most convincing smile as he crouched down at the edge of the stage, talking to the balding wiry organiser of the 50th Birthday party in the primary school hall. 'My apologies, Mr. Simpson. We'll sort that out right away.'

Pleased, Mr. Simpson tripped away, straightening his bow tie and clearly feeling like Rambo for thus subduing the troublesome musicians. Tom turned back to us, all universally irritated at being interrupted for the third time during the first set, and grimaced.

'We've got to turn down again, guys. They want to "talk".'

‘But we’ve gone down twice already,’ Jack protested from behind the keyboards. ‘If they wanted to talk, why did they book a band? They could’ve just played CDs all night.’

Wren and I continued to smile reassuringly at the front of the stage, aware that all eyes were on us. Sometimes, being the front-person in the band with no instrument to hide behind can feel like you’re naked.

‘We can hardly hear the foldback as it is,’ Wren hissed through her smile. ‘If we lose any more sound on stage I’m not going to be able to pitch harmonies.’

I nodded. ‘I was singing ‘Love Train’ blind. No idea if the tuning was any good.’

‘You both would have been fine if *someone* had remembered to pack the in-ear monitors tonight,’ Elliot remarked.

Tom groaned. ‘Whatever.’

‘Look, it’s fine,’ Sophie interjected. ‘Turn down front of house to a bare minimum and we’ll keep foldback at the same level. It’ll sound pants but at least the punters will be happy.’

Charlie said nothing from behind the drums, his expression thunderous. Leaning over, he moved the faders on our sound desk, picked up his sticks and stared back at Jack.

‘OK dudes. Motown medley – count us in, Chas.’

Twenty minutes later, when the buffet was opened and the partygoers were tucking into vol-au-vents, chicken legs and thick slices of pork pie in their posh frocks and DJs, The Pinstripes gathered in a far corner for a half-time analysis.

‘The first set was utter crap. I don’t know why we even bother sometimes.’

‘We couldn’t help the audience, Charlie,’ I countered. ‘How were we to know they wanted a quiet set?’

‘Well perhaps we would have had more of an idea if our *manager* had deigned to inform us of the clients’ wishes,’ Jack scoffed. ‘Or bothered to show up, even.’

Sophie raised her glass. ‘I vote we sack him.’

‘I vote we sack this gig off now and go home,’ Tom said, making everyone jump. He had been noticeably quiet since we arrived at the venue four hours ago and had barely spoken two words until now.

‘Oh, it speaks! Welcome back, mate, we though we’d lost you,’ Wren laughed, her smile disappearing when Tom mumbled something unintelligible and walked away. ‘What did I say?’

Sophie shook her head. ‘Ignore it, hun. He’s been like it all day. I don’t know what’s got into him.’

Elliot, who had been conspicuous by his absence, appeared with a plate so stuffed with buffet food it resembled the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Munching on a sausage roll, he stopped when he saw our amused faces. ‘What? It’s free, isn’t it?’

I left my friends ripping the heck out of our bass player and made my way over to the stage, where Tom was slumped over his guitar retuning the strings.

‘Hey.’

He didn’t look up. ‘Hey.’

‘You OK?’

‘Peachy, Rom.’

I folded my arms. ‘Don’t ever go into acting, will you. That was woeful.’

He gave a hollow laugh as he raised his head, and immediately I could see sadness paling his face. ‘Loser.’

‘What’s going on, mate? You haven’t been yourself all day.’

It was some time before he answered. I’ve known Tom since college and we’ve always had this understanding between us. I used to work on Saturdays with him at his granddad’s pub in the centre of Birmingham all through college and university and during that time we developed a close friendship, talking about everything from music to relationships to random topics we happened to fall upon. He likes to think that he’s elusive and able to shield his feelings from other people, but he’s about as mysterious as a glass box. So when he tells the rest of the band that his day job at an insurance brokers doesn’t bother him, I know he’s lying; or when he insists he doesn’t mind that one of his best friends chucked him out of a band just before they landed a huge recording contract and became global stars, I don’t believe a word of it. This latest attempt to avoid the truth was doomed and he knew it.

‘It’s Anya and me. We’re over.’