

The Eminem-wannabe

Miranda's note:

I wrote this scene to show Jack and Romily working on someone else's song at his studio. It shows their friendship and how they work together. While I love this scene as a set piece, it was cut because it slowed the action of the book. I've included it here to give you a giggle – watch out Jay-Z!

Jack called the following week with an offer of some session singing work at the studio – a welcome event considering the tightness of my finances this month. My car had unexpectedly failed its MOT and only passed it £300 later, thus devastating my carefully saved holiday fund, so the opportunity to earn some extra cash was not something I was going to ignore. Plus, the chance to get paid for doing something I love, regardless of the song, was too good to miss.

The track in question this time was a quasi rap-rock-dance number of dubious lyrical prowess, written by Leonard Dixon, a twenty-five year old accountant from well-to-do Henley-in-Arden – the kind of prohibitively expensive picturesque English village my mother dreams of retiring to. Convinced this song was the one that would propel him into the limelight, Leonard – or 'Lenny D' as he preferred to be called, wanted a suitably wailing female voice to complement his highly questionable rhyming skills:

I'm in da club and it's so eeeee-seee

Spittin' my stuff like Jay-Zeee

All da laydeez watchin' me

*Cos I have da edge here
And I'm right up in your ear
Doin' my thang for all to see
Laydeez dis is Lenny Deee
Ya'll hear me – uh*

Jack couldn't quite bring himself to make eye contact with me as Lenny D's track played while we listened, maintaining his professional objectivity against serious odds. I resisted the temptation to laugh out loud, nodding my head in what I hoped passed for an appreciative gesture. It's times like these when I feel like Tom Cruise in Jerry Maguire screaming down the phone to Cuba Gooding Jr: 'Show me the money!'

Lenny D, meanwhile, was miming the words to his track, eyes closed, obviously imagining himself surrounded by half-naked, writhing girls in his multi-million dollar music video. Quite how he believed he would actually get into one of these videos was beyond comprehension; especially given that his idea of 'Gangsta-style' consisted of a long white t-shirt, skinny jeans, a pair of gold framed thick lens glasses and a sensible haircut made only a little less sensible by the gelling-up of his fringe (which made him appear mildly alarmed rather than darkly threatening). Still, as Jack has said many times, if his customers have the money to realise their dreams, who is he to stamp on them?

'So, what do you think?' Lenny D asked me in a clipped private-school accent, when the track had finished. 'Is it totally hot, or what?'

'It's – ' Words escaped me. *Think of the money, Romily...* '– banging.'

‘Alri-i-i-ght.’ Visibly impressed, Lenny D sat back and nodded appreciatively at me, his eyes moving up and down in an alarmingly lascivious survey. ‘So you gonna lay down some massive wails for me, girl?’

Help!

‘Absolutely.’ I made a point of looking at Jack. ‘What did you have in mind?’

Jack was gritting his teeth, valiantly fighting the urge to laugh. ‘Improv,’ he said, his voice too high with the effort. ‘Just sing your way round the – er – *rap*.’

I have been asked to provide vocals for some dubious songs over the years and, compared with some of them, Lenny D’s track was tame in the extreme. When, like me, you have performed on a Nigerian gospel-reggae album (singing backing vocals in a perfect Nigerian accent to match the lead singer’s intonation); a series of teeth-gratingly awful advert jingles for a double-glazing firm; a mock-opera epic orchestral ballad for a songwriter who believed Katherine Jenkins would snap his hand off to record it (she didn’t); a Pussycat Girls-type raunchy dance number that I sang all the parts of for a manufactured girl group to mime to (all the members of which were pushing forty and seemingly held together with excellent control undergarments and whole cow’s-worth of Botox) and countless dance tracks composed by geeky civil servants in the depths of their bedrooms (most of them more ‘Morbid’ than Moby), nothing much surprises you.

After thirty minutes of vocal acrobatics and improvised stabs, I rejoined Jack and his wannabe rapper client in the studio’s control room.

From Lenny D's incredibly red face, I could see that my efforts had hit the spot.

'How did I do?'

He nodded wildly. 'That was... like... totally amazing...'

'Excellent.'

Jack shook his head when he walked me to the exit, later. 'You do realise he's going to be imagining you as his 'bitch' now, don't you?'

I grinned. 'It's a small price to pay. Sixty quid, was it?'

He handed me the money. 'It's a good job neither of us values our dignity.'

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