



# Love Notes (Serenade Book 2)

**Author:** *Drew Duncan*

**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** The music industry hasn't always been kind to Lennox Love. Spun into a web of lies and denial for the sake of his band, Lennox seeks comfort at the bottom of a bottle. Spiralling ever further out of control, he checks himself into rehab and turns his back on the toxic lifestyle that put him there.

Now, fifteen years sober, Lennox prepares to take the world by storm on tour. Healthy and true to himself, he's ready to face the music, until ghosts of his past life come back to haunt him and threaten his very safety.

Enter Tom Thatcher – head of private security, tasked with one goal: keep Lennox safe. Tom's never been the distracted type, but things get complicated when they realise they have more in common than they thought.

Thrust into a life on the road in close quarters, can Tom keep his mind on the job? Or will his growing attraction to Lennox prove just too risky when lives are on the line?

**Total Pages (Source):** 30

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

My eyes tracked the length of the corridor before slipping the key card into the lock and entering unnoticed, smiling to myself.

It hadn't been anywhere near as difficult as I thought it would be. I had lucked out with the handsome male receptionist. My performance as the slightly air-headed assistant who was sure to be fired if she couldn't do what her boss had asked her had clearly convinced him.

And what would my boss do if I didn't return with his favourite lucky silk scarf? He had refused to go on stage without it, and 'you know what these temperamental musicians are like.' An extra flutter of my eyelashes and the key to Lennox Love's hotel room was all mine.

I had been thinking about this for a while, planning every detail so everything would be perfect. I wanted to surprise him with my demonstration of love, and I knew how much he would appreciate it. Who wouldn't love to receive such a beautiful gesture of adoration from their soulmate?

As I stepped into his hotel suite, I paused for a moment to admire the extravagance of the place. Inhaling the air, I caught the scent of his aftershave. It was the first thing I noticed the first time we met, and even now after all these years he was still wearing it. It was luxurious.

I hastily set my bag down, a smile tugging at the corners of my mouth. Feverishly, I pulled out all my supplies, desperate to get back to the concert on time. I moved quickly to the bed and started to spread the rose petals – deep red and velvety soft, a reminder of my love for him through the laughter and the tears. I had to be there

tonight; I wanted him to know how much I still cared about him after all this time.

I cautiously took the framed photo of us from the bag, holding it close to my chest. A soft sigh escaped my lips as I thought back to when the photograph had been taken. We had been so young, but the chemistry between us had been palpable. I placed it in the centre of the bed, wedged between two plush pillows.

With trembling hands, I grabbed the card I had prepared to celebrate our special night and delicately slipped in the tiny love note I had written. With each item placed where I wanted, my heart fluttered faster, and my eyes filled with tears of joyous memories. This was perfection. We were perfection.

Lifting out a bottle of champagne and a box of his favourite chocolates, I set them on his bedside table for us to enjoy together later. With that, I've finished my preparations.

I wanted to make sure Lennox's return to touring after such a long hiatus is truly unforgettable. Making this night a one-of-a-kind experience was my goal; something he would never forget. I took one last look around the room and decided I had done enough. Understated, pretty, but sure to make an impact and send the right message to him.

I picked up my bag and proceeded to the door. Being cautious, I peered out into the hallway to make sure there was no one around to spot me and spoil the surprise for Lennox before I quickly exited the room.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

I stood there on the stage, my arms spread wide before taking a bow. The sound of the crowd was vibrating through me; whistles, cheers, thousands chanting my name. This was the only drug I would need from now on, my only future fix. It was intense and breathtaking, and worth every second of the hard work I had put in to get here.

When I walked off the stage, I felt as though I was floating on a soft cloud, the sounds of adulation carrying me weightlessly towards the backstage crew. There I was met with pats on the back all until I reached the tour manager Carl.

“Jesus Christ, Lennox, that was off the charts amazing!”

I beamed at his words, feeling a heady mix of pride and humility. I wasn’t so cocky to believe I couldn’t fall from these lofty heights at any given moment.

“Come on, fella.” Carl grinned and ushered me in the direction of the stage door where a car waited to take me back to the hotel. This was what I lived for—sharing my lyrics with people, having the music inspire emotions in them. I felt like I was being the truest version of myself I could be, and that feeling was priceless.

When I finally got back to the hotel my head was still spinning. The crowd had been amazing; they had been warm, welcoming, and seemed to love my new songs even more than they ever did when I was in the boy band. It had been fifteen years since I had last been on tour, and a lot had changed in that time. I had changed in that time.

Back then I was riding high on the crest of a wave made from boy band fame and fortune. And I crashed lower than the pits of hell on the other side of it. I might have only been seventeen and very naïve when I joined the band, but I was old enough to

know I was bisexual. Even as that inexperienced teenager, I had still had a couple of boyfriends and a girlfriend.

My background had been vetted by the PR team for the record label, and they had decided since I had a girlfriend when I joined the band, it would make more sense if I didn't mention I was bi. Instead, they pushed the heteronormative version of myself 'for the fans.'

My immaturity was proven because I agreed; the fame and the band were more important. Until I discovered very quickly it wasn't. I was utterly fucking miserable and took to self-medicating those feelings away.

Initially, it didn't seem that bad. I was the life and soul of every party – and I went to a lot of parties. But that made it so much easier to dismiss. It wasn't that I was downing as much alcohol as I could in a night and trying to convince myself I didn't actually have a problem; I was only drinking to be social. I was only drinking because it was fun. At least it was only booze and not something actually dangerous like drugs.

That was until I crashed and burned. I had been skirting the edges of a breakdown for months. Not being able to be myself was just too much. The alcohol wasn't doing what it was meant to anymore, and I signed myself into rehab.

Mickie, the manager of the band, had insisted I didn't actually have any problems with alcohol. He was intent on the lie that I was merely burned out from the pressures of being on tour for so long. The official story was that I was suffering from stress and exhaustion. The management tried so hard to cover up the actual problem, all in the name of 'protecting the band'.

As well as teaching me how to break free from the demon booze, one of the other things rehab taught us was to remove the toxicity in our lives because it would only

hinder our recovery and could make us more prone to a relapse. A lightbulb moment occurred one counselling session when my psychologist questioned why I had started to drink as heavily as I had.

Knowing that I had to be honest, I came out to him as bisexual. I explained what had been said to me, all for the sake of looking out for the band's image. He looked at me and said, "And who was looking out for you, Lennox? Don't respond to that now, take some time to really think about the answer, and we can discuss it in your next session."

His question started me thinking about everyone who had ever told me to go against being myself. Thinking about who had been looking out for me, and the conclusion I came to was no one – not even myself.

I left the band the next day and vowed I was done with the music industry and all its fakery. It was a trauma so great for our fans, the record label had to set up a helpline to support them through their grief. That cemented it had been the right move for me; while the fans got a helpline, I had zero contact from anyone in the band, the management team, or the record label. Apparently, there wasn't an ounce of concern for me. I'd been written off as a selfish wanker who walked away from them.

But here I was fifteen years later, sober for the last twelve and bouncing off the walls because of the love, respect, and energy amplified at me when I was on stage. I pulled out my key card, opened the door to my suite and walked in.

The second I turned on the light, something felt off. As soon as I walked into the bedroom that feeling was validated. Instantly the joy and love I felt after the concert was replaced with a sense of fear and dread. My mouth dried, my stomach sank, and a cold sweat broke out over me.

The first thing that caught my eye was the bottle of champagne sitting on the bedside

table. The rose petals all over the bed were next, and lastly, the photo frame – a picture of me and a fan from what must have been seventeen years ago. I see the card sitting in front of it and I don't need to lift it to know who it is from.

My disgusted curiosity got the better of me, though, and I grabbed the card she had placed in front of the picture of us. I let out a long puff of air in an attempt to give myself time to change my mind about opening the card. Biting my lip, I turned the envelope over and pulled at the overlapped section of paper.

The card itself was harmless enough, a cheerful 'congratulations' message across the front with bright, bold writing and shiny foil embossed balloons and streamers. Inside there was something just that little more intimidating. When I opened the card a folded-up note fell onto the floor. Stooping to pick it up, I could feel the bile start to rise.

This wasn't the first time I had heard from Natasha. She had been getting more and more daring in her contact, but I never believed she would go to this extreme. Thinking of her here in the room where I was meant to be sleeping made my blood run cold. Carefully, I unfolded the note and sat on the arm of the sofa by the bed to read what was inside.

My darling Lennox,

I can't begin to tell you how proud I am of you for getting back on the road again and starting touring. It's where you belong; on stage, shining like the beacon of perfection that you are. You have an amazing gift, and I am so glad to see you finally sharing it with the world again. It's where you belong, out in the spotlight with all of your adoring fans there to cheer you on.

And I want to be cheering you on, my darlin'. I will be in the audience tonight watching you, waiting for the moment when you sing me our song. I know that you

said in an interview that you wrote it for someone who was incredibly special to you, and that you lost them because of your drinking, but I just wanted you to know that you haven't lost me. I'm still here. I'm always here waiting for you, my love.

I know that the day we can be together is getting closer and closer and I'm looking forward to it so much. When a love is as strong and beautiful as ours, you know it can never be denied. We are made for each other. Soulmates. I know you feel the same way about me as I do about you, it's all there in our song.

It won't be long, my love.

All my love, now and always,

Your Natasha xox

The letter was trembling. Realisation hit me; it wasn't the letter quaking, it was me. I didn't know how to react to her words. She had always been a little over the top, but it had never been like this. If I was honest, in the past she didn't seem the type to go to this extreme.

My thoughts focused on the song she was talking about. It wasn't our song. Hell, it wasn't even about a romantic relationship, or even about a relationship with a woman. I wrote the song about a close friend I made in rehab, a friend who, after several years of being sober, relapsed.

We had bonded over fame, self-medicating, and being stuck in the closet. When he fell off the wagon, he never got back on it, and despite pleading with him to get help, he didn't. He was dead within a year, his liver just couldn't take it, and I lost one of the few people in this world that really understood just what I had been through. That's what 'our' song was.



Doing the only thing that I could think of in that moment, I pulled out my phone and called Alex. “Umm, I’m honestly not sure how to deal with this, but I think we need to call the police,” I blurted out the second he answered the phone.

“Lennox? What’s happened?”

“Someone has broken into my hotel room.” I sighed and licked my lips, attempting to get some moisture back into my mouth.

“Lennox, are you okay? Are you in danger?”

My cheeks puffed out as I thought about how to tell Alex exactly what had been happening lately. “This isn’t the first time something has happened, but until today, I didn’t think it was anything serious. But this...it seems like it’s escalating, and it’s kinda fucking scary, mate.”

There was a muffled call for Johnny, Alex’s partner, bandmate, and the co-owner of the record label I was signed with.

The next voice I heard was Johnny’s. “Don’t touch anything, okay?” While he phrased it as a question, I knew from his tone it was more of a command. “I’m going to call Carl now, and you’re going to go to his room and stay there until Alex tells you that it’s all good, okay? I’m going to pass you back to him now.”

“Uh huh,” I murmured, unable to really take in everything that had been happening this evening.

While Alex spoke, I could hear Johnny on his phone in the background, making calls, barking orders and generally taking control. “Why didn’t you tell us there was stuff happening? We’re here to look out for you, Lennox.”

I shook my head. I didn't know how to answer that one. I guess it was because I thought there was nothing to actually be worried about. I was familiar with love-crazed fans, because twenty years ago it would have been played off as nothing, and any suggestion of anything else would have been dismissed as an overreaction.

"I didn't think it was anything to really tell you about. You know how fans can be," I admitted.

I heard the tone of Alex's voice change. "Oh yeah, I know exactly how they can be," he acknowledged softly.

"It's been silly cards and notes. They were all sent to the post office box I have set up. The closer it got to the tour, the worse it seemed to get, but all still fairly innocuous. Bunches of flowers, boxes of chocolates, things like that, but they were showing up in places I didn't think people knew I was at."

There was a muffled conversation at the other end of the phone and Alex came back to me to tell me everything was sorted and to go to the room of Carl, the tour manager.

"Come in, come in." Carl ushered me in the second I knocked on his door. "Johnny called me. He's handling it all for you. There's a private investigator on the case, and he's going to liaise between us and the police. He's been talking about a bodyguard too."

I scoffed at the notion of needing someone to babysit me. "It's not that bad is it? Do I really need a babysitter?"

Carl looked at me blankly. "You've had notes, gifts, and now they've been in your actual hotel room. Is that something that you think you should be risking, mate?"

Admitting defeat, I flopped onto the sofa in his room, my shoulders sagging, my head down. “No, probably not,” I conceded.

“Order yourself some room service, and I’ll get back on the phone with Johnny and Alex. We’ll get all this figured out, okay?”

Food was the furthest thing from my mind, but my stomach growled at the mention of it. I had to acknowledge that, perhaps, it was something I needed.

When the police finally knocked on the door two hours later, I had worn a track in the carpet pacing back and forth, feeling like a caged tiger, wondering what the hell was going to happen next.

The officer strode in and outstretched their hand to me. “Mr Love.” He nodded. “So, we have been to your room and it seems as though it was just the items that you had seen that were left in the room and nothing else. No one was still in there, and there wasn’t anything we would term as particularly sinister.”

I nodded blankly. Had they expected to find more? Could there have been someone in my room I hadn’t noticed? Would there be the next time? A chill ran through me and goosebumps pebbled all over my skin as I tried to concentrate on what the policeman was saying.

“Now, I’ve been made aware this isn’t the first thing you’ve experienced from this person, is that correct?”

I nodded my head. “Uh, yes, there have been other things, but honestly, it’s show business, isn’t it? I didn’t think much of it. When I was in a boy band when I was younger, we had so many things sent to us. Some of them were pretty out there, so I foolishly just dismissed it at first.”

“I understand. If you have any examples of that prior contact, it could be helpful in locating the person, or persons, involved.”

Something about his comment struck me more than anything else and made me feel even more on edge. “You think there could be more than one person? Really?”

The officer shook his head and held up his hand. “I didn’t mean to alarm you, Mr Love. In our experience, more than one suspect can be the case.”

I puffed out my cheeks and exhaled as I started to pace up and down the floor again. “Right.” I nodded in a daze. “Can I go back to my room now?”

Carl interrupted before the officer had a chance to speak. “It’s okay. you’re going to take my suite here and I’m going to get another room. Johnny thought it would be better given the circumstances.”

The words washed over me, but I wasn’t sure I was actually taking any of them in. Had I really been ignoring something that was this much of a threat? Was this really happening? This was the first night of a life changing tour for me, and the high I had felt from it had come crashing down in a heartbeat. This wasn’t how I thought things would be when I started my return to the music industry.

As I continued to try and process all of this, Carl took over. He talked to the officer and arranged everything that needed to be organised and handed over to them as evidence. I heard him thank them for their help on the matter.

“I know that this probably isn’t what you want to hear, Mr Love, but it might be a good idea if you perhaps arranged yourself some personal protection. Maybe think about getting a bodyguard or something.”

I stared at the police officer and they winced at my expression. He nodded in

acknowledgement of my fears. Not at any time in the twelve years I had been sober had I ever wanted a drink more than I did at this moment. I was in hell.

Maybe this wasn't the best move for me after all. Maybe I should be cancelling the tour until this was all sorted out.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

Private security had been the most sensible idea for me once I retired from the Army. I say retired, but what I meant was once I was of an age where I felt I'd done enough. I'd enlisted in Her Majesty's Army when I was just sixteen, and as clichéd as it sounded, it had been the making of me.

I'd learned a lot of skills, been through a lot of rough situations, and met some interesting people. I'd also made some decent connections in a few helpful places.

Security was the perfect profession for someone like me, and it was proving pretty lucrative too. It also gave me a great way to help guys just like me. As soon as their feet hit civvy street, I was able to offer them somewhere to use their interesting range of skills.

I had worked for 45RPM Records a few times now. The first had been when they stepped up their personal security after the nasty incident with Alex's ex. Aside from that, everything with them over the last few years had been fairly routine.

From what Johnny described on the phone, it seemed as though one of the musicians they had signed was experiencing a bit of trouble with a stalker. It sounded like it was escalating too, and that was never a good sign. I was glad he had called me when he did.

I had the perfect guy in mind for the role; Levi. He was a new recruit, expert marksman, an E5 of Krav Maga, covert specialist, and fluent in several languages. He was genuinely lethal, but so unassuming; he blended beautifully into the background and no one would ever know he was security. Perfect if we wanted to actually catch this stalker in the act.

The man that walked in with Alex was not what I had been expecting at all. This man was at least six feet tall, slim but athletic build, with floppy curls framing his face. He had dark soulful eyes that looked like they hadn't seen sleep in a week. The fact he broke the stereotype I had assumed would be walking in here, mixed with how lost he looked, spoke to me. Something in my body yearned to connect with him.

Johnny smiled and introduced us. "Lennox Love, this is Tom Thatcher. He owns the security firm we hired to deal with all Spitfire Junction's security."

I held out my hand for him to shake and was caught off guard to feel a warm tingling radiating up my arm and into my body from every point his skin made contact with mine. "Nice to meet you. Sorry about the circumstances."

He grimaced and all thoughts of Levi being the right guy to take the lead on this assignment went right out the window. After the reaction Lennox had just inspired in me, I was going to be the lead bodyguard on this case.

"It's all good." I smiled warmly back at him. "It's your protection I'm here for."

Lennox's eyes met mine and seemed to search for something and then looked away. "Thank you."

I didn't miss the almost negligible side eye offered to me by my friend Johnny. I gave him a slight eyebrow raise as a challenge and whatever he had been implying was dropped as quickly as it was raised.

Lennox sat opposite me with Alex beside him and Johnny at the head of the conference table.

"So, last night Lennox had an uninvited visitor to his hotel room while he wasn't there. The police were called, as was Eric Mullan."

Agreeing with the decision to bring Eric in on this, I nodded. He was a damn good investigator and the more information we had on whoever this was, the more equipped we would be. Sure, the cops were on it, but with how under-resourced they were these days, it was better for Lennox's safety that Johnny and Alex went that extra mile for their latest signing.

"Who's Eric Mullan?" Lennox interrupted.

"A private investigator, best I've worked with," I interjected before Johnny could say anything. "When is he hoping to have data back to you?" My eyes didn't leave Lennox until the last word, even though I was addressing Johnny.

"He thought it would be a few days."

"Any more gigs before that?"

Lennox answered, "There's one tomorrow. If it's as bad as you guys think it could be, shouldn't we be cancelling these? Or rescheduling them?"

I shook my head. "Negative, right now our best defence is the fact that she doesn't know we're looking for her."

Lennox eyed me with suspicion. "I'm not sure how comfortable I feel about being bait, Mr Thatcher."

I adorned my best smile and attempted to turn on the charm. "No, you completely misunderstand my meaning here. You won't be anyone's bait. When pressure is placed on a subject who is already escalating, it can cause them to panic. They then move forward faster or derail completely and do something dangerous, ill advised, and ultimately someone always gets hurt. If they don't know that we're aware of them, they continue with whatever plan they have to their own timescale which is



infinitely safer for you. Plus, it gives us a much better hand to play.”

Lennox looked at me like he didn’t believe a word I’d just said. Johnny and Alex didn’t look like they did either.

“Look,” I tried to explain it further, “if you had a plan, and thought that I might stop you, you’d panic, you’d change your plans, and you’d take risks. Risks are what get people hurt.”

Johnny smirked at me. “Lennox, I know he sounds like he’s talking out of his arse right now, and that he’s being very flippant and blasé about your safety, but I would trust this man with Alex’s life. He’s that good at his job.”

Alex smiled sympathetically at Lennox and nodded his agreement with his partner’s statement. “He might not be good at describing why and how he knows what he does, but if we thought he would put you or anyone else at risk, we simply wouldn’t hire him.”

“I wouldn’t be as successful and trusted as I am in this business if I didn’t know what I was doing,” I added. This first meeting with a client wasn’t going anything like it usually would. Maybe I should have just been leaving this one to Levi. No, that’s definitely not happening.

I put both my hands up in the air as a symbol of surrender. “Look, give me forty-eight hours to protect you. At the end of that time, if you’re not happy with the protection you’re given, I will assign someone else to take over your case. Deal?”

Lennox’s gaze left me feeling like I was being put under a microscope.

“Okay,” he agreed.

Internally I sighed with relief. I didn't know why I needed him to trust me, or why I needed to be near him, but I had an inexplicable desire to find out.

“Guys, can you give me some time with Lennox so I can find out what exactly has been happening with him and this stalker?” Alex and Johnny agreed and left us to it. “So, do you want to talk me through everything about you and this hotel room visitor?”

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

I honestly wasn't sure where to begin telling Tom what had happened with me and my super fan. "Well, I know who she is. I mean I know of her." Figuring the most obvious place was the beginning, I started to explain exactly where I had first met up with Natasha.

"She was a fan of the boy band I was in and I met her once about fifteen years ago. It was an event that had been organised by the official fan club. She won a competition to have a date night with all five of us."

Tom took out a notebook and a pen and started to scribble down anything of value. "Did anything happen while she was with you all, between you or any of the other members of the band?"

"Christ no," I dismissed, shaking my head. "She was a child, nothing at all happened with her. We each gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and we draped an arm over her shoulder as we posed for photos of the evening for her. Nothing else."

Tom nodded to confirm he was listening.

"Her name is Natasha Gibson, and she is very much obsessed with me."

He put his pen down and looked at me with an intensity that made me uncomfortable. "There was nothing that ever happened with you which could have triggered her obsession? And let me make something very clear before you answer, I'm not here to judge you, I'm here to help you. To do that I need to know everything, even if you think it's not something you should be sharing."

Knowing what was at stake, I wouldn't dream of hiding anything from Tom. "Not a thing. The only contact I have ever had with her is that one time I've mentioned. She's not my type. Believe me."

For a moment there was a hint of something on Tom's face, like he was going to ask more about it but had instantly thought better of it.

"So, what was the first contact you've had with her recently?"

I thought about it. It had been so easy to overlook the initial interaction with her because at the time it really was innocent. "Umm, I guess it would have been a congratulations card that came in after the news I had been signed by 45RPM broke. I have a post office box for any fan mail."

More notes were written. "And then?"

My cheeks puffed out with a sigh as I tried to remember the next thing I had received from Natasha. "A birthday gift three months later. There was a stuffed bear and a card, again that came in via the mailbox."

"And what's the standard way mail like that is handled?"

"It comes in and gets opened by an assistant. We have a few standard little cards which we reply with. They're printed out postcards, but they have a little message on them from me, and it's made to look like I wrote it."

"A nice touch for your fans, I'm sure they love it. But in this case, it probably made it easier to fixate on you. She might have been able to convince herself that the card really was from you. That she was someone special."

The thought I had done anything to make this worse made my blood run cold,

especially when I was only trying to honour the support from fans. I nodded absently. “That might be something we need to look at going forward. I really don’t want this kind of thing happening again.”

Tom looked at me sympathetically. “I think with the nature of your job, things like this are something that may keep coming up. But we can certainly look at how to protect you from them and try to dissuade any attention like this in the future.”

The fact there could be more problems after this hadn’t crossed my worried mind. Did he really think this could keep happening? Had I been so naïve about this when I was in the band, because I had thought nothing like this had happened before? Or was it just that the management had been very good at hiding it all from us?

Tom seemed to understand what I was thinking, and he smiled. “It’s not something to be concerned about,” he explained. “I’m not going to let anything happen to you.”

I didn’t know what it was about the way he made his promise, but it seemed to soothe the raw and worried nerves within me. Despite the comments he had made to reassure me the concerts should go ahead, and how nonchalant he had initially seemed, that one simple statement of not letting anything happen to me, washed all my fears away.

“Mr Thatcher,” I started.

“Please, call me Tom. We will need to work together closely, and calling me Mr Thatcher seems far too formal for that,” he interrupted with a warm smile.

“Okay,” I continued. “Tom, I need you to be honest with me. How bad do you think this can really get?”

“Honestly?”

I nodded.

“In an ideal world, I’d have been on board sooner and none of this would have got this far. But the fact that you’re acting on it now is something that can only work in your favour. The limit this person is willing to go to, to achieve her end goal is something we won’t actually know until we have more information about her. I promise you one thing, Lennox. We will be ready for her, and nothing is going to happen to you.”

Again, his words seemed to give me comfort where I wasn’t even aware I needed it. I didn’t know if it was the lack of sleep or the extra time needed to process just what the fuck was going on, but the gravity of the situation had started to crush me.

“So, what happens now?” I asked, needing to distract myself.

Tom scratched his brow and looked at me. “Well, the idea is that you and I pretty much become stuck together like glue. If you’re in a hotel, you’re in a suite with two bedrooms, or interconnecting rooms. If you’re on stage, I’m just behind the wings. If you need transport anywhere, we take my car and I drive.”

“That sounds,” I searched for the right word, “intimate.”

His steely grey eyes sparkled in what I read as amusement. “It can be somewhat, yes, but there’s more we need to cover here before we get to that part.”

I wasn’t sure how I really felt about that. The man’s attractiveness was not lost on me, but I also didn’t want to make this any more complicated than it already was. I didn’t want to sound dramatic about it, but the fear in me didn’t want to dwell on the fact my life could actually be on the line. Thinking about it like that took way too much out of me and after how little sleep I’d had the night before, I didn’t have the energy in me to spare.

Needing to distract myself I changed the subject a little. “So, what more do you need to know?”

“What was the first thing that wasn’t sent to your post office box and where was it delivered to instead?”

“It was flowers. A big bright bunch came to the independent studio I use, close to my home.”

“Does anyone know you use that location? Was it reported anywhere?”

I shook my head. “I don’t think so. I wasn’t aware of anything.” I couldn’t think of anyone who knew I used that particular one, even Alex and Johnny had assumed I would work in their buildings.

Using the independent studio was part of my therapy in the last few years, long before I was back on the music scene. I hadn’t seen anyone hanging around outside. There were none of the usual paps standing about outside. I guess that didn’t really mean anything in the grand scheme of things in the days of telephoto lenses and tip offs. I didn’t know anyone who worked there who would do that. I trusted them.

Tom made more notes, and I was suddenly aware of the fact that all the information he was getting here would be checked on. I made a point of trying to avoid the news stories about me. The British tabloid press was absolutely relentless in their hounding of people, and it really felt more like you were being hunted. I was so focused on my recovery and everything I had going on to make me a better version of myself that I hadn’t thought about any of it for a second.

“I have to be honest with you, Tom. I try to avoid the press as much as I can. I try not to be anywhere that might get me in the papers. If I do happen to actually end up being snapped, I try to make sure I don’t look at any of the stories and the bullshit

they write, because honestly, half the lies they print aren't true."

He smirked at my joke. "Noted. I can't say I blame you on that one either. I saw first hand just how they could be with how they tortured Alex over that dickhead Phillips. I'll be making sure we know exactly where they are and what they're saying from here on out, however."

I gestured my acknowledgement of his comments.

"I'll be checking up on it to see if there was a potential leak around that time. I'm kind of hoping it was in the press, and she was just opportunistic instead of any other possibility."

"That she's been following me around you mean?"

Tom's mouth pulled into a grim line, and I took it as his confirmation that was exactly what he'd been thinking.

"Right." The thought of being followed made the bile rise into my throat. Suddenly my head felt light, and the room started to spin.

Before I registered what was happening, Tom was in the chair beside me and had a hold of my hand. "Hey, hey – take a deep breath in through your nose." He took a huge sniff in, flaring out his nostrils. "Out through your mouth." He exhaled deeply. "Come on, Lennox," he encouraged.

Somehow, I found the will to copy his breathing, and the world stopped spinning just a little bit.

His other hand settled on my shoulder. "That's it. It's okay, you're just having a moment of panic and anxiety. This will pass, just keep focusing on your breathing. In



and out. In and out. That's it."

He had just talked me down from a panic attack I wasn't even aware was starting. He was at my side so quickly I hadn't even noticed it. Something about that soothed me more than his actions and him getting me to work through some breathing techniques. Any doubt I'd had about this man's ability to keep me safe disappeared in that single moment.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

I left Lennox in the safety of the record label's offices and went back to my house to pack a bag and collect some essentials. I needed to have a little chat with Eric to see just what was going on with the investigation too.

I pulled my BMW into the closest empty spot to his office before I walked up to the main entrance. I pressed the buzzer on the intercom. "Mullan Investigations, how can I help you?"

"Hi Glenda, it's Tom Thatcher. Is Eric in?"

The door buzzed to allow me entry, and I went straight in and up the stairs to the office.

"Hello Mr Thatcher." Glenda greeted me with a smile when I entered. "He's just in there, he's expecting you."

I nodded and thanked her.

Eric smiled and kept talking on his phone, gesturing for me to come in and take a seat when I peered around the door of his office. "Thanks Billy, I appreciate that, I'll await your call." He hung up and set his phone back on the cradle. "That was my ear to the ground checking in. He'll have more information for me in a few hours. He's sending over the initial info now." Eric pressed a button on the phone cradle and Glenda answered. "There's a few emails coming in from Bill Jefferies, send it all over to Tom's email too, would you? And can you bring me in another coffee next time you're making yourself one, I'm desperate here."

She laughed and agreed, hanging up without saying anything else.

“Initial reports are she’s on her own with this and appears to be both insanely lucky, and incredibly resourceful.”

“Any history of mental illness?” I shouldn’t make such assumptions, but I had been in this job long enough to know that sometimes it was the obvious answer to the question of why.

“Not that we know of yet. It’ll be a few days before we can get her medical records. What we do know is that she’s a thirty-two-year-old divorcee, no kids, no partner to speak of at the minute. She seems to come across on paper as a very average woman.”

“Average people don’t make a habit of becoming stalkers though, do they?”

Eric sighed. “That they don’t. Who have you got on the job?”

“Me.” I busied myself with picking imaginary fluff off my jacket and didn’t make eye contact with Eric. His silence forced me to look up. “I know usually I don’t do this kind of thing, but everyone else is busy so there isn’t much else I can do.”

Eric didn’t buy my answer, but he was polite enough to not comment on it. It had been almost a year since I had taken on an assignment. To be honest, it wasn’t that I couldn’t do it, it was just that it made my life much easier to farm the assignments out to those on my staff. It was becoming too much of a habit.

“I haven’t done it for a while, so I figured it wouldn’t hurt to keep myself fresh,” I explained. Jesus, man, stop talking. “Anyway, I’ve left the client back at the 45RPM offices, so I should make a move.” I stood, thanked Eric for his time, and asked him to keep me up to date with anything else he found out. Day or night, I needed to know

everything that he could tell me.

Two hours later, Lennox was sitting beside me in my car as we headed towards the centre of Birmingham and his next concert. We were booked into a hotel with adjoining rooms; Lennox still wasn't sure of that, and I could feel his concern in every question he asked. I couldn't blame him, the situation he had found himself in wasn't exactly something that inspired thoughts of everything going well. He probably thought about all the famous faces who'd had stalkers. Hell, what happened to the Welsh singer Duffy came to my mind when I initially heard one of 45RPMs acts was in trouble with a stalker and a hotel room break-in.

It was one of the biggest things I learned from my time in the Army and the protection business: people were fucking sickos and freaks when they put their minds to it enough. I doubted the person stalking Lennox was going to prove to be any different.

The miles on the M40 passed in silence and by the time we were passing Bicester it was starting to drive me insane. "So, how did you find yourself in a boy band?" I asked, trying to break the silence.

Lennox's gaze on the Oxfordshire countryside didn't waiver, but a slight smile pulled at the corners of his mouth. "Uh, it was a talent show. I was seventeen years old, and I was mad enough to try and win the judges over. Auditions went well, but they figured the few of us they had let through in our mid to late teens were probably too young to go forward solo, so they teamed up five of us. I was one of them, and the rest as they say is history."

"Thrown in at the deep end, huh?"

He glanced in my direction. "Something like that. What about you? How did you get into personal protection?"

I puffed out my cheeks as I exhaled. “Short version of the story? I left the army, couldn’t find any comfort in the standard nine to five of civilian life, and I knew friends had gone into the field in Kuwait. That seemed a little more mercenary than I wanted to get involved with, but it did spark the idea of similar work here in the UK with people who really needed someone to look out for them, and my business was born. Now I work with other ex-forces personnel, and we look after even more people.”

He nodded in appreciation of my story. “Is everyone you protect famous?”

I laughed. “Famous no, but they need to have a certain amount of income to be able to afford my rates.”

“Oh.”

I glanced over at him as he stared out the window again.

“Don’t get me wrong. I’m not talking about ripping people off, or only being available to the very wealthy. But what I do isn’t a simple nine to five position. If I’m on an assignment like this for example, I’m never not working. Should you need me at three in the morning because you can hear someone trying to get into your hotel room, or whatever it happens to be, I’m there.”

He looked back over to me. “How do you not burn out?”

No one I had ever served protection for had ever voiced a single concern about me and my ability to handle my work. It was somewhat refreshing to be seen as an actual human being, not just the hired help.

“When I was first in the business, I smoked a little too much, and I drank a little too much. But then I realised that the mental health of me and my team was paramount

given the work we were doing, and I hired someone to be our in-house counsellor. She talks to us when we need it throughout the assignments, and she's a key part of the debriefing process we have."

"No one on my team will ever go from one assignment straight into the next. We always have a period of at least two weeks where we can decompress and take time out before we go back out again. Unless, of course, it's one of our more routine jobs. One guy, Ian, he's basically just a driver for a diplomat rather than a specific security detail, but he's got the ability to act instantly should everything ever happen. He's constantly looking out to see if they are being followed. He's trained in evasive action, but there isn't anything overly stressful about that particular assignment."

"And how did you get this assignment?"

"I wanted it," I answered a little too quickly. "I have been too busy with the day to day running of the business and keeping everyone up to date on all their licences, and training, and everything else that applies to a business like this. I didn't want to be in a situation where I was too rusty to take on a role myself, so this is me out here doing what the guys are doing."

"How long has it been since you were last on assignment?"

"Not as long as you'd think." I grinned at him. "It's actually only been about nine months. The last assignment I did basically grew the business's reputation and I needed to focus on having more bodyguards to be able to handle all the new business that wanted to come my way."

"Is that what you call yourself then? A bodyguard?"

I shrugged. "A minder, bodyguard, babysitter, whatever title you think fits the role best is all good with me."

Again, Lennox's gaze drifted off to the world whizzing past outside. "How long do you think I'll need you for?"

"As long as it takes, I'm here." I wanted to reassure him that I wasn't going anywhere. "Right now, we have a lot of work to do to find out more about Natasha and just what it is that she's up to. Until we do that, we can't even begin to start anticipating the moves she's going to make next."

"How far do you think this will all go? Do you think my life really is in danger?" The fear in his voice was clear, and it pulled at my heart to hear it.

"I think we have no way of knowing until we find out more about her. But I'll make you this promise now, Lennox, I'm not about to let anything happen to you. That's just a fact."

He let out a huge sigh and murmured, "I really hope that's the case."

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By the time we arrived at the hotel in Birmingham, I was exhausted and then some. Tom took care of everything. He checked us in, he took our bags himself, scoped out everything in the rooms before he let me go in and get settled.

“I have a meeting with the hotel manager and some more members of my security team in about five minutes. I’ll introduce you to them all later. You need to be familiar with the faces that you’re going to be able to trust for a while. You get yourself settled and I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Can I order room service?” I wasn’t sure of the rules yet, or what would be deemed as safe.

Tom smiled. “Yes, call and get food. When I get downstairs, I’ll arrange for one of my guys to bring it up to you. His name is Levi, he’s about four inches shorter than you, blonde hair, green eyes, looks totally unassuming, average build. If the person bringing your food doesn’t look like that, don’t open the door. You ask them to leave it outside and you call me. Give me your phone.”

I didn’t hesitate for a second in handing over my phone to him. He was strong and forceful, and there was something about him which made me feel safer than I had done in weeks.

He handed it back to me and held it for a second longer than necessary to ensure he had my attention. “Close the door tight after me and lock it. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

I nodded, following him to the door and bolted it behind him. Flopping back down on



the bed, I had a browse of the menu to try and decide what it was I wanted, but the layers of tension that had accumulated were hard to ignore. I decided to relax in the bath first.

Sitting on the edge of the tub, I turned the taps on and watched as the water poured into the bath. I grabbed the tiny complimentary bottle of bubble bath from the countertop around the sink and poured it all into the warm water.

I went back into the room to dig through my bag, grabbing some fresh underwear and joggers which I left to the side of the sink. I put my phone onto charge by the bed and went back into the bathroom. Stripping off I turned off the taps, tested the water temperature, and slowly lowered my exhausted frame into the soothing warm bubbles.

My whole being was grateful I was finally getting some much needed rest. After washing my hair and body, I allowed myself to sink back into the bubbles and close my eyes.

I remember nothing else until there was a loud bang and I was vaguely aware of someone calling my name. The door of the bathroom flew open, and Tom bounced around the door. “Lennox?”

My mouth and nose slipped under the water, and I coughed myself back to full consciousness.

“Lennox? Are you okay?”

I nodded, sitting myself up straighter in the tub, rubbing my hands over my face before realising I was still naked and dropping my hands to my lap to cover my modesty.

“Sorry, I must have fallen asleep,” I admitted sheepishly, feeling heat starting to rise in my cheeks.

“I did call but you didn’t answer. I needed to check you were okay,” he explained.

I nodded, swallowing my embarrassment and thinking about my stupidity; I could have easily accidentally drowned myself in the bath, simply by falling asleep. “I’m sorry for panicking you.”

Tom held up his hands in surrender. “No, it’s okay, it’s not surprising you’re exhausted after everything. I’m sorry for bursting in on you. I’ll just be...” His voice trailed off and he gestured back out of the bathroom before leaving and closing the door behind him without another word.

I sighed and drew in another breath, holding it before I allowed myself to immerse completely under the water. Christ, I was a fucking moron. Once I felt my lungs burning with a need for air, I pulled myself back up and wiped the water from my face with my hand.

Dried off and clothed, I shook my head and left the bathroom. Tom was setting out the food that had been delivered. It was pretty much a selection of most items on their small room service menu.

“I assumed you still wouldn’t have eaten anything, so I got them to bring up a bit of everything they did,” he explained. “For what it’s worth, a bath while you’re that exhausted might not be the smartest move. At least not without someone else in the room to keep checking on you.”

My cheeks felt like they were starting to burn all over again. “Sorry, I just wanted to finally relax.”

Tom grinned. “If you can relax, then I’m doing my job right. That’s a good thing, don’t apologise for that. Just tell me next time, so I can be here to check on you in case you fall asleep.”

I nodded.

“Now, can I interest you in anything here?” He gestured at the selection of hot and cold food spread out across the table in my room.

My stomach growled in reply, and I bit my bottom lip thinking about what it was I had last eaten. Properly before the concert. Carl had attempted to get me to eat last night after the room invasion, but I had barely picked over what was there. Right now, I was starving, and the fact Tom had been courteous enough to order a bit of everything and made sure I was eating was comforting to say the least.

I grabbed the empty plate he held out for me, and I lifted a bit of everything that looked delicious until I had a full platter. Tom did the same and sat at the small table with two chairs arranged in front of the window.

The first bite sent me into foodgasmic heaven. “Oh, mmmmm!”

Tom wiped his thumb across his mouth with a grin at my reaction. “Sounds like you needed that as much as you needed the bath.”

With my mouth full of delicious food, all I could do was nod in agreement. I didn’t know if the food was actually that good, or if it was just that after so long without anything sensible in my stomach, my body was delighted I was feeding it. Either way, I was enjoying the feast in front of us, and I wasn’t ashamed to admit it.

After a few mouthfuls, Tom’s gaze in my direction started to feel like heat on my skin. “Sorry, I’m stuffing my face; I haven’t eaten properly since before last night’s

concert.”

He wiped his mouth with a napkin and sat back with a smirk. “I’m happy to see you enjoying your food. It’s all good with me.”

“Thank you for all this.”

He shrugged. “Not a problem.”

“Next time I’m taking a bath I’ll make sure I tell you first, and I’ll take my phone with me.”

“Thank you, that’d make life easier. I know this process is going to be quite intrusive, but it’s a necessary evil. I don’t mean to sound like I’m being a bossy bastard.”

I shook my head and put up a hand. “No, it’s fine, honestly. I totally understand what makes it a necessity. I promise to keep you informed of everything I’m doing when I’m not in your sight in future to make sure there are no misunderstandings or scares like this evening. I’m not here to try and make your job more difficult.”

He smiled, seemingly satisfied with my response. “So, now is as good a time as ever to go over the rules of this situation, I guess. If that’s okay with you?”

I gestured for him to continue.

“If you’re going anywhere, I would like to know ahead of time, and I will insist that I go with you. If you are taking a bath, going to bed, or whatever it happens to be, and I’m somewhere else in the building, I would ask that you tell me, and if it’s that you’re in the bath or shower, you take your phone with you in case anything comes up and I need to contact you.”

“All sounds sensible so far,” I agreed.

“If I’m not available, Levi will be instead. You met him earlier, and in London, remember?”

Taking another bite of food, I nodded.

“I will always be in the same suite or in an adjoining room, and I ask you not to lock any doors between us for your own safety.”

“Does that include the bathroom door?” I ask around a mouthful of food.

“Only if you’re going to make a habit of falling asleep in the bath.” He grinned back at me and for the first time that day I noticed he had a particularly nice smile. It was warm and genuine and something cheeky sparkled in the corner of his eyes when he did it.

I sat back in my chair, rubbing my bare stomach, stuffed with all the food I had feasted on. “Scouts honour.” I grinned back at him, attempting a terrible Scout salute to go with it.

He laughed. “Why do I feel like you were never in the Scouts?”

I feigned innocence and shrugged my shoulders.

His smile faded a little and his brows furrowed. “Why did you leave the boy band, if you don’t mind me asking?”

I shook my head. It wasn’t something that I hid from anyone. “Long story short, they didn’t allow me to be who I really was and it drove me to self-medicate with alcohol.”

“They?”

“The record label, the management team.” I sighed. “I’m bisexual, and even before I was in the band, I had had a boyfriend and a girlfriend or two, but they believed it was better for the band not to say that. They thought they could make more money if I was this straight guy who all the girls could fawn over. Only problem with that idea was the older I got, the more and more I was attracted to other men.

“I wanted to be a normal guy in my late teens and early twenties. I wanted to date, to experience life and be with whoever I wanted to. Not being able to do that really started to get to me. I started to not like myself. I started to not like the life I was living, and the secrets I was keeping. To compensate for that I started to drink. And then it was me drinking too much, but it wasn’t a problem, right? I mean I was just a social drinker; it wasn’t like I was an alcoholic, and at least it wasn’t drugs, right?”

Tom’s expression was one of simple compassion. There was no judgement or pity. It was refreshing to tell someone my truth and not have them look at me differently because of it. The ease with which I could talk to Tom about all this surprised me a little. It felt comforting, and yet at the same time bizarre to trust someone without hesitation like I could with him.

“Obviously, in reality, it was a big fucking problem. Something needed to change before it killed me, and I checked myself into rehab to try and get my life back to being my own.”

“I take it from the very fact that you’re here and back out in the music business you did exactly that?” he asked unobtrusively.

I ran my tongue over my lips to wet them before I continued, and I felt his eyes tracking the movement. “Well, I’ve been sober for twelve years now. When I quit the band, I lost four guys I thought were my best friends, but they dismissed me at the

time as being a selfish wanker. The management team was more worried about the fans than me, and the label dropped me like a stone. But I was free, and for the first time since before I went to that bloody audition my life was my own again. It felt damn good. Looking back on it all, who knows what the hell the guys in the band were told about the situation. I'm just saddened that not once did one of them ever reach out to me and ask about it."

His smile made me feel like he was proud of my actions. I knew that I was these days – of all the progress I had made in my life and now with my music again. I used to be so unsure of myself, to worry that I'd made the biggest mistake of my life. Maturity and distance from those events were always showing me that it wasn't necessary; I was doing well. I was thriving, and aside from the hiccup of the stalker, I was hoping that would continue.

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“What about you?”he asked. “Why did you join the Army?”

I chuckled when I thought about my answer. “I was sixteen and fucking stupid.”

Lennox snorted.

“Not in the way you would think,” I continued, “I was smart, but at some point around my fifteenth birthday I fell into the company of a couple of dickheads in school. Instead of keeping my head down and getting on with my GCSEs, I fucked around and skipped school to smoke and drink cheap cider like a complete waster.”

Lennox’s brows furrowed like he didn’t believe a word I was saying.

“I know, I don’t seem the type, right?” I laughed. “My uncle was a policeman; he told me to either get my shit together and make my mother proud or he would kick my ass. I decided that joining the Army and making something of myself was the most sensible way of doing that.”

Lennox smirked. “Did your mum approve?”

“Fuck no. She was convinced her only son was going to get himself killed and she would forever be worrying about me. At least until I got my first medal, and my first commendation, and then my first command. Then she sang a whole other story of how amazingly well her son was doing and how he was travelling all over the world.” I laughed thinking about a time Mum had been telling her bingo friends all about her officer son and how he was the boss of a group of other soldiers.



“How long have you been out of the Army?”

I sighed thinking about it because it made me feel old. “I was thirty-five when I got out, so seven years, and I’ve had my business for six years now.

Lennox’s eyes widened. “You certainly don’t look like a man in your forties!”

I could feel the heat radiating across my cheeks at his compliment. “Thank you. I try to look after myself as best I can. Ditching the cigarettes and booze helped with that.”

Lennox looked like he was considering whether to ask his next question or not. I smiled and took a guess at what it was.

“No, I wasn’t an alcoholic, but I was damn close the way I was going. Haven’t touched either in four years.”

He nodded. “I take it with the way your business demands your time there isn’t anyone waiting at home for you?”

I snorted. “Nah, Mr Right doesn’t even know I exist.”

Lennox looked at me in disbelief.

“What? Yes, your bodyguard is gay.”

He shook his head. “I guess I just assumed that an ex-Army guy was probably straight.”

“As a gay soldier, I let a lot of people assume exactly that, and told no one the truth about it, not really. Sure, I messed around with other gay recruits—we had ways of ending up in each other’s company—but it’s not something you can openly admit in

the Army. I mean, they try to say that you can be honest about how you are, but you and I both know what that's like and how people are bloody quick to tell you that it's better you don't."

Lennox's smile was soft and regretful and didn't quite reach his eyes. He knew only too well how it felt given what he had just told me.

I rarely shared details of my own sexuality. These days it wasn't so much that I hid it, it was just that I was so used to not disclosing it, it was a habit for me now. Something in me craved talking honestly with him though. It felt good to be working on a policy of full disclosure between us.

"These days I'm just too fucking busy. This business has been my baby and my life since I started it. It's finally at a point where I can offer work to fellow ex-Army like me, and I can take a back seat almost. I focus on getting the work in and leave the heavy lifting to the team."

Lennox looks at me with a glimmer of confusion on his face. "You don't usually do the security part of it yourself anymore?"

I sighed. "No, not usually. I will keep my hand in to ensure that I'm not getting old and rusty. I tend to be more behind the scenes these days. I mean, having my own business has to have some perks." I shrugged with a smirk.

"I see." Lennox smiled back, the twinkle in his dark eyes told me he might have a suspicion about something. But for whatever reason, he wasn't ready to voice it for now, and I appreciated that about him.

"So, tell me." I changed the subject. "What made you come back to the music industry after it burned you the first time?"

He laughed, and his whole face relaxed and lit up. It was delightful to watch. “I’m a glutton for punishment?” He sighed and ran his fingers through his loose curls.

“I guess it was like a part of me was missing. I needed to get back to it, and it sounds a bit silly given the music business is what started all my troubles with booze. But I suppose I thought about it for long enough and came to the conclusion that it wasn’t the music that was the problem. It was the people from the music business that I had been surrounded by.

“That’s why I went with Alex and Johnny, and their team at 45RPM Records. They are true to who they are, and they don’t piss around or hide, for better or worse I really respected that about them. I trusted they were the people to trust me enough to be myself too. No more hiding, no more bullshit, just me and the music I wanted to write that tells my story.”

He looked so serene when he was talking about his music. There was a passion within him, and he clearly enjoyed what he did. I admired that and recognised it within myself. It was a weird comparison, but I enjoyed my job. I thrived when busy and I ultimately loved the fact that I was helping people.

Without me and my business, people were in danger. It wasn’t something I liked to admit, because it made me sound like I was a cocky twat with a bit of a superhero complex, but it was the simple truth of it. Like this assignment now, without me, Lennox might well be in danger because of a woman who never quite got over her childhood crush. My brow furrowed as I thought about it and Lennox noticed.

He tilted his head and fixed me with a stare. “What happened there?”

“Huh?” I tried to deny that I had any idea what he was talking about.

“That look,” he said, waving a finger in front of my face. “You were listening and

then a thought crossed your mind, and you clearly didn't like it."

In a split second, I decided not to lie to him. We were starting on a bed of truths and might as well keep it that way. "I was just thinking that you clearly love your work, and I thought about how I love mine."

He was studying my face. Part of me wanted to flinch away from his attention, part of me wanted to bask in it.

"Makes me sound like a cock if I say that I like the risky business of personal protection, but I do. Then I thought about the job I have here with you and the danger that might involve, and it brought me back into work mode I guess."

He bit his lips and absently nodded, clearly contemplating what it was I had said. "Do you think she could be that dangerous?"

"I won't let her be." I wasn't sure it was the most appropriate response to someone I was meant to be looking after, and barely knew, but it seemed right to lean and touch his arm. To comfort him, reassure him that I wouldn't let anything happen to him.

Thoughts of how I wanted that to also be the case after the situation with his stalker was over also flooded my brain. My thoughts were interrupted by Lennox's hand coming over mine and giving it a squeeze.

As I looked up at him, there was a moment where neither of us wanted to break the contact between us. Ever the idiot, I moved my hand away first. I cleared my throat, checked my phone, and pretended I needed to nip out into the hallway to make a call.

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I stuck a post-it on the connecting door and left Lennox in the capable hands of Levi while I did my usual pre-concert checks on the venue.

Talking to every member of staff there, I provided each with two things: an explanation for what was happening and a photo of Natasha. We all wanted to be as prepared as possible. Just in case.

Lennox still wasn't awake by the time I got back to the hotel. It had just been an exhausting few days. The food he'd eaten last night, hopefully mixed with a sense of reassurance coming from the security he now had around him, was providing him with the comfort needed to catch up on his rest.

I kept myself busy in the meantime. While I knew that I probably wouldn't be hearing from Eric again for a day or so, I took the opportunity to email him and ask when he was anticipating more information.

I briefed Levi on the plan for that evening and discussed the usual routines of prepping for the venues ahead, staff lists, floor plans, and everything else that we usually did. We never went to a venue without knowing the layout and having some sort of plan about what we were doing and how.

While Levi and I were the ones next to Lennox at all times, we also had our own team of standard security below us that we took everywhere. It was safer than relying on the security people at the venues. Our guys worked with them; the venue's security focused on their usual jobs, and our guys blended in beside them, looking like they belonged there. In reality, though, their only task was to watch out for our client.

When Lennox was ready, we headed out to the venue. Levi driving, me watching everything when we arrived by the stage door.

When I got to Lennox's dressing room, ready to walk him out to the stage, I found him pacing like a caged tiger. He was wringing his hands together, a soft sheen of perspiration covered his skin, and his pupils were dilated. If I hadn't seen him already on the verge of a panic attack, I would have sworn he had taken something.

"Lennox?" I called out to him and closed the door behind me.

He looked up at me and swallowed. "I can't do this," he answered, shaking his head. "I can't. What if she's out there? I'm supposed to be okay with being looked at, it's a concert for fuck's sake, but I can't stand the thought of her eyes on me."

Stopping him from pacing, I put a firm hand on each of his upper arms and held him in place. "Lennox, look at me." His gaze was thick with fear when his eyes met mine. "Your fears are valid, but don't let them control you. Remember. Breathe."

A slight nod answered me, and he looked at me while he mimicked my breathing. "That's it, in through your nose, hold a second or two, out through your mouth. Again."

His eyes closed, and he kept practising the deep breathing technique that I had coached him in a few times now. "Breathe in. Breathe out. You've got this."

With a small smile he opened his eyes and nodded at me again. "Thank you," he said in between deep breaths.

I smiled warmly and rubbed his arms in comfort. "It's all good. Like I said, being scared is normal, helps to keep you safe, but panicking steals your sanity, and you don't want that."

His tongue darted over his dried lips before he nibbled on them nervously. “I’m sorry. I must seem bloody neurotic.”

I squeezed his arms again. “Not. At. All. You are in a hard situation, and you’re holding up better than most people do. I would be more worried about you if you were taking it all in your stride. Never be ashamed of fear, Lennox, it’s a natural thing. It’s an internal warning system of danger that allows your body to be alert when it’s needed.”

He let out a sigh and sagged a little in my grip. “I just feel so stupid. Did I encourage this? Was it something I did? What if she’s angry with me for not—I dunno—wanting her? It’s so unnerving.”

A grim smile formed on my face. I knew those feelings only too well. I’d had them when someone had died under my command for the first time. Was it something I’d done? Was it something I could have prevented? But I also understood emotions like that were born out of searching for reasons, because reasons can be justified, or argued away. It was all just a natural part of trying to make sense of the situation you were presented with.

“Lennox, you are a phoenix. You rose from the ashes of the last life that got burnt to the ground with alcohol and everything that the label did. You will rise from this as well. I refuse to accept that you’ll let one silly person steal that from you. You have forged something new and good out of your life. You know she’s not worth this. Don’t let her steal your joy and your happiness. I will protect you from her. She’s not going to win.”

The tension in his muscles that I had been feeling against my hands seemed to drift away the second I stopped talking. Not thinking about it, I pulled him against me for a hug. “You’ve got this.” I smiled over his shoulder.

His arms reached around me in reply, and I drank in the warmth of his body against mine. It really did feel good to have Lennox in my arms, especially when he leaned his body fully in against mine. A knock on the door pulled us out of our hug.

“Ready, Lennox?” came Levi’s voice from the other side of the door.

“On our way,” I called back to him. “Ready?” I asked Lennox in a softer tone.

He straightened, took a deep breath and nodded to me. “Thank you for this.”

I smiled warmly at him. “All good. Let’s get you on stage.”



## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

I didn't know if I was relieved or disappointed that Levi had knocked on the door and interrupted us. There was something about my bodyguard that was incredibly easy to confide in. The only issue with that was if I wasn't careful, I would start to see him as something more than just my bodyguard. Especially now I knew how nice it was to have his arms around me. How safe and comforting it felt.

I didn't know how long it would be before my stalker was found and dealt with, so I knew hoping for any long-term thing to happen with him probably wasn't the best idea. I had been celibate for the entire time that I was sober. I wasn't even really sure if I wanted to risk my sobriety for a relationship. What would happen if or when we broke up? Besides, with his job and mine, how would that even work?

Christ, why was I thinking about this? These were not the kind of thoughts I needed to be having about anyone at the minute, let alone my paid babysitter in what was probably a dangerous situation.

No, I needed to be sensible. Getting involved with someone at this point wasn't going to be helpful for my life, my career or my sobriety. Something in me was saddened by that thought; my heart sank a little.

What the hell was wrong with me? I grabbed my guitar, nodded that I was ready to Tom, and let him escort me out to the stage. For the next couple of hours, it was just going to be me and the music. Sod the rest of it for now.

Coming off the stage in Forum Birmingham made it seem like the world was alive again. Colours were more vivid, sounds were richer, smells more distinct, and tastes more flavoursome. This was what I was born to do. Every other thought in my head

disappeared. I got lost in the music I was playing and the atmosphere feeding back from the crowd.

Tom nodded as I walked off the stage, ready to move before there was a crowd to contend with at the stage door. “Nice work. See, I told you everything would work out.” He smiled and nodded his head. Warmth flooded through my body. If I hadn’t learned how to control my blushing back in my boy band days, I would have flushed red with the feelings that Tom’s compliment was filling me with. The man made my heart flutter and my mind race with all the possibilities and what ifs.

“Time to go?” I asked, changing the subject to distract myself.

He nodded again, and walked alongside me, his eyes constantly scanning our surroundings. The stage door was thrown wide, and as predicted, the timing was perfect. There were very few people standing around outside. I put all thoughts of Natasha being somewhere around us out of my head and bundled myself into the back of the waiting car. Tom sat in the front passenger side and his driver, Levi, sped off.

The next morning, I woke early, only to find a post-it stuck to the door between our rooms.

There’s been some info from the PI, I need to go check it out. Levi’s going to take you to Sheffield, and I’ll meet you there later. Don’t worry, everything will be okay!

Tom

I hadn’t had much time to talk to Levi yet, but he seemed like a funny guy who was sure to have some stories to tell. I knew that the other member of the team, Nathan, was also now with us. But there was still something that made me feel a little disappointed I wasn’t going to get more time in the sole company of Tom again.

Whatever it was he had heard about, I hoped it was something that would help to sort this whole Natasha situation out.

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

The next morning I was woken early by a text from Eric. He had sent me some emails with the information that was finally starting to come together about Natasha. Her ex-husband, Trevor, lived in Leicester, and given how close we were to there, I figured I would get in the car and take myself over to his house for a little chat.

I left a message on the door for Lennox, then told Levi of the latest update and that he would have to do the run through of the venue. Nathan was back from holiday, having arrived yesterday looking very tanned and relaxed, so he would be able to be around for Lennox while I was away and Levi was at the venue.

It was about an hour later when I pulled up outside the unassuming detached, early 1900s house on Linden Drive in the Evington area of the city. Checking that I had the right address, I got out, locked the car, and approached the front door.

My knock was answered by a tall burly man with gingery-blond hair, green eyes, and a surprisingly gentle air about him, despite his large physique. "Hello?" He smiled.

"Uh, hi, Mr. Gibson. You don't know me, my name's Tom Thatcher, but I'm here about your ex-wife Natasha. I'm afraid she might be in a bit of trouble with a singer, Lennox Love," I started and waited for his reaction to my statement, watching closely.

A variety of emotions flickered across his face. Confusion, worry, understanding, and an element of defeat. "You'd best come in, I think," he said, standing back and opening the door wide for me to enter. "Is Tasha okay?" Was his first question as I stepped inside.

“At the minute, yes, but she’s going to be in a lot of trouble if she keeps acting how she has been.”

He concurred, and I got the impression he had been waiting for a conversation like the one that was about to happen here.

“Can I make you a coffee?” he asked and directed me to a sofa in the large open plan kitchen-diner-family room at the back of the house.

I nodded and took a seat. “I’m going to be honest with you, Mr Gibson.”

“Call me Trevor,” he interrupted.

“Trevor,” I corrected. “I work for Lennox Love. I was employed by his record label to look after his safety after an incident where Natasha broke into his hotel room.”

Trevor sighed. “Yeah, I had the police here after that. I hadn’t seen her in months.”

“Is that still the case?” I asked, picking up on his phrasing.

“She called not long after it to be honest, telling me that if the police contacted me, I wasn’t to tell them about her and Lennox. She’s not well, Mr Thatcher.” His voice sounded genuinely concerned.

“Please, call me Tom.” I smiled. “Do you mind if I ask you about what happened between you?”

Trevor shook his head. “Not at all, Tom. It’s not really that much of a story. I loved my wife very much, I still do love her, and I worry about her more than you can know.”

Taking the mug of coffee he offered, I listened as he settled on the other sofa and told me everything that had happened to end his marriage.

“Natasha’s not a bad person. You have to believe that. She’s just – well she’s had a hard life, and sometimes, it’s caused problems for her. I won’t go into the details of it, because it’s not mine to tell. But it was bad, it caused her trauma, and it left her looking for comfort in places that weren’t always good for her.”

“Does she have any history of substance abuse?”

He shook his head. “God no, nothing like that. It’s just that she can have trouble with knowing what’s real.”

“Delusional then?”

Again, Trevor disagreed. “No. God, it’s so hard to explain. It’s like she just becomes so obsessed with something that she can’t see the truth, and she reads too much into things.”

“Is that why you divorced?”

“Honestly, everything was fine with us until Lennox started to come back onto the music scene. It was as though it sparked something within her. Until then, she’d struggled a bit with her mental health from time to time, but it was like once he was back in the public eye again, old feelings that she had buried became unlocked. I’ve never seen her so obsessed about anything like that in the twelve years that I’ve known her. To be honest, it just all got too much. I was living in another man’s shadow, no one can compete with a fantasy.”

Trevor paused to take a drink of his coffee. I had to admit, I felt sorry for him. Here he was in love with his wife, only to have her obsessing about someone else. It didn’t

make for a healthy marriage at all. I wasn't surprised he had decided to call it a day.

"Thanks, Trevor, I really appreciate your honesty."

He shrugged. "I still love her, and I worry about her, especially with what she's been up to recently. But it was just too much."

"Do you think that she's violent, or that she could be if pushed?"

"Christ, no," he answered without hesitation. "He's everything to her. She'd never forgive herself if anything happened to him. She thinks she's in love with him."

I nodded, drinking my coffee and thinking about what the hell could have pushed someone to be so detached from reality. She was lucky to have an ally in the man who was pushed out for a celebrity. But there was still something about it all that made me wonder if Trevor was actually telling me the truth. I had no way of knowing if he was covering for her. I hoped not, he seemed like he might have more sense than that.

Setting the mug on the coffee table, I moved to stand up. "Thank you very much for talking to me about Natasha. I appreciate it and your honesty." I pulled my business card from my pocket and handed it to him. "If you hear anything else from her, anything that you think could help us at all, I would really appreciate it if you would give me a call."

He took the card from me and glanced at it. "I will, Tom. Tell Lennox I'm sorry that this is happening to him. I really am. Tasha is just a bit lost at the minute, and I wish there was some way of getting through to her. If I hear anything that can help, I'll be sure to give you a call."

Again, I thanked him for his time and left the poor man in peace. Once back in my

car I called Levi.

“Boss?”

“How’s the venue looking?”

“All good. You get what you needed?”

Pausing to reflect on how I was feeling about what Trevor had shared, I had to be honest. “I’m not sure, mate. I’m coming to Sheffield now; I’ll see you in about an hour and forty-five minutes.”

“All good here. See you in a while.”

I started the car and pulled away from the home of Trevor Gibson, wondering if he would actually call me about Natasha. The next seventy odd miles couldn’t pass quickly enough. I just wanted to get back to Lennox before the start of the next concert.



*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

When we arrived at the Lyceum Theatre I was buzzing. The tour was going well and every gig was sold out. Aside from that first night, we were a week into travelling around the country and there had been nothing more from Natasha, nor had she been seen. Everything was feeling good.

Tom hadn't said much about where he had been, but he didn't seem as stressed as he had been in the last day or so. I assumed that whatever he knew, it was a good thing. It was probably best not to push him and wonder where he had been and what he had learned. It wouldn't do me any good, and to be honest, if he thought I needed to know, I trusted that he would actually tell me.

I waved to Levi. He joked and headed down the corridor to the main backstage area as I opened the door to my dressing room and went inside, feeling hyped about getting ready for another of the intimate gigs I'd been doing.

Alex, Johnny, and I had talked about what kind of atmosphere I wanted when we planned the tour. I told them that I had done a lot of big arena gigs, and while they were great for the ego, they really didn't feel as personal to me. With that in mind, we found a lot of venues that had a capacity somewhere between one and five thousand. Intimate, small, friendlier in my book. Even standing at the back of the gig, someone would very clearly see me on stage without the need for binoculars. That was important to me. I wanted my audience to be connected to me, and me to them.

My eyes met a massive floral display sitting in front of the mirror. A stark white envelope stood out in the midst of the swathe of colour around it. In that instant, every single drop of hype and energy I had for the gig ahead of me was ripped away. My stomach dropped into my feet, my mouth was instantly dry, my chest tightened,

and I couldn't take my eyes off the white card.

I thought about calling for Tom, but I couldn't move. I thought about just turning back around and finding Levi, telling him to get these things out of my dressing room. Instead, my morbid curiosity for the better of me. I held my breath and pulled the card from where it was nestled in the envelope.

At that moment, everything felt like it was collapsing on top of me.

My darling Lennox,

I've been to every concert so far; the crowd loves you, just like I do. Not long now, my darling.

All my love as always,

Your Natasha

Xox

I felt the bile rise into my throat, and I rushed to the bathroom. The contents of my stomach ejected into the white porcelain. I felt like an elephant was sitting on my chest, I couldn't breathe. She'd been in here. Despite all the security, despite the checks, everything, she'd been here.

My heart was pounding in my chest, hammering against the underside of my ribs. I wanted to shout out. I wanted to call for Tom or Levi, or anyone, but the words wouldn't form. I didn't have enough air in my lungs to do anything.

I pulled my phone from my pocket, opened the messages app, and sent one thing to Tom.

SOS

Moments later as the room started to spin and I felt like I was about to black out, Tom burst into the room with Levi hot on his heels. He was on his knees beside me in a heartbeat.

“Lennox? Levi, the flowers.”

Levi grabbed the flowers, and the card where I had apparently dropped it to the floor, and disappeared out of the room almost as quickly as he had come in.

“Lennox,” Tom insisted more softly. “I need you to look at me. Come on. You can do it.” He took his hands in mine. I wanted to comply, I wanted to look at him, but I couldn’t open my eyes and let him see the fear there. I felt like I was letting him down after all that he had taught me in the last few days.

He squeezed my hands tighter. “I’m here. She’s not here, I promise you that, you’re safe. Open your eyes and look at me. Let’s sort your breathing, I’m sure you’re feeling lightheaded by now.”

He understands.

That thought brought me right back to him. I opened my eyes and stared right into his soul.

“That’s it,” he encouraged as, without even thinking about it, I started to practise the breathing method he had been using with me over the last few days. He didn’t need to actively encourage it; it was already starting to become a habit. I just needed his presence and his strength to remind me that I was capable of dealing with this panic myself.

His hand cupped my face. “That’s it, you’ve got this. Big breaths. Brilliant, Lennox.” That single touch of his hand on my face was all it took to ground me back into the reality of who was here with me. Of how protected I was, and how I could get through this all with him there to guide me and care about me.

“Do you think you can stand now?” he asked, his hand dropping from my face to my hands as he stood to pull me up. Levi knocked and came back into the room just as Tom yanked me back to standing.

“She’s not here. She never was,” he announced to us both. “One of the venue staff took a delivery from a local florist about an hour ago. Apparently, they’re used to that kind of thing, so they thought nothing of it and just brought it back here.”

“Thanks, Levi,” Tom acknowledged. “Can you put that on the top of the sheet for the next venue briefing, and make sure that the manager here is notified that it might be something they need to have words with their staff about in future?”

Levi nodded and left us alone again in the dressing room.

“See, she’s not been here. You’re safe,” he reassured me. A shiver ran through me, and Tom wrapped his arms around my shoulders. “Hey, it’s okay. I promise you it’s okay.”

This time my pulse quickened for different reasons. The closeness of Tom, his comforting arms around me, his soft tone soothing my nerves. When he pulled back from me and our gaze met, there was a moment of something between us. He looked at my lips. I wanted to press mine to his. The millisecond that we were paused there seemed to stretch out into minutes – time stuck waiting for one of us to make a move.

Instead, Levi knocked on the door to my dressing room again. “Ready when you are,” he shouted through the wood.

Tom broke his attention from me to glance at the door, and just like that the spell was broken. He waited as I got myself organised, freshened my breath, put on a fresh t-shirt, and did my eyeliner.

I approached him and covered his hand on the door handle before he had a chance to open it. “Thank you. For everything.” I smiled and took the chance to kiss him softly on the lips. Just as there was a hint of it turning to more, I pushed his hand down and opened the door, slipping through it and heading for the stage.

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My lips had tingled the entire time that Lennox had been on stage, but by the time he came off, he was more shy, a little timid, and he even apologised about overstepping boundaries. I had wanted to tell him it was okay. I had wanted to tell him that I had wanted it too, that in fact I wanted more. Instead, I thought about my job, and let him take the lead. I nodded, told him not to worry about it, and it was left at that.

I had kicked myself all night long as it kept coming back to my mind. His lips had felt so damn good on mine. It had felt amazing to have my arms around him. I wanted to be able to act more on the thoughts that had been going through my head since the moment I met him but knew that given the nature of the job at hand it was probably the dumbest idea I'd had over the last week. So instead, I settled in for a night of second guessing, frustration, and restless sleep.

Next morning, Lennox looked like he wasn't faring any better than I was.

"Are you okay?" I asked as he rubbed his eyes and his forehead like someone who had either a bad hangover, or the start of a killer migraine.

"I swear, in all the shit that's happened recently, I've never wanted a drink more." He glanced at me after he said it and read my expression well. "Like, not actually, but God it's just been one thing after another, and it's hard."

Understanding some of the sentiment behind his comment I smiled back at him. "I might have an idea, if you're up for a day trip and something different?"

A plan popped into my head. We were going to be moving on from Sheffield today, heading for Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. Just for one day the world of gigs, Natasha, and

everything else could survive without Lennox Love – if he was willing.

“What have you got in mind?” he asked, his hand already dropping from his eyes and head.

“Do you trust me?” The question had been meant playfully, but Lennox’s reply of ‘yes’ met me with such an intensity I was positive he wasn’t just talking about today’s idea.

Acknowledging the depth of his response with a smile, I nodded. “Okay. Comfy clothes, your usual baseball cap and shades, a warm coat, and let’s get out of here for a while.”

A little over two hours later, Lennox and I were standing on the water’s edge, the wind blowing, and the white water chopping up the sea in front of us.

“If this doesn’t clear your head for you, nothing will.” I grinned as he stood on the beach with his eyes closed, drinking in the sensations of being blasted by wind and the sound of the waves.

“I can’t believe you brought me to the seaside.” He smiled back at me.

“A good thing, I hope?” Self doubt over my idea suddenly nipped at my heels.

“I thought you might like a change of scenery and pace for the day in the light of everything that’s been going on this last week or so.”

Lennox agreed. “Do you know, I’ve never been to Scarborough. But the beach is definitely my thing. It was one of the things I loved the most about living in Portsmouth growing up. The sea was always on hand when I wanted to clear my head. Something about it soothes my very soul.”

Warmth radiated through my body when he said that. I had intended it to be a nice day away but one statement about his attachment to the sea made it all the more special that I'd picked the right place.

“Ah, see, I grew up as a landlocked brat. Scarborough is a place my mum used to take me to all the time for holidays in a caravan when I was a kid. I have a lot of fond memories of this place. In fact, Scarborough is where I first kissed a boy, Harry Yates. His family were in a neighbouring caravan. They were in Scarborough to try somewhere different, they usually went to Wales.” Laughter bubbled up in me at the long-forgotten memory deciding to reappear in that moment.

Lennox was smirking. “Oh, is that so? Popped your gay cherry here huh?”

I chuckled. “Oh, I don't remember it ever getting that far. Just a snog before he went home when we were fourteen. I don't think we came back to Scarborough after that. Or anywhere else for that matter. I was at the age where I thought it wasn't cool to head out on holiday to a caravan with your mam.” Shaking my head at my childhood idiocy I snorted a little.

“You clearly enjoyed it here, no matter what the teenage you said. You've gained a twinkle in your eye and a warmth to your smile that tells me you're actually very fond of being here.”

How easily he could read me was something which continued to take me by surprise. To almost every other person I knew I was a closed book. I worked, I kept to myself, and with my line of work that wasn't a bad way to appear. But Lennox seemed to see right through all of that. He made me feel seen, and that was something altogether new for me. It wasn't something I had ever really had, and now that I did, I was starting to feel like I had been missing out.

Seeming to sense that I was getting a little lost in my own thoughts, Lennox hooked



his arm through mine and started to walk us along the sea wall trail. An hour of walking along the coastline later, Lennox started walking with a little more purpose, pulling on my arm just that bit more.

“What are you doing?” I asked, raising an eyebrow.

He nodded with his head. “Look.”

Following the direction he was gesturing in, I realised where it was he was talking about. “The aquarium?”

His grin in reply was all I needed. “Okay,” I agreed.

We walked into the building that housed the aquarium like a couple of kids at Christmas.

“We have seven seals in the hospital at the minute, if you’re interested in having a look. They’re all pups, most less than three months old,” the receptionist told us as I paid the admission. She handed Lennox a guide to the exhibits, and a receipt to me. “Enjoy your visit,” she said brightly.

“Thank you.” Lennox smiled sincerely.

We made our way around the suggested path, and entered the first section. A huge demonstration tank filled the centre of the room, and lots of smaller tanks with observation portholes lined the walls. I watched as Lennox’s face lit up, and he wandered slowly from tank to tank.

“Have you ever been here before?” He turned to ask me while he was looking at a tank full of squat lobsters.

I shook my head. “I haven’t been to this one before. I visited one as a kid on a school trip, but honestly, I don’t remember much of it.”

Lennox smiled and led me over to the demonstration tank in the middle of the room. He pointed out all the varieties of fish and other sea life they had in the tank and explained how when the demonstration started we would circle back to here. He said the staff of the aquarium would put on a kind of show and tell, where they let visitors touch and hold the creatures in the tank. He was so animated about the types of fish and how to handle the starfish and sea urchins.

I felt a warmth permeating within me, starting in my chest and radiating out to every last inch of me, reaching my fingertips and toes. The more I listened to Lennox and watched him, the more I felt it. It was starting to consume me. I had never known anyone like Lennox in my life, and at that moment in the aquarium, I wasn’t sure that I ever would again.

When he led me around the next corner in the exhibition past a dark little nook, I couldn’t resist the pull of the attraction between us anymore. I drew him tightly against me and kissed him slowly, tenderly and completely.

When our lips parted, he looked deep into my eyes.

“What was that for?” he asked, his eyes twinkling in the soft light.

“I just wanted to,” I admitted honestly.

He grinned at me. “Okay.” He nodded, licking his lips and tempting me to do it all over again. “Come on.” He beckoned, pulling me back towards the displays.

We toured around the tanks, Lennox smiling when he heard kids exclaiming in delight about the fish in the tanks. I was content watching him – his childlike

excitement, how he smiled at children and parents alike.

He was under my skin. I wasn't sure what that would mean for us once the job was over and everything was settled, but I didn't want to think that far ahead. For now I just wanted to enjoy how good it felt to be in his company.

True to his word, when the demonstration started at the main tank, Lennox led us all the way back to it. He told me to roll up my sleeves so I could touch the fish. A member of staff came out and talked to the crowd about the local sea life and the creatures in the tank in front of us. Lennox watched, listened, and smiled when a horn-backed ray appeared from the water and poked its nose against his fingers.

He grinned and turned to me as he ran his fingers over the fish. "See, they love the attention," he told me.

I put my own hand over the water and as Lennox had told me, the same ray nudged at my hand too. The small sharks in the tank seemed just as happy at being petted as the rays.

When the presentation was over and the other visitors started to walk away, Lennox lingered. He kept his fingers in the tank, letting the sharks and rays keep his attention for just a while longer.

"What?" He laughed without even lifting his head, knowing I was looking at him and not the fish.

I shook my head with a laugh. "Oh, nothing."

He beamed, pulled his hand from the water, and nodded his head in the direction of where we could wash our hands after contact with the fish. From there, we made our way back to the exit and the gift shop.

We walked out of the aquarium with a plushie seal and ray, and a key ring. Lennox cuddled the seal and I had the ray. He paused, looking at me.

“Thank you.” He gazed at me warmly.

“You’re very welcome.”

As I went to walk off, Lennox grabbed me by the front of my coat and pulled me back to him. Leaning in, his lips met mine for a moment. It was soft and tender, and warmth flooded through me. A contented expression settled on Lennox’s face when he pulled back.

The feelings that stirred within me made me a little nervous, so I took the chance to lighten the mood a little while I could. Holding the ray up, I made it swim around in the air in front of Lennox.

“Look, Lennox, I’m swimmin’!” I grinned, dipping and raising my ray as it ‘swam’ around in the air in front of him. He burst out laughing and nudged me in the arm.

“You’re such a kid. I can’t take you anywhere, can I?” he scolded, trying not to laugh.

“Pfft,” I replied. “You’re just jealous because Larry’s a great air swimmer!”

Lennox shook his head laughing, linked his arm with mine, and we started to walk back to the sea front and where we had parked the car.

About an hour later we arrived back at the car, walking just beyond to one of the benches that faced out over the water. I started to swim Larry through the air and bumped him softly against the tip of Lennox’s nose. He laughed, snatched the toy out of my hand and hid it behind his back. I gasped at the kidnapping of my beloved ray

and circled my arms around him, trying to get the toy back.

Our faces were just inches apart. My rescue mission for Larry was swiftly forgotten, and I dipped my lips towards his, using the arm I had around him to pull him tight against me instead. My tongue licked along his lips and teased his. Before he knew what I was up to, I yanked Larry out of his unsuspecting hand and stepped back, waving him in front of Lennox.

“Hahaha! I got him!” I laughed, clutching the toy to my chest and stroking it. “There there, Larry, I’ve got you, you’re safe now!” Shooting a crazed look in Lennox’s direction I grinned.

A hearty laugh erupted from Lennox’s throat as he watched me. “You’re crazy!” He chuckled. “Are you sure that I’m actually safe with you?”

I smirked and waggled my eyebrows at him. “Well, I rescued Larry from his kidnapper successfully, didn’t I?” Before Lennox could think too much about how that related to his own situation I changed the subject. “Come on,” I said, getting up. “Let’s find somewhere to get something to eat. Larry says he’s starving.” I smirked and held my hand out to him, and he accepted it. Together we strolled back to the car.

It was late by the time we finally arrived in Newcastle. There wasn’t much else to do but settle into our rooms and sleep. I stood in Lennox’s room and smiled as I thought back over the day we had shared.

“Thanks for today. It was just what I needed. Sometimes I get so bogged down in the pressures of life that I forget just how much being at the beach soothes my soul.”

There was a pause, neither of us knowing quite what to do next.

“All part of the service,” I blurted out, trying to end the silence between us. The

second the words left my mouth I realised how bad they sounded. Like everything that happened today had been just a routine part of the job. Lennox realised it too; his face fell a little, and the smile he kept on his lips, faded from his eyes.

Guilt tugged at my guts. I didn't know why I couldn't just tell him that I liked him. Instead, it seemed as though it was something I was only capable of away from the 'job' side of the relationship between us.

"Goodnight, Tom," he said softly with a sigh.

I took the hint that I had messed that up and nodded. "Good night," I said in defeat. I turned to the door that connected our rooms, and with everything in me screaming to turn around and tell him how I really felt, I silently slipped through and closed the door behind me.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

The last two weeks had begun to feel like I was in a washing machine stuck on an endless spin cycle. First there was Natasha, and then there was Tom.

I kept thinking about his words last night. ‘Part of the service’ – is that really all he thought it was? He kissed me, more than once. We had a wonderful day together as just Tom and Lennox, not the bodyguard and the singer.

Yet, when it came to say goodnight, he brushed it all off with a throwaway comment. I could have sworn there was a flicker of regret on his face the second he said the words, but I was starting to doubt my ability to read anything with him. I thought there was attraction between us. That we had connected.

This was all too much to think about. I needed to escape it all for a while again. I pulled out my phone, googled parks, lakes—anything that was nearby and would allow me to get out of my own head for a while again. It was almost like everything that had been achieved by a day at the beach had been wiped out with a silly miscommunication.

I waited until the corridor was busy with housekeeping staff and slipped out. Covered by the cart full of cleaning supplies, I managed to avoid being seen by Levi and slipped into the back fire escape stairs. By the time I hit the street, I couldn’t wait to find a cab and just get away from everything that had me circling the idea of using my old crutch of booze.

I didn’t know how long it had been before I arrived at Jesmond Dene. There was a water course running through where an old mill had been and a small waterfall. I needed that serenity to bring me back to the calm necessary to see out the next few

weeks. I just had to get through the tour, and I had never been more grateful that I had insisted on it being small and short.

After walking for what felt for miles, I finally found myself standing on a bridge in front of the waterfall. Behind me stood the ruins of the old mill, in front of me, the bubbling of water was already starting to soothe me. When I turned to try to get myself closer to the waterfall a familiar and unwelcome face greeted me.

“Lennox.”

“Natasha? What the fuck are you doing here?” I asked, battling to hide my panic.

“I just needed to see you.” The look on her face was so happy and peaceful. It was a stark contrast to the fear and panic that she so regularly put on mine. “You haven’t written to me in ages, and I just wanted to make sure that you were getting my gifts.”

Writing to her?

I had no idea what she was talking about. “Natasha, this really needs to stop.”

She smiled at me and I felt my stomach flip and the bile start to rise in my throat. “I know it does, and it will soon, because we’re going to be together, I promise. It’s just going to take a little more time.”

She went to take a step towards me, and I instinctively took a step back. “This isn’t right,” I warned her.

“I know it isn’t,” she started, but something she noticed over my shoulder seemed to distract her. “But it won’t be long now, I promise.”

Without warning she took off running, and when I turned around to see what it was



that had caught her attention, I realised why. Tom was about twenty feet away, Levi with him. The latter was now sprinting in the direction Natasha had disappeared. The former was walking over to me, my relief to have him present hitting me like a tidal wave.

“How did you know where to find me?” I asked when he finally reached my side.

He held out his phone to show a map with two blue dots. “I enabled location sharing on your iPhone when you gave me your mobile that first night. As long as you have it with you, I can find you.” He put his hand into mine, and something in me settled in an instant from the contact. “What did she say?”

I furrowed my brow as I repeated the one thing that just hadn’t made sense to me. “She said I’d written to her. More specifically that I had stopped writing to her. I’ve never written to her in my life. I just don’t understand what the hell she was talking about.”

Tom squeezed my hand. “We will figure it out, I promise.” He must have noticed Levi before I did because his hand slipped from mine.

“She just fucking disappeared. There’s just too many different directions that she could take off in, and she’s a slippery little shit.”

Tom shook his head. “Very professional Levi, as always.”

I bit back a laugh and instead it came out as a snort.

“Come on, runaway, let’s get you back to the hotel. Unless you want us to do something else, boss?”

Tom shook his head. “She’ll be long gone. But we might need to think seriously

about the number of men we have as extras from here on out. I don't like the ramifications of this at all." Tom turned to me. "If you start to overthink what just happened, and you need to stop and breathe, just let me know and we will sort it for you, okay?"

Knowing exactly what Tom meant, I nodded, hoping it wouldn't happen, but understanding that because it was me, it probably would.

When we got back to the hotel the guilt was killing me. I was making Tom's job harder, and why? Because I was being a silly little brat and letting my emotions put me in danger. Just as Tom had mentioned, I did indeed start to think things over. I thought about the fact that to know that I was in that park at that moment in that exact spot; that had been no coincidence. She had been waiting for me. Following me. Hoping I would give her the opportunity to approach me. And me being the complete idiot that I am had offered it to her on a plate.

"Hey," Tom scolded. "Stop that thought, I can see your mind working."

It warmed me that he could read me so well already to know where my mind was heading, but it didn't stop the thoughts that were churning around in my brain.

I could have walked right into a trap with her. She could have had a weapon. She could have had acid. She could have done literally anything to me, and because of my stupidity and sulking over hurt feelings.

"I'm sorry about today," I admitted, trying to work my way through how I was thinking and feeling about it all. "I shouldn't have gone out like a pouting teenager and made your job harder. This tour has given me a lot to think about, and a lot of tension."

"Don't apologise. Honestly. And for what it's worth, if my stupid off the cuff

comment about it all being part of the service last night added to all of that, I am so sorry. I didn't mean to imply that anything that happened with us yesterday wasn't something out of the ordinary and actually, pretty damn special."

I felt that increasingly familiar warmth flood through me. It was happening more and more around Tom and if I wasn't careful, I was going to get addicted to him quickly.

"When I realised that no one could find you, my stomach sank and I was worried. I don't usually get that worried about my clients."

"Even if they go missing?" I asked, a little taken aback by his admission.

He nodded. "Yes, because that doesn't help me keep a clear and calm head to be able to get them back in one piece."

I grimaced a little at the thought of him being so disconnected and a little bit cold, but even more so when I thought about making him worry about me. God, I could be such an idiot. Something flickered over his face, and he leaned over. Before I realised what he was doing his lips were on mine.

Electricity flowed through every part of my body, prickling on my mouth and radiating out from there. His hand cupped my face. His tongue slipped along my lips and teased them apart. The feeling of his tongue on mine set my body on high alert. The prickling of electricity threatened to turn into a raging fire that would engulf us both.

He parted his lips from mine, his forehead resting against me. "Don't you ever apologise for being who you are. You are pretty fucking special, Lennox Love."

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

When we arrived in Northern Ireland, en route to Belfast, everything had changed. I had wanted to take things a lot further with Lennox last night, but something was still holding me back. I wasn't sure what it was, or how to get myself around it. At least now I knew that I wanted to.

Lennox lifted his bag from the boot of my car, and I smiled cheekily at him. "I hope you don't feel like you need to escape again."

Lennox stuck his tongue out at me. "You know, I would, but for very different reasons this time. I have only ever been to Belfast once before. We arrived, played a big arena, and then we were out of here. I never got to drink in any of the history or the atmosphere that the city has to offer."

"You never got to be a tourist you mean?" I asked with a playful grin.

"Yes." He laughed back at me. "Exactly that."

"Would you like to be?" I asked and his face lit up.

"Could we really? I mean, wouldn't it be risky?"

His caution made me smile, but I understood why he thought it might be needed after everything. I was pretty sure Lennox wasn't at risk of actual physical harm from her. I would remain very much on alert, though. Just because she wouldn't hurt him, didn't mean that he wasn't still under threat from her. At least this way we would have more opportunity to see if she was still following him.

“I doubt after what happened in Newcastle she’ll be around today. Though I will make damn sure to keep an eye out for her at all times if you do want to go out.”

“You’re sure it wouldn’t be too much trouble?”

“I’m absolutely sure; you’re never too much trouble.” I grinned, revelling in his reaction to the suggestion. I liked how he was able to relax around me. I liked being able to go with him and experience fun things with him that didn’t involve music or protection. I’d be lying if I said that the thought of all this being much more didn’t cross my mind.

“Besides, I spent a while in Belfast, and I know the city and its highlights pretty well.”

“You do?” Lennox asked with a raised eyebrow. “Should I ask?”

Smirking, I replied, “Well, it wasn’t in my army days if that helps, but it was while working for someone from Westminster. It’s a brilliant city, and we could head out tomorrow for most of it, but if you really wanted to see what Belfast is really like, do you fancy a non-alcoholic drink in a pub? Or is that too much?”

Thoughts clearly circled in his mind as he thought about my suggestion. “If it’s for the atmosphere, I’m sure I could go to a pub.”

I grinned at him. “Get your coat then.”

Twenty minutes later we were sitting on chairs of red leather in a small, whitewashed stone pub with two pints in front of us. “You can’t come to Belfast and not have a Guinness, and lucky for us they make an alcohol-free version now, so get that into you.”

Lennox eyed up the glass of the infamous black stout with suspicion.

“It’s okay.” I chuckled. “It tastes worse than it looks.” Picking up my glass, I held it up for a toast. “Sláinte,” I said, clinking my glass against his.

“What now?” he asked.

“Sláinte. It’s the Irish word for cheers.”

He looked surprised that I would know such a thing.

“I did warn you; I know this town a little. Learned some things too.” I smirked and took a sip from my glass.

Lennox followed me and his nose wrinkled. “Jesus.” He grimaced, setting his glass back on the table.

A laugh bubbled up from my chest. “I did warn you! It’s the aftertaste that gets you, just keep drinking it and you’ll be fine.” He shook his head with a chuckle and the rest of the evening was spent enjoying the atmosphere, not drinking more Guinness, and having some well-earned time off.

“Which first?” I asked him when we got into the hire car. “Castles, ships, or mountain views?”

He looked at me with surprise. “Mountains, we’ve not done that yet.”

Putting the car in gear, I pulled out of the multi-storey car park behind the Europa Hotel where we were staying and set off for the Hightown Road.

We parked up and started our walk towards McArt’s Fort. The shrubbery kept most of

what was in store for Lennox hidden, with only the occasional break in the trees and bushes offering hints at what lay further along the path.

“Where the hell are you taking me?” Lennox laughed as we kept on walking.

“There’s some cliffs up here. You’ve been getting on my nerves, so I thought I might push you off.” For a second, I was convinced that Lennox wasn’t sure if I was joking or not, so I bumped his elbow with a snort and encouraged him to keep walking with me. “Trust me, you’ll see why I’m bringing you up here once we get there.”

When we turned the final curve towards our destination and the view before us really opened up Lennox’s expression turned to one of amazement.

“This?” he said with a sense of wonder.

“Almost. Just a few hundred yards more.”

He nodded and we kept on following the track until we reached the famous point that jutted out over the Lagan Valley below us.

“Holy shit, that’s one hell of a view.” He grinned.

I nodded. “You’re standing on top of a point called Napoleon’s Nose, if you look over there,” I said pointing over to the right. “Those mountains way in the distance are the Mourne, the highest mountain in Northern Ireland is there.” I moved myself in behind him and pointed out over his shoulder. “Right there, those yellow cranes, those are Samson and Goliath, they belong to the same company who built the Titanic, Harland and Wolff.” I moved against him again and pointed down to the hills directly below us on the right. “See that red brick building there sticking out in all the trees? That’s Belfast Castle.”

Turning him to the left, I pointed again, our footing on the ground making me directly behind his ear. “Just before that outcrop of land over there is Carrickfergus Castle. And just beyond all that, if it was a touch clearer, you’d be able to see Scotland on the horizon there.”

Lennox nodded and leaned back just a fraction to press his body to mine. I closed my eyes and licked my lips at the feeling he was stirring up within me.

We stood there, held against each other for what seemed like ages until we became aware of the presence of others behind us. “Where to next?” I asked softly against his ear as he pulled himself away from me.

“Ships.” He grinned, taking my hand in his, and we walked back down to the car park.



## Page 15

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

Our tour of the Titanic Museum had been more emotional than I had anticipated. It was the darkened room with the LED ‘stars’ above us and morse code on the walls that did it. The people who had been going around the exhibits at the same time as us all went quiet, just as we had.

There was something eerily moving about that particular part of the display—the bit that covered the actual sinking and its direct aftermath. The survivors and the ones that didn’t; tales from both sides really hammered home just how horrific the loss of life had been.

When I glanced at Tom his eyes were as glassy as my own, a man just across the display room from us lifted out a tissue from his pocket and dabbed at his eyes.

“Wow,” I said softly as we got back into the car at the end of our time in the museum.

“Makes you think, doesn’t it?” Tom agreed.

Neither of us said another word until Tom parked the car in a street on the seafront about ten minutes later.

“Hungry?” he asked, his tone still soft and subdued.

I nodded. “God, yes.”

Gesturing towards the building with a yellow and blue sign with a nod, he said, “This place is great. Food is lovely, and so is the atmosphere and views.”

I smiled as we walked inside. He was right about it. We settled into a table near a fireplace overlooking a window with spectacular views over Belfast Lough, and ordered some delicious pub grub.

Getting back to the hotel after the concert I was on a high like never before. Everything that had happened with Natasha in the park seemed like a lifetime ago instead of the day before.

“I don’t think that I’m going to be able to sleep for hours yet,” I said with a grin and sprawled out on my bed.

“You look like you are buzzing. Belfast seems to agree with you.”

It wasn’t just this town that had done me good. The concert in the Ulster Hall had been a good one that night, and the sightseeing and drinking in the history of Belfast had been too. But that wasn’t the main reason. The person who had kept me company through all of it was a major influence in how I was feeling too.

“Oh, it wasn’t just Belfast.” I lifted my head and smirked at him.

“Is that so?” He grinned back at me. “I didn’t think Levi was that much of an influence.”

I sat up and looked at him. “Oh, he is, I just love his sense of humour, and the way that he really seems to wind you up at times.” I playfully grinned back at him.

The sexiest of smirks looked back at me. “Uh huh.”

“Thank you so much for today. I had a great time. Especially because it was with you.”

“You’re very welcome.”

I stood and closed the distance between us. “I mean it. Thank you for rescuing me in Newcastle, thank you for being by my side through all the panic attacks, all the concerts, all the drama. Thank you for Scarborough and thank you for today.” Reaching out I took his hand in mine.

He laced his fingers through mine in response and gave a squeeze. “I wanted to spend time with you. You’re very easy to spend time with.”

“So are you.” I smiled in reply, feeling the pull between us grow. We stood there for a moment in silence, just looking at each other, until I gave into the need that was building, and pressed my mouth to his.

Something this time was different. The chemistry and yearning that had been building since the moment we met finally came tumbling out. There was a heat that had been bubbling, and now it was overflowing.

When I licked along his mouth, Tom parted his lips and let my tongue roam over his. His hand dropped mine and instead he slid his hands around my waist and held me against him. I deepened our kiss and wrapped my arms around his neck. Both of us pulled our bodies together, lining ourselves up perfectly against one another.

From my waist his hands slid over my hips and grabbed my arse, tugging me hard enough against him that I could make out every inch of his cock as it pressed into my hip. Despite this, I couldn’t help but feel like we still weren’t close enough.

Knowing my bed was directly behind us, I started to move us back towards it, leading him along with me. When we reached the side of the bed, he pried his lips from mine and looked at me with eyes hooded with lust.

“Are you sure about this?”

I pulled my t-shirt over my head and cast it aside. “Very sure.”

I smiled and put my mouth back on his. A soft groan escaped against his lips as his hands caressed my bare back. Putting my arms around him, I fisted my hands in his shirt, pulling him tighter against me, needing us to be closer, wanting more of him.

His kiss moved from my lips across my jaw. Tom nibbled on my earlobe, and I felt like I was about to spontaneously combust. When he moved from there to my neck, I thought that I was about to make a fool of myself by making a mess in my briefs. Every suck and nibble on the sensitive flesh on the side of my throat was directly wired to my dick and it throbbed harder still with each connection.

“Oh fuck, Tom.” I breathed wantonly as he moved to my collar bone. My hands slid to his head, my fingers cradling him against me, silently encouraging him to do something I hadn’t experienced since I was a horny teenager. “Do it,” I pleaded as he sucked on the skin on my shoulder.

Understanding exactly what I was talking about he applied more pressure with his mouth. My head fell back in pleasure as I cast a moan skywards. This was a man I could get lost with. This was a man whose body and soul felt like he fit so well with me, that this was the most natural thing in the world.

His hand cupped my face and his mouth possessed mine again. I moved my hands between us and started to unbutton his shirt. His marking my shoulder had now become the point of no return. I wasn’t going to be satisfied until this man had his cock buried balls deep inside me.

My hurried hands fumbled over the buttons on his shirt before finally undoing the last one and pushing the cotton over his shoulders and down his arms. My fingertips

returned to the broad expanse of hairy chest, and I delighted in running my hands over him, the sensation of his hair against my skin, until I skimmed over his nipples.

A low moan that could easily have been mistaken for a growl vibrated against my lips. Suddenly the backs of my legs were against the edge of the bed, as Tom steered us down onto it.

Skilfully, he didn't break the contact of our kiss the whole time, and he came down on top of me with one leg between mine, the other on the outside of my thigh. I could feel his hard cock pressing against my hip again, but with the weight of his body on mine, it almost made it feel like it was much bigger than I had previously thought.

His hand skimmed over my side before coming to rest on its target as he cupped at my pec muscle and let his fingers tease my nipple. This time it was my turn to moan against his mouth. My hands caressed over his back, the contact with his bare skin making my fingertips tingle. This man was setting me on fire in a way that I had never experienced in my entire adult life. I thought about how long it had been since I had let someone touch me like this, knowing full well that it had been since before I went into rehab.

I had worried that my sobriety would be compromised by the stress of a relationship, but here in this moment I realised that the only thing that was keeping me back from something like this had been fear. If I had been able to get through the pressure of the situation that had brought Tom into my life without drinking, then I could do anything.

He pried his lips from mine and looked at me. The intensity of the lust was scorching, but there was a hint of something else in there. Something deeper and more soulful. He grinned at me cheekily and sank his mouth onto the nipple that wasn't being teased by his skilful fingertips. I hissed at the contact.

“Fuck!” I moaned as he pinched both nipples, one with teeth and the other with his thumb and forefinger. My back arched off the bed and I rolled my hips, pressing my cock against him. My hand grabbed at his shoulders, my fingertips pressing hard against his flesh.

He shifted his weight against me, leaning more on my hip, and his hand skimmed over my torso, before sliding over my crotch and cupping my rock-hard dick through my jeans. I moaned at the friction he was providing and thrust myself against his hand, willing him to help me out of my jeans and have his hands on me.

As though he had read my mind, Tom’s fingers moved to pop open the button of my flies, and then lowered the zipper. His hand then slipped inside the denim and cupped against my cock again.

“Oh God,” I moaned as the heat of his palm enveloped me with just a thin covering between us.

Again, he shifted, and his mouth was back on mine before I had the chance to properly register that it was gone from my nipple. A second after his lips met mine, his hand slipped beneath the waistband of my briefs. He cupped my balls and slowly trailed his hand along the length of my cock. It throbbed against his touch, and he wrapped his fingers firmly around me. I flexed my hips against his grip, needing more, wanting him to pump my cock and make me come.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

Feeling Lennox's cock, thick and hard in my hand, was making my own throb unbearably. I had never needed to sink my dick into another human being as much as I did in this moment with him.

When he encouraged me to mark his shoulder, I thought that I was going to cream my pants. It seemed so primal and almost territorial, but the thought of someone seeing it and knowing what it meant turned me on even more. They didn't even have to know that it was me who did it, just that they would know he had been with 'someone' was enough.

And now with his cock in my hand, I knew I had passed the point of no return. This wouldn't end until I had my cock inside him, and it was also the start of something that I was beginning to realise I couldn't be without. A relationship with him. While there had been an attraction that first day in the offices, I never once imagined that I would act on it, and I certainly never considered that it would be much more than just attraction for him.

He thrust his cock against my closed hand again, and I smiled against his mouth before breaking our kiss. His dark eyes were almost black and sparkled with lust and desire.

"Is there something you need?" I teased, my voice low and almost raspy.

He licked his lips and moaned as I moved my hand against him. "Yes." He breathed, closing his eyes as I pumped the length of him again.

"What is it?" I urged.

Again, his hips met my movement.

“Fuck me and make me come,” he said, staring at me intently, challenging me to deliver what he was asking.

A groan rumbled up from my chest. “Oh fuck, you’re going to get it.”

I moved away from him and stood back beside the bed. Never taking my eyes off him, I undid my trousers and pulled them and my underwear to the floor. As I did, Lennox lifted his hips and slid his briefs and jeans down his thighs. I grabbed his shoes and pulled them and the last of his clothing off. Both of us now completely naked, I moved back to where I had been against his hip, one leg between his.

“Is this what you wanted?” I asked as I slid my hand back over his balls and his cock.

“Mmmm,” he agreed as his eyes closed, and his hip flexed against my hand once again.

I shifted on the bed, removing myself from between his thighs to lie beside him. I dipped my head towards his crotch and lifted the head of his dick for my mouth to take, leaving my hand free to push his legs further apart and my finger to skim over his taint to his arsehole.

I pressed against the muscle of his ass, rubbing in small circles as I slid my mouth down as far as I could on his cock. One of his hands stroked over my back, the other cupped the back of my head to encourage my movements with my mouth.

When I ran my tongue over the head of his dick, his voice echoed in my ears. “Oh, sweet fuck, Tom.”

Christ, hearing my name uttered as he moaned in pleasure was something I didn’t



realise had been missing from my life until now. And I was sure that it wouldn't have been right with anyone else saying it but him.

In that moment, I realised that I was in way over my head with him. I wanted Lennox like I had never wanted anyone else my whole life. I wanted him like I needed air. He was addictive as hell and in the few short weeks that I had known him I was definitely hooked.

I worked to let my spit cover his cock, using that wetness to increase the sensations. Gathering some on my finger as lube, I returned it to his arsehole, pressing again against the ring of muscle. As his dick hit my gag reflex, I felt my finger slide into him.

His moans and a peppering of expletives only served to encourage me, and I started to move my hand and head in a combination that was sure to be driving him closer to doing just what he asked for. But as much as the thought of tasting his spunk on my tongue as I sucked him off to climax was appealing, I desperately needed to be inside him.

Letting his cock fall from my mouth, I kissed up over his body, moving to cover him. My hand was still between his legs, my finger still inside him, as I claimed his mouth again with my own.

Working my finger in and out of him while kissing him fiercely, I didn't think that I'd be able to wait anymore. I pulled my finger out and moved until both my legs were between his. My cock was now lying against where my fingers had just been teasing.

I pulled back from our kiss and looked down at the beautiful man lying under me. "I don't have anything with me," I told him, hoping that he would understand what I meant.

“Yeah,” he agreed, knowing what I was talking about. “I don’t have anything either.” His hand cupped my cheek. “But don’t stop.”

“Sure?”

He nodded and slid his hand to the back of my neck, pulling me back down to his mouth. I kissed him hard and fast before settling back on my heels between his legs. I put my hands on his hips as he watched me and yanked his body hard against mine, bringing his arse up onto my thighs. I encouraged his knees back towards his chest and delighted in the sight of his arse and legs spread ready for me.

Gathering my saliva at the front of my mouth, I spat it out over Lennox’s arsehole, catching it with my fingers and working it in and over him. I licked my other hand and rubbed it over the head of my dick before pressing it to where I wanted it most and guiding it slowly and carefully inside him.

As soon as the muscle relaxed and let me inside, Lennox moaned, and I paused to let him get used to the feeling of my cock. I watched him, reading his body language, using that focus to keep me from pushing too hard and too fast with no real lube. Inch by torturous inch I slowly worked my way deeper until I was buried inside him up to my balls.

“Fuck, that feels so insanely good,” he moaned when I paused finally, fully ensheathed within him.

“Fucking right it does,” I said, staring at where our bodies were now joined, before looking up at his face. One look at him and I was suddenly aware of just how much I wanted to take my time and make love to his man. Emotions I didn’t know I had washed over me. This was going to change me forever, and I wanted to do nothing but welcome it.

Lennox flexed against me, and I pushed that thought aside. There would be plenty of time for that later. For now, I was going to make sure both of us spent all the tension that had been building between us. I pulled back just a fraction before sinking back into Lennox completely. This time would have to be hard and fast, because I didn't think that I would be able to hold back from him anymore.

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*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

When Tom finally buried his cock balls deep in my arse I was sure of one thing: this man was going to be my undoing. He paused, looking down at me, the intensity of his glance washing over me. The pull in my chest that happened when he did was too much, and I had to do something to interrupt whatever the hell that was.

I flexed my hips and clenched my arse around his dick, encouraging him to move. Needing him to give me what he had promised he would. It was all the incentive he needed because he pulled back and slid back inside me. The sensation made my cock throb, and I started to move against Tom's movements with every thrust that he made inside me.

Tom's low rumbling moans turned me on even more as he started to pick up the pace. His hand found its way around my cock as he started to stroke me in time with the movement of his hips.

I knew that it wouldn't be long before he had me coming over my torso and his hand, my arse full of his delicious dick. His thrusts grew more powerful and urgent, driving himself deep and hard as he started to chase a climax for us both.

I thought about how good he felt inside me, how he wore his desire so exquisitely on his handsome face, how he stirred up feelings in me that I wasn't ready to admit to having. Feeling that telltale pull in my balls, I knew that I was close.

"Oh fuck, I'm going to come," I warned him with a moan.

Spurred on by my admission, Tom's hips started to buck against me. His eyes caught mine as his thrusts became more staccato and less rhythmic in pace. I felt as though

he was looking into my soul, and the potency of the emotion it was stirring was almost too much to bear. Needing to look away, but not daring to, I held his gaze as we came undone together.

Spent and sated, we both cleaned ourselves up and climbed under the covers. I fell asleep with Tom's arm draped over my waist, feeling protected and for the first time in what felt like forever – loved.

Waking up with an arm draped over me and a warm body behind me was a feeling that I wasn't used to. But I had to admit, it was definitely something that I could get used to. I hoped that Tom was going to give us the chance to experience it more regularly. I sighed softly, letting my body drink in the tranquillity that seemed to be radiating from Tom and drifted off to sleep once more.

When I woke again the bed was empty and the sounds of a shower running echoed in from the bathroom. Casting the sheets off, I rose from the bed with a stretch and a spring in my step. Quietly, I opened the bathroom door and watched the back of Tom as he showered.

“Morning.” I grinned as he wiped the water away from his handsome features.

He turned to greet me with a smile. “Morning. Care to join me?”

Pushing myself off the counter where I was leaning, I moved towards the shower space to take Tom up on his offer. Last night had very much been about him being in control and doing what he wanted to me. This morning I wanted it to be about me returning that pleasure.

Standing behind him, letting the hot water cascade over both of us, I grabbed his shower gel, took some in my hand, and started slowly rubbing it over Tom's back. I worked the soap into a lather as I massaged my hands over his skin before focusing

on his shoulders, kneading into his flesh. From his shoulders, I allowed my hands to roam down his spine spreading lather out over his ribs down to his waist.

Tom raised his hands to the tile, bracing himself as he relaxed into the feeling of my hands on him. My touch encouraged satisfied hums and moans from him as I worked lower, down over his form until I reached his hips and arse. Feeling emboldened by his audible enjoyment, I ran my finger down the valley between his butt cheeks and let my finger circle around his arsehole.

“Fuck, Lennox,” came his breathy reply, and I circled over him once more before pressing myself against his back and letting my hands skim over his front instead.

With my rock-hard cock pressed firmly against his bum, I skimmed my hands over his torso on my way to his chest. I grabbed another squirt of shower gel as I reached around him and rubbed it across his expanse of broad chest. I let my hands glide over his chest hair, until my fingertips found themselves on his peaked nipples. Rolling them between my forefinger and thumb, I kissed across his shoulders.

“Jesus, Lennox, you’re going the right way about getting me inside you again.”

I grinned as I scattered more kisses over his skin. “As delicious as that sounds, this is all about you this morning.” I nibbled into the flesh of his shoulder and let my hands slide all the way down to his crotch. With hands on either side of his glorious dick, I skimmed one hand under his balls, and the other gripped his length firmly.

A long moan echoed around the bathroom, and Tom’s head fell forward. The movement of my hand started slow and deliberate as he watched my every move. When I moved my cock against his arse, I felt his own throb in my hand, his breathing changing with every stroke.

“Your hands look so good around my dick. And fuck, they feel even better.”

He shifted on his feet, pressing back against me. Christ, I wanted this man inside me. But the feeling of influence over him like this, was just too much to let go of so soon. I wanted him to come undone because of me, but in that moment I wanted it to be because of either my hands or my mouth. I wanted it to be in a way that was solely focused on his pleasure.

Tom started to thrust against the movement of my hand. There was an element to all of it I couldn't find the words to describe. Despite the fact that Tom was semi controlling the situation with the rhythm of his hips, I felt empowered. This handsome, strong man, who was used to being in control of everything, was letting me take the wheel and steer him in the direction that I wanted to. Right now, it was with my hand firmly around his cock, but in general it felt like I was allowing him the freedom to, like me, feel things that he had hidden from for so long. That feeling was definitely one full of promise.

"Fuck!" Tom moaned, snapping me back out of my mind's little wander. I let my hands drop from his cock and moved them across his hips, pushing him around to face me. As the water fell over us, he dragged me against him, and his lips captured mine hard with a passionate need. Drinking in the attention for a moment, I kissed him back fiercely. His hand cupped my face while his other grabbed my arse and pulled me even tighter to him.

Pushing back against him, I broke our kiss. Before Tom had a second to yank me back, I skimmed my hands over his chest, my mouth following the trail that my fingertips were leaving. My tongue lapped over his nipple as I looked up at him. His eyes closed, and his mouth formed a perfect 'oh' shape as I latched my mouth around it and sucked.

Gradually, I kissed and caressed my way lower, sinking slowly to my knees. Tom stared at me when he realised just what I was planning to do next. The hissed-out groan followed by, "Fuck, Lennox!" was my reward for taking his cock in my mouth

and sinking down over it as much as I could before I gagged. I looked up at him as his eyes bore into me, watching as again I took him as deeply as I could, holding his gaze as I gagged again.

“Jesus Christ, your mouth feels fucking amazing.”

I smirked around him and continued to work him in and out of my mouth, pushing myself to take more and more of him every time. I needed him to know just how much I wanted him. How much I needed him. How grateful I was to him for how liberated I felt having him around.

When his hands tangled in my hair, trying to control the pace, I knew that my end goal was in sight and that it wouldn't be long before I was rewarded for my actions. Tom's hips thrust against me, fucking my mouth, looking for that rhythm needed to climax.

I grabbed his arse and pulled him against me, silently demanding that he take what he wanted, gazing up at him the whole time he did. His eyes locked on mine. His movements became irregular and his cock throbbed as he started to come in my mouth.

The intensity of our exchanged looks added to the moment and made it feel like so much more than a greedy blow job. His hand released from my hair and stroked my cheek as I licked and swallowed everything that I could from him. His other hand grabbed mine and pulled me from the shower floor and into his arms for another passionate kiss.

When I had started back in the music industry, I hadn't been sure of what to expect. This was something I could never have expected, and while altogether uninvited, was starting to feel like exactly what I had been missing.



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I wanted to scoop him up and tell him exactly what was circling around in my mind. I wanted to tell him I was starting to think things about him and talk to him about what that all meant and where it could all go. But I didn't. Instead, I skirted around it. I changed the subject. I made up reasons to slip out of his company and 'make a call'.

I was a goddamn coward.

Belfast with him had been amazing in so many ways, and now we were heading for Glasgow it was almost as though it had been some other lifetime. Instead of talking to him like an adult, like he deserved, panic set in. I tried to lose myself in the work of being his bodyguard, without trying to think too much about his body and just how much I wanted it naked and pressed up against me.

Levi looked at me with a smirk.

"I don't want to fucking hear it," I growled in anticipation of his humour and sarcasm.

"I was going to say that whatever happened with you and Lennox seemed to be suiting you, but if you're going to be a prick about it, I'm going to tell you he's too fucking good for you, and you're a dickhead."

"I'm going to fucking fire you one of these days for your cheek."

Levi laughed. "No you fucking won't. No one else would put up with half the shit you put on me and you know it."

He had a point. About what he dealt with, and about Lennox. I was a dickhead, but unless I got my head back in the game of protecting him, there wouldn't be much point in any of the other things that I thought and felt about him. I was muddying the waters, and fucking up the job at hand. No matter how much banter Levi wanted to level at me about it, that much could not be denied.

"Don't fuck it up, boss," he said grimly with a soft pat on my shoulder.

"I'll do my best." I nodded, and he disappeared off to head to the venue.

An hour later Lennox caught me in an idle moment. "Can we talk for a minute?"

Feeling like a deer caught in headlights, I nodded.

"I don't mean to sound like an insecure, needy idiot or anything, but I just wanted to know if we could clarify a little of what's been happening between us."

Oh fuck, here it comes.

"We've been getting closer, haven't we?"

I bow my head once to gesture my agreement.

"I got the feeling that something was starting to develop between us. I was just wondering if that was something you wanted to continue even after the tour, to keep seeing me, and to see where all this was going to end up?"

The hopefulness in his voice pulled at my chest. I wanted to tell him yes, I wanted to say that I was very much attracted to him in a way that I had never been attracted to anyone else ever. That there was a vulnerability to him which made me want to protect him from the moment I met him, and that pull had only gotten stronger as the

tour had gone on. That I wanted nothing more than to explore every possibility of this budding relationship and see where it went. That I hoped it would lead into something deep and fulfilling and with the potential of being lifelong.

Instead, something totally different came out of my mouth. “I think it would be better to hold off on that until the whole Natasha thing is sorted out, don’t you? I would hate for something to happen to you because I wasn’t focusing on the reason I’m here.”

I saw it on his face the second he registered what I had said. I was a wanker. I was the very dickhead Levi had accused me of being earlier. Lennox’s disappointment and hurt flashed across his features, even if it was for the briefest of moments before he composed himself and nodded.

“Right. Of course, you’re absolutely right. I shouldn’t have mentioned it. Consider it shelved until this whole thing is tied up.”

He didn’t say anything else and neither did I. He simply turned on his heel, walked back into his own bedroom and closed the door. Guilt flooded every inch of me and it took everything I had to not open the door and tell him I was sorry. I wanted to pull him against me and kiss him with all the passion I could muster.

His life was on the line, and I honestly thought that I couldn’t let myself have the luxury of anything else in case I mucked it all up, regardless of the fact I was very clearly mucking it all up anyway.

I spent the rest of the day burying myself in work.

Lennox had been on stage for just forty minutes when I got a call from the desk sergeant down at the local police station. He said he had someone who had matched Natasha’s description brought in over a speeding incident. Since I knew who I was looking for, he wanted me to come down and verify that it was actually her.

I told Levi what had happened and left. Jumping in my car, I headed to the police station in the hopes that it would actually be her, and we would be able to finally get the threat to Lennox under control.

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Something was off. I didn't know what it was, but coming off stage in Glasgow, there was something that just didn't feel right. I shook my head, trying to dismiss my thoughts and feelings as something else; stupidity on my part. I had expected Tom to drop everything and want to be with me as much as I wanted to be with him. He had been absolutely right. We did need to wait until the madness of a stalker and the forced closeness that had been thrust upon us was over. It was the right call—even if it did sting.

Carl hugged me with a massive grin on his face. “Lennox, that was fucking amazing! They love you, and the new song went down fantastically!”

Some of my nerves disappeared, and I smiled, leaning into his hug. He was right, the new song I had played for the first time tonight had the crowd captivated. They really loved it. It gave me hope for the new album I was working on, and how it was going to be received.

Levi also nodded in my direction. “Nice gig, mate. They really loved you tonight! Are you ready?”

I smiled at him. “Yeah, they really did. Where did Tom go?”

Levi's mouth pulled a grim line. “He had a call from the local cop shop about a lead on Natasha.”

I nodded. “Did you get the toy ray out of my dressing room?”

His brow furrowed; he hadn't. He went to move past me, and I held my hand up to

stop him. “It’s okay, I’ll go and get it. I could do with a piss break anyway. Everything’s all secure back here anyway, right?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “But if you’re not back in about two minutes, I will be coming in after you.”

I rolled my eyes and smirked. “Back in less than two minutes then!”

Leaving them outside in the wings, I made my way back down the corridor and into my dressing room. I first nipped into the attached bathroom, and no sooner had I started to pee when I heard the outer door of my dressing room being opened.

“Jesus, Levi, I’m sure even you can’t piss that fast!” I laughed, flushed, zipped up, and washed my hands before walking out to find a complete stranger standing in my dressing room.

“Who the fuck are you?” I panicked. My heart started to pound in my chest, and I thought for a second about how I could disarm him and escape.

He held his hands up in surrender in an attempt to calm me. “Relax, Mr Love! Levi is waiting for you in the car outside. He told me to come back here and tell you they’ve had a possible sighting of the Gibson woman and to take you to him. The car is just outside the fire exit opposite here.”

I stared at him. This. This was what my instincts had been telling me. Feeling validated, I listened to what I was being told. I slipped across the corridor, out into the night, into the awaiting car.

Before I could realise what was happening, the man slammed the door closed behind me. I wasn’t alone in the car. Sitting pressed against the driver’s door so as to not be noticeable from the outside was Natasha. A split second after I realised it was her, I

also noticed the glimmer of metal in her hand and saw the gun she had pointed directly at me.

Bile rose to my throat. My heart started hammering against my ribs. It was her. I was in the car with Natasha Gibson. My blood ran cold. This was going to be how I died.

“The doors are locked, so are the windows. Don’t try anything. We’re just going to go somewhere where we can have a little chat in private.”

I stared at her, my mouth dry, my pulse throbbing in my ears. I was so damn stupid. I listened to someone I didn’t know after everything Tom had told me and now I was the victim of my own stupidity. Words wouldn’t form; I gave her a nod. She smiled, seemingly satisfied with my compliance as she turned to the steering wheel and nodded. Seconds later she drove us out into the streets of Glasgow and the darkness.

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“Levi, what the fuck do you mean he’s gone? Gone where?” I bellowed down my phone.

“I don’t know, boss. He went to get his toy ray, take a leak, and never came back. I went to his dressing room after five minutes and he wasn’t there. We’ve combed the building, he’s nowhere to be found. He’s not anywhere in the building.”

Fuck!

A moment of fear gripped me; the what if of several scenarios flooded my mind. My military training took over. I pushed my feelings into my boots; my mind focused on the task at hand and everything I needed to do to get Lennox back in one piece.

“Levi, CCTV, I need every exit they have, the corridor of his dressing room. Check them all. Cars, anything at all that looks out of place. The man hasn’t just disappeared, something will show us what’s happened. I’m on my way back, ETA about eight minutes.” I didn’t wait to hear Levi’s reply before I hung up.

The last miles back to the venue passed without me even really registering how I arrived there. My mind was racing with everything that I would need to do to make sure that I got Lennox back safely. My heart was down in my belly, filling it with nervous knots in a way that I had never experienced before.

I thought about everything that had happened between Lennox and I over the last few weeks. I thought about what had happened between us just a few nights ago in Belfast. It wasn’t long before my mind also raced with thoughts about everything I should have said that day and didn’t have the balls to. What if I never got the chance



to say them to him now?

No.

That could not happen. I would get Lennox back or else.

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A few miles from the gig, on the edge of Glasgow, we pulled into a deserted car park and waited. Soon, another car pulled in and parked beside us. Natasha rolled down the window.

“Are you sure you weren’t followed?” she asked them impatiently.

“Yes Tasha, I’m sure I wasn’t followed. Now hurry up and open the door. You know it won’t be long before they go looking for him,” a male voice reminded her.

She rubbed her forehead and waved the gun at her accomplice. “I know.”

“Make sure you do, love. We had a deal, remember?”

Love? She knew him? What the hell was happening?

“There’s been a change of plan,” she announced and pointed her gun at him. “You’re staying here and I’m going on alone with Lennox. Do not follow me, do you understand?”

“Natasha, this wasn’t the plan! You agreed!” he pleaded with her.

Ignoring him, she put the window back up and tucked the gun into her lap as she moved off, leaving the man who had been in my dressing room behind. She pulled out of the car park and back onto the main roads.

Dread made my blood run cold in my veins. What kind of deal did he have with her, and why had she now changed her mind enough to double-cross him? This situation

was getting worse with every moment that passed. The bad vibe I'd had at the concert continued to grow until it evolved into a full-on panic attack. I was going to die at the hands of this woman.

To distract myself from what might happen, I tried to focus on the directions that we were going, the roads we were taking, anything that might help Tom find me. If only I was able to get a message to him about where I was somehow. Why had I left my phone in the dressing room? He would have been able to track me with it by now.

Time seemed to stretch out forever as the city disappeared. We headed out into the dark countryside, unseen and probably undiscoverable. I couldn't make out any of where we were going. I caught glimpses of the occasional road sign, but it almost felt as though we had looped around a few different ways in an attempt to stop me from knowing exactly where we were.

By the time we pulled into the driveway of a small, whitewashed cottage, the clock on the car dash told me it was about an hour and a half since I had got off stage. Natasha exited the car and came round to my side, pointing the gun at me through the door.

"Just do what you're told and this will all be over soon enough," she warned me. My mind was running away with all the gruesome possibilities and a chill went down my spine thinking about what 'over' could actually mean.

I needed to get out of there. I didn't know how I could achieve that, but I needed to get the hell away from her. By now, Tom would know I was gone and would be looking for me. Had I not been right off the stage, I would have had my phone and Tom would be able to track me. But now I wasn't sure what was meant to happen at all. Part of me wondered if she had planned for this. Had she, or the dressing room stranger, known I wouldn't be traceable if they got me when they did? I feared that I was being paranoid. After all, Tom had run such a tight ship until now.

The thought of shoving her and running crossed my mind. But she was armed, it was dark, and I had no idea if she knew the area or not. Maybe this was somewhere that she was very familiar with. I, on the other hand, would be running blind, and she would definitely be pissed off when she got back on her feet. If she wasn't going to kill me before that, she definitely would after.

So instead, I let her shove me into the cottage, where she ordered me into one of the kitchen chairs and tied me tightly to it. I couldn't have moved even if I hadn't been too terrified to do so.

"Now, my love, that's better, isn't it?" She smiled at me, and my stomach churned. "The plan had been for Trevor to come with us, and then leave us here while I talked to you. He thinks if I can just talk to you, then I'll come to my senses and be his wife again." She pulled a chair over and sat opposite me. "But you and I both know that I'm doing nothing of the sort, don't we?" She ran her hand over my cheek, and I tried not to wince back from her touch.

"What?" My panic wasn't remotely hidden from my voice, it was higher and a touch squeakier than normal.

"You sent me cards, you wrote songs for me. He's never done that."

My mind was racing almost as fast as my heart. What the hell was she talking about? I had never sent her a card, and I had certainly never written a song for her.

"Maybe he loves you in other ways," I suggested with a smile.

A second later my ears were ringing and my eye socket felt like it had exploded. For a moment I thought that she might have shot me. As the initial fog of the impact started to clear I realised that she had struck me with the butt of the gun.

“Don’t ever talk to me about how he might love me. I don’t love him, I love you. You and I are meant to be together, and you know it.”

“I’m sorry,” I murmured in defeat.

“That’s better.” She smiled at me manically again. Her hand stroked over my face where she had hit me. “I’m sorry to have hurt you, but you have to know how much it hurts to hear you saying someone else could love me better than you. No one could ever love me better than you, Lennox.”

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It had been two hours since Lennox was last seen in the venue. The clock was ticking. We were no closer to finding him.

The call from the police station had been a hoax. No one at the station had even heard of the name the sergeant had given and there was no one who had been brought in on a speeding incident. In fact, the only person they had in custody at all was merely the first drunk of the night, a woman in her fifties who had gotten a bit lairy with a bouncer.

The second I realised that it was a ruse to lure me away, I understood exactly what was going to happen. I knew what Levi was going to tell me the instant his name appeared on my car's display. Natasha had got him.

The CCTV around the venue confirmed that Natasha had been driving. What surprised me was that her ex-husband had been the one to hustle Lennox into the car with her. Aiding and abetting a kidnap was not something I had pegged for him, though he had been very clear that he was still in love with her. Maybe he thought this was his way back into her good graces. His reassurances that he didn't think she was capable of being violent with Lennox suddenly paled into insignificance considering this new knowledge.

“Levi, find me everything you know on Trevor Gibson, and get Eric on the phone.”

He nodded and got to work in the mobile operations centre that we had temporarily set up in my hotel room. A few moments later, Levi handed me his phone.

“Eric? I hope we didn't wake you.”

“Not at all, what can I do to help?”

“Did you find anything else out about Trevor Gibson?” I asked, trying to remain calm, but knowing full well the stress was beginning to show in my voice.

“Nothing more than the basics of what I told you. I’ll send you the updated documents now.”

I thanked him and ended the call. There was a knock at my door and Levi went to answer it.

“Mr Thatcher?”

Levi pointed in my direction.

“We just wanted to keep you informed that we have a lead into Mr Love’s disappearance and are looking into who owned the car he was last seen getting into.”

I nodded. This wasn’t news to me. I had already figured out who it was that owned the car. I knew that as soon as I saw the CCTV. I also knew that because this was an open investigation to them, they wouldn’t tell me who it was anyway.

“If we find out anything further, I will keep you updated,” he finished.

I shook his hand and thanked him for his time, closing the door behind him as he left.

“The buggers don’t get anymore helpful with this, do they?” Levi laughed to himself.

“Not one fucking bit,” I agreed. “Any word on where the car went after driving away?”

Levi shook his head. “Nah, boss. Looks like they had at least some knowledge on being followed. Aside from the odd traffic camera in the direction of the M8, they seem to have just disappeared from sight.”

Fuck. I knew what that meant. They had been even more clear in their goals and how to achieve them. They understood they would need to avoid being seen.

“This has been planned.”

Levi agreed, “Too fucking planned for my liking. The call you had was just to get you out of the way long enough to get Lennox. And now these fuckers have it in place to stay away from view and just disappear.” Just as he spoke his phone pinged with a text message. “Well, my mate has just confirmed that the car is indeed registered to Trevor Gibson.” He showed me the screen.

Anger bubbled up within me. “He lied to my fucking face.” I made a vow that if I saw him again I was going to punch his lights out. “Now what?” I growled.

“Relax, boss. We’re going to keep looking. Something will turn up and we’ll get him back.”

“Levi, call in some of the tech guys. Tell them they have an hour to take apart her social media, her emails, her bank accounts, and the same for Trevor Gibson. There has to be something—other cars, property, credit cards, cash withdrawals. Anything. There has to be a tie to something, somewhere that we have overlooked.”

Levi lifted his phone and was dialling before I had even finished what I was saying. I really hoped that we could find some clues to be able to get Lennox back, but the more time went on, the more worried I got.



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“Don’t look so nervous,” she cooed at me.

“Forgive me, but you kidnapped me, brought me here with a gun, and have me tied to a chair in a farmhouse in the arsehole of nowhere. I mean, that doesn’t exactly feel like the warmest of welcomes.”

“I’m sorry.” She looked genuinely regretful. “But it’s not like they would let me talk to you. They kept trying to keep us apart. We used to talk, and then once you left the band, I didn’t hear from you anymore. But now you’re back....”

The cogs in my head were spinning. Her words echoed over and over. ‘We used to talk.’ I needed to know what the hell she was talking about. “We used to talk?”

“Don’t you remember?”

“I was drinking a lot back then,” I lied.

She nodded like she understood. “I cherished every one of them.” She opened the bag that she had with her, and I winced, preparing myself for another weapon, she pulled out a stack of clearly repeatedly read cards.

“Those are all from me?” I asked in complete disbelief as I stared at the neatly tied up bundle.

“You really don’t remember sending me any of these?”

I sighed and shook my head. Had I really been that drunk that I didn’t remember

sending her letters? Was this going to be a disaster of my own making in the end?

“Can I see any of them? They might refresh my memory.”

“This one was one of the first that wasn’t a birthday or a Christmas card,” she explained fondly, untying the ribbon and pulling it from the bundle. “Let me read it to you,” she suggested, looking at the ropes around me.

Silently I nodded, and she began reading what ‘I’ had written.

“Dear Natasha,

Tonight was the first gig in London, and it was an insane one. I don’t think any of us had been prepared for just how much noise was going to be coming back at us from an arena with over twenty thousand fans packed in and ready to see us. It was an amazing experience! I really hope you were there, and you got to see for yourself just how unreal it was. I’m buzzing, I have been for hours, and I can’t wait to do it all over again already!

Write soon,

Love, Lennox xo.”

I blinked, taking in the words as she read them. They sounded familiar, but I couldn’t put my finger on where I knew them from. Had I really been so drunk that I didn’t know what I was doing? No, I pushed that thought from my mind. This was on the first day of the first tour that we ever did. It was another six months or so before I really started to even feel like shit about what the record label were pushing, and at least another year before I started to drink. So why couldn’t I remember sending her this letter?

“Does it sound familiar?”

“A little,” I admitted.

“You know these cards and notes got me through some pretty tough shit in my life,” Natasha disclosed in return. “I’ve re-read them a lot. They’re why I love you, and why I know you feel the same about me.”

I tried not to react to her words. I didn’t want to hurt her and have her overreact to what I said or did. I wanted to get out of here alive.

I thought about Tom again and just how much I wanted to get back to him. How much I wanted to be able to just straight up tell him that I was into him and I wanted to have a relationship with him.

“Let me read you another one,” Natasha suggested hopefully. When I nodded in agreement, she started to read another letter.

I listened, and again the words sounded familiar, but I couldn’t place where I knew them from. I was starting to doubt my memory. Maybe I had sent them to her. Maybe in my drunken desperation for company I had picked up on something that she needed via one of her letters in reply. She said she wrote back.

Natasha read me card after card, note after note. More and more of the words sounded familiar to me. I felt guilt, I felt forlorn, I felt numb. And in that almost checked-out haze of half-listening to her reading note number whatever-it-was, something in the words caught my attention.

“Wait, what was that last part?”

She stopped and looked at me with a furrowed brow.

“Read that last paragraph again for me? Please?” I begged her with my eyes to repeat the words. I thought I had it now. She looked at me suspiciously and read what was in front of her for the second time.

A lightbulb went off somewhere in my mind. I knew where the words came from now and why they were familiar. I just wasn’t sure how much Natasha was going to like what I was going to say.

“I recognise some of the words in those letters.”

A smile grew on her face and my guilt and trepidation rose again. “I knew you would remember! I knew that it wouldn’t take long for you to realise just what we used to have.”

I wanted to tell her where I knew the letters from. But something in me reminded me of how dangerous a situation I was in. This woman was holding me at gun-point, tied to a chair in a cottage in the middle of nowhere. I had no idea how to get out of this. My panicked mind had only one answer for me. Pray, and play along. Pray that wherever I was, Tom was going to be able to figure it out and come to my rescue and play along just long enough to give him the time he needed to find me.

“You’re right, I remember. I wrote those during our very first tour.” I smiled weakly at her as her face lit up with joy at my recognition.

“Yes!” She beamed.

“I wrote those notes for a backstage glimpse of life on the road. I’m glad that you still have them. I’d forgotten what it was like on that first tour until you read them to me.”

She moved herself closer to me. “Do you remember what I told you all those years ago?”

“Drinking so much really messed with my memory. Remind me what you said?” I smiled fakely at her. At least that wasn’t a complete lie. When I was drinking the most, I lost days to the booze. It was one of the biggest factors in me getting into rehab and getting myself sorted.

Natasha simpered her sickly-sweet grin at me and proceeded to remind me of just how much she had told me back then. She’d loved me, I was her first love, that she wanted me to be her first. I thought about how all of this happened before her winning the date with us, and how much that must have fuelled her delusions even further. To have had hugs from us – from me – time with me, photos with me. Christ, I wanted to be sick. The things that the record label had made us do to keep us in the good favours of the fans had only made everything a million times worse. I would never forgive them for any of this.

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My phone rang about twenty minutes after Levi called the tech guys. “Talk to me,” I demanded Cathy, our IT chief.

“No other cars, nothing out of the ordinary on her banks. Same with him, no other cars. He did hire a car in Glasgow, though.”

“What? But they were in his car? Where is it?”

“Coming back into Glasgow now. I’m sending the tracking to Levi’s handheld now.”

“Brilliant! Cathy, I need more, they must have taken him somewhere.”

Levi was already on his feet with my car keys in his hand. “Let’s go and pay him a visit.”

We tracked him all the way to a hotel not far from the venue and kept out of sight until he disappeared up to his room. We gave him a few seconds and then approached. I pressed myself against the wall on one side of the door and Levi knocked. The door swung open, and Trevor was standing there looking grim.

My anger got the better of me and from my unseen position, I grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and pushed him back into his room, slamming him against the wall, Levi closing the door behind us.

“Where the fuck is Lennox?”

He held his arms up in surrender. “I don’t know!”

Pressing my forearm against his chest almost at his throat I growled in his face. “I know that you were with her, I know that you were the one that got him into the car with her. WHERE IS HE?”

“I don’t know! She said there had been a change of plan. I was supposed to go with her, she was only meant to talk to him.”

“Are you fucking insane?!”

“I didn’t think she’d do this.”

I pressed even harder on his upper chest and throat. “I should have fucking known that you were in on it. Tell me where she’s taken him.”

Trevor was pulled at my arm, trying to get me off him, trying to get air into his lungs. “You’re choking me!” He gasped.

“Boss,” Levi said calmly behind me.

“She told me that she just wanted to talk to him.”

“If she hurts a single hair on his head...” I let my voice trail off, leaving my threat unspoken.

“She won’t.”

Levi chimed in this time. “With all respect, mate, I’m not sure you’re really in the best position to make that kind of decision about all this. You have literally aided and abetted a kidnapping. What about any of that makes you think this woman is of sound mind?”

“She thinks she’s in love with him. He has been sending her all these fucking letters while she was a teenager. She needs to talk to him, she needs to understand that it wasn’t like that for him, and that she’s living in a fantasy.” Trevor bit at him.

“She’s not the fucking only one,” I snarled at him. “You thought this would get her in your good graces and that she would just come running back to you? It’s not fucking happening; I’m going to make sure she goes to prison for a very long time.”

I was finding it harder and harder to keep my temper with him. He had to know something. I was about to start into him again when my phone rang.

“What?” I barked without looking at the screen.

“She has property. She was left a lakeside cottage by a great-uncle when she was a child.”

“Where?” I barked again.

“Already sent it to Levi,” Jake answered.

“Keep on it in case there is anything else that might have been missed.” I didn’t wait for his answer, and I shoved my phone back in my pocket.

“Know anything about a cottage at Loch Lomond?”

Trevor’s face gave away the fact that he had no idea what I was talking about before he even opened his mouth.

“Is she armed?” Levi asked over my shoulder, and again his expressions told us all we needed before he uttered a single word.



“Fuck,” Levi muttered.

I pulled my arm from Trevor’s body. “I promise you this now, if anything happens to him because you helped her... I will come after you too. What does she have?”

“A gun.” He sagged against the wall in defeat.

My heart dropped like a stone into my boots, and I glanced over at Levi. “Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

Just over an hour later, with the help of the coordinates supplied by Cathy, we arrived on the road leading to an isolated, yet pretty, little cottage on the edges of Loch Lomond. We drove just a short distance past the house, pulled the car into a ditch and jogged back to the cottage using the cover of darkness and our on foot approach to our advantage.

Adopting the same method we had at the hotel, Levi hugged one side of the doorway and I took the other. Just as we were about to make our move a shot rang out in the darkness.

Levi used surprise to his advantage and kicked in the old wooden door in one move.

Natasha was standing over Lennox with the gun still in her hand. Levi managed to disarm her without much incident as she stood there with her mouth open, staring at Lennox, who was slumped in the chair, blood pouring out over his t-shirt.

Knowing Levi would take care of Natasha, I rushed to Lennox’s side, kneeling beside him as all my training and ingrained skills took over. I lifted his t-shirt, looking to see where it was that she had got him. Just high enough on one side to have possibly damaged his intestines, or even his diaphragm.

“Tom?” came a pained muttering from Lennox.

“Shh, I’m here, we’re going to get you to hospital.” I smiled grimly at him as Levi restrained Natasha in a similar way to what she had done with Lennox. He emptied the bullets from the gun and put them out of her reach.

Once he was sure that any danger she presented had been taken care of, he came to my side and started to untie Lennox while I got some bandages from the first aid kit we had with us. We worked quickly and silently, freeing him from his binds, getting him more comfortable on the floor, and applying basic first aid.

Levi got on his phone. “Ambulance please. Hello. Yes, my name is Levi Marshall, I’m on scene with a gunshot victim... No, it’s not me, it’s the gentleman that I am in the personal protection detail of... Yes ma’am... Would the what3words location be the best? Uh huh... We are at composts.bookshop.excellent.... Yes ma’am. Brilliant, how long? Thank you. Yes, please, police also. Thank you.”

Levi looked at me as I pressed down hard on the still bleeding wound on Lennox’s torso. “Ambulance and police are on the way.”

I looked over my shoulder to where Natasha was sobbing quietly, her gaze remaining fixed on her favourite singer’s unconscious form. She glanced over at me.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it. I didn’t mean to, oh God. Oh God! He’s going to die, isn’t he?”

I rolled my eyes and turned back to Lennox, “Don’t listen to her, you’re staying right here with me,” I whispered over him as I swapped the blood-soaked dressing for a new one. “You’re doing great Lennox, you’re going to be just fine.”

I wished that I believed my own words. I was worried; he was still haemorrhaging

and getting paler by the second. I was terrified that I was going to lose him before I got the chance to tell him what I really felt about him. What I should have been telling him all along—I was crazy about him and I wanted to see where all this could go. If he made it, I promised myself I would tell him exactly that, the first chance I got.

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“Thanks for letting us know, Tom,” Alex replied when I called to tell him what happened. “And keep us updated on how he’s doing, won’t you?”

“I will. They’re hopeful he’ll make a full recovery, they’ll just have to keep an eye on him for a while and make sure that everything heals as it should.”

“Get some rest,” Alex insisted.

“Soon,” I promised, and with that we said our goodbyes. I went back to the family room as I waited for them to get Lennox settled in his own private room off the main ward.

Levi had handled everything with Natasha and the police, including telling them where to find Trevor. He told them everything we knew and they’d just have to wait to be able to talk to Lennox.

I went in the ambulance and then waited in the hospital for any news they could give me on how Lennox was doing. Being lured away from his side had meant that I hadn’t been there when they kidnapped him. I wasn’t about to leave his side now. There were too many things that had been left unsaid about what was developing between us. That wasn’t a mistake that I intended to make again.

As the light finally started to fade outside, I heard the voice that I had been waiting almost a whole day to hear.

“Tom?”

I straightened in my chair at the sound of his voice and leaned closer to him, taking his hand in mine. “I’m here.”

“I had the craziest dream. I was running through the corridors of this big old castle, looking for you, but I couldn’t find you,” he murmured softly, still not completely conscious of his surroundings.

“I’m here. I’ve been here the whole time,” I reassured him.

“She didn’t kill me.” While it was stated as fact, I wasn’t entirely sure that he wasn’t also asking, just to make sure he could trust that he was still alive.

“She definitely didn’t kill you. I got there just as you were shot. Levi and I looked after you until you got to the hospital.”

“I knew you’d find me.” He smiled weakly, squeezing my hand back.

Looking in his bleary eyes, I made him a promise I intended to never break. “I will always find you and be there for you.”

Lennox grinned and fell back to sleep.

The next morning, Lennox was a lot brighter when he woke. I shouldn’t really have been allowed to stay, but Alex and Jonny had negotiated with the hospital that Lennox was to have security at all times.

“Morning.” He smiled at me, his face less pale than it had been for our conversation the evening before.

I gazed back at him warmly. “You’re looking better than you were last night.”

“Well, yesterday I was just getting over being shot, so I would like to think I’m looking better now.” He smirked cheekily.

“Oh, you’re definitely feeling better.” I grinned back. The return of his natural colour and his cheekiness made butterflies rise in my stomach. My heart felt like it was so swollen it would burst. “Before the nurses and doctors all come back in and start to fuss over you again, I have some things I need to say.”

Lennox shook his head. “It’s okay.”

I reached again for his hand, squeezing it. “No, I’m going to say this. I thought I was doing the right thing in putting whatever it was between us off until after the tour was finished. Your situation reminded me that sometimes the only right time for anything is in the moment, because you never know when you’re actually going to get another one.”

I moved myself to sit on the bed beside him. “There is something starting between us. Any fool could see it, and I’m sorry if I made you think that I didn’t want to be with you. That was wrong. I very much would like to be with you. You just make me damn nervous.”

He snorted a little as he replied. “I make you nervous?”

I nodded. “You do. I could very easily be myself with you. Let my guard down, trust you, want you. I’ve never done that with anyone before, not truly. I think my work helped me keep everyone at arm’s length and yet there you were right up against me.”

“Mmm, I did like being right up against you.” He smirked.

Shaking my head at his comment, I chuckled. “Really? Shot and in a hospital bed and you still can’t stop tempting me?”

Lennox rubbed over his side where his bandages now were. “Maybe I’ve learned that life is short and time is precious.”

“Maybe I have too,” I replied. For the briefest of moments, I was about to lean over the bed and claim his mouth with my own, but the door knocked, and a nurse entered.

“Someone is looking better this morning.” She studied Lennox and then shot a dirty look at me. “No sitting on the bed please, Mr Thatcher.”

“Sorry.” I smiled sheepishly and retreated to the chair where I had been parked the whole time that Lennox had been in the room.

She checked Lennox’s vitals, had a glance at where his wound was, and the condition of his bandages. She updated his charts, said the doctor would be around soon, and left again.

“For the record,” Lennox said with a smile, “I would like very much to see where things are going with you. I find you just as easy to be around. Just as easy to be myself without fear, or any front needed. It feels good, it’s addictive, and I would definitely want more.”

“Let’s do that then.” I grinned back. “We’ll get you better and out of here and see where all this leads.”

“Oh, I think you’ve got yourself a deal.” He grinned back as another knock on the door interrupted us.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

The last month had been one hell of a rollercoaster ride of emotions. Being shot, surgery, recovery, telling the police everything that had happened the night I was kidnapped... And then there was Tom.

When I was released from hospital, Tom drove me all the way home. He offered me the choice of his house or mine, and I picked mine. I reasoned it would help me heal better to be in my own bed with my own familiar surroundings. He agreed, and he hadn't left my side since.

I wanted to see where it all went for us, and I had to admit that even I had been pleasantly surprised by just how well he and I seemed to fit together in a domestic life.

Alex and Johnny had been brilliant. They had postponed the rest of the tour and had agreed that I could add in some extra dates too, to revisit some of the venues again now that I wouldn't be fretting over the fact Natasha could have been in the crowd. That, and Tom had agreed to have his team stay on as my personal security for any time I'm on tour. Of course, I had to promise him that this time I would actually do what I was being told, and not just walk off with any stranger.

I could have hidden myself away, but after talking with the guys at the label and Tom, I decided that this event couldn't be allowed to define me, to enshroud me in fear. She had been one very isolated person who had needed help when she was younger and never got it. That mental illness had grown unchecked and while it had almost cost me my life, it had also cost Natasha hers. So, this tour and future ones would still happen, I would keep doing what I really did love, but I would be careful about who I trusted in concert venues, and mindful of what Tom's team would be



telling me.

Tom had also discussed putting in security cameras on the outside of the house, though I had to admit, I was starting to suspect that might be to make Tom feel better than to actually help me. Natasha's attack scared him. Mostly because at the time he had left things unsaid, but also because it had given him a glimpse of a life without being alone. He told me the thought of losing me was something he never wanted to face again.

The loneliness was something I didn't want to have to face either. Life was richer with Tom in it. It was something that would be coming up soon however, because with every passing day I was getting stronger. I had healed up well, and I was sure that sooner or later, Tom was going to want to go home.

"I've been thinking," he announced as I was playing about with my guitar, fiddling with some new songs I'd been working on.

"Christ, words to strike fear into any man." I smirked. "Go on." I laughed when he shot me a dirty look.

"Well, I have been thinking. Your recovery is going really well, and it's getting to the point where I could probably move back into my place again."

I braced myself for what was coming next.

"What if I just didn't. What if I stayed here – long term."

For a moment I just blinked, unsure if I had heard his words correctly. "You want to move in?" I asked for clarity.

Tom suddenly looked nervous. "I mean, yeah. If you're okay with that, and if you're

not, then that?—”

“Yes,” I interrupted him. “Yes, I would really like it if you stayed. Life is better with you in it.”

Tom moved closer and sat on the edge of the coffee table in front of me, taking my hand in his. “Are you sure?”

“I like what we’ve done here over the last few weeks. I like how we gel together.”

“Me too.” He smiled back at me. “I’ve been thinking about something else too.”

I rolled my eyes, and he squeezed my hand a little tighter in response.

“I’ve been thinking that yours was the last case that I want to go out into the field on. What happened to you could just as easily have happened to me, and I don’t want that for either of us.”

A sense of relief washed over me. I hadn’t put much thought into the what ifs of Tom returning to work again, but I understood the risks that would have been involved if he did. I did worry that there could just have easily been an attacker out there ready to take him on, never mind what happened with me and Natasha.

“Could you really do that?” I asked, setting my guitar aside and leaning closer to Tom.

“To make sure that I get to come home safely and annoy you for quite some time to come? Uh, yes, I think I can.” He grinned cheekily.

I chuckled softly and pulled him close enough to capture his mouth with my own. I kissed him softly, and Tom sank to his knees from where he sat, deepening our kiss

as he did.

“I think you should take me upstairs to celebrate this decision,” I whispered against his ear as he kissed along my neck.

He pulled back and looked at me with surprise. “Are you sure you’re ready?”

I nodded. While intimacy hadn’t been in short supply between us as I recovered, both of us finding alternative ways to pleasure each other, sex simply hadn’t happened. It wasn’t something either of us had needed to rush while I was healing, but right then seemed like the perfect time.

“Lead on.” He smiled, and I stood from the sofa, took him by the hand, and led him upstairs to my—our—bedroom.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:49 pm*

Lennox stood beside me, his face pale, his hand clammy and gripping mine tightly. This was the moment that he had been dreading since the trial started. It had taken five months for the High Court to finally begin seeing their case against Natasha and Trevor Gibson. Now, just three weeks later, it was time for Lennox to take the stand and tell them what happened that fateful night in Glasgow.

“I feel like I’m going to be sick,” he half whispered to me in the busy street as we approached the door to the high court building. I squeezed his hand and looked at him with a grim smile as the press that had gathered outside for his arrival started calling his name and shouting out all manner of insane questions.

‘Was it true that you’d known her since she was a teenager?’

‘Did you have an affair with her?’

‘Is she a scorned lover?’

‘Did she rape you?’

‘Were you involved in a threesome with her ex-husband?’

They just wouldn’t let up in their calls, and Lennox pulled me along to the doorway faster. This was an eye opener for me. I knew that being in the public eye had its pitfalls, but to see the press bombarding Lennox like that outside a court where he was the victim was just insane to me. That was a side of the fame for those I protected that I didn’t usually get to see. Diplomats and rich businessmen didn’t normally attract that kind of attention.

Once safely inside Lennox glanced over at me. “They’re something else, aren’t they?” he said with a small shake of his head.

“That’s insanity,” I replied incredulously.

Lennox sighed. “It’s always something with the UK press unfortunately.” He peered around him. “Where the hell is it that we’re meant to be going?” he asked, changing the subject back to the reason we were there.

Glancing around myself I saw one of the advocates handling his case standing further along the corridor. They nodded to acknowledge us as we approached. “Mr Love, Mr Thatcher. Thank you for being here.” They greeted us as they shook both of our hands in turn. “Mr Thatcher, since you have given your evidence before Mr Love, you are welcome to make your way to the public gallery. My clerk here will be able to show you where you’re going.”

Acknowledging him with a nod, I turned to Lennox. “You are going to be amazing today. Just keep calm, remember to breathe, and remember that even when I’m not beside you, I’m still in the room, and I’m right here with you,” I said, touching his chest over his heart.

“Thank you.” He smiled grimly, before turning to the advocate and being led into the court. One of the clerks that was with them showed me to the public gallery where I would be able to watch as Lennox gave his evidence.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:50 pm*

I didn't think that I would have been able to face any of the trial without having Tom by my side every step of the way. The press coverage of it had been very much on the side of how a big strong man could have fought off a poor little woman.

The more that came out, the more the press tried to push it to me being the one in the wrong. My sexuality was called into question. It was assumed that I led her on when I was drunk. It was assumed that it was some kind of weird love triangle with me and her ex-husband, some even suggested that we were a thuple. It had been an almighty shit show from start to finish, and Christ knew what they were going to say once the evidence I was about to give was reported on. Hopefully they would just lose interest.

Now, standing in the dock in the High Court in Glasgow, I really wasn't sure how much they would be forgetting this story. I gave my affirmation that I promised to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Advocate McAdams then took over and started to ask me about what happened.

"Were you aware of Mrs Gibson before your encounter on the night in question?" he asked.

I glanced at Tom in the gallery, took a deep breath and began to tell them my story.

"I was."

"And can you tell me in which capacity you were aware of her?"

"I first met Mrs Gibson when she was a teenager as part of a prize the boy band I was in had offered to her." My hands started to shake as I spoke.

“That was the prize of a date with yourself and the other members of your band, was it not?”

“It was.”

“And are there any other times that you have been aware of Mrs Gibson?” he asked.

“Yes, very recently Mrs Gibson has been sending me gifts, notes, and flowers. When I started my recent tour, she got into my hotel room and left things on the bed for me.” I squeezed my hands together trying to get them to stop trembling.

“Was she authorised to be in your hotel room?” Advocate McAdams asked.

“No, Sir.”

“What was it that she left in the room?”

“There was a note, flowers, chocolates, and a bottle of champagne. There was also a card, and a framed photo of the time I met her at the date she won.”

“Sounds like the kind of gift one might leave for someone you’re in a relationship with. Were you ever in a relationship with Mrs Gibson?”

“No,” I answered, shaking my head.

“You mentioned that she left you some champagne.”

“Yes,” I confirmed, my mouth starting to get dry.

“The gift of champagne for a recovering alcoholic?”

“Objection, My Lord. Was that a question, or a statement from Advocate McAdams?” Natasha’s solicitor interjected. The judge agreed and asked Advocate McAdams to stick to asking questions.

“Apologies, My Lord, I will rephrase,” McAdams replied. “Mr Love, are you a recovering alcoholic?”

“I am,” I admitted.

“Is your struggle with that particular addiction well known?” he asked.

“It was covered widely in the press at the time and was one of the reasons I left the band that I was in. I would imagine it was pretty well known.” My palms got sticky with sweat as I rubbed them together.

“So, as someone with a keen interest in your life and well being, Mrs Gibson would be well aware of your issues and subsequent recovery?” he suggested.

“I would assume so. It was front page news for a while,” I pointed out.

“And as someone who is a recovering alcoholic, would you expect someone that professed to love you and care about you to leave you the gift of a bottle of alcoholic beverage?”

“No, Sir, I would not. It would be the opposite of what I would expect of someone in that situation,” I agreed, licking my lips trying to get some moisture back in my mouth.

“And what did you do when you discovered that the defendant had been in your hotel room?”



“I called the owners of my record label,” I answered.

“Not the police?” McAdams countered.

I shook my head. “I guess I was in shock. I honestly didn’t know what to do about it, but on top of the other things that I had received from Mrs Gibson, I was worried that this was getting worse and wanted their advice on the best thing to do about it.”

“And what did they suggest?”

Again, Natasha’s Advocate interrupted with an objection, saying it was hearsay, which the Judge agreed with.

“Apologies again, My Lord. What happened after you called the owners of the record label?” he corrected.

“I went to the manager’s room and the police were contacted.”

“Did you call the police?”

“No, Alex and Johnny – the owners of the label,” I corrected, “they did that.”

Question after question was asked about what had happened after that initial night in my hotel room. Had I seen her again, had anything else happened? I did my best to be as clear as I could with the answers that I gave. Slowly but surely the questions crept towards the night where I was ushered into the back of the car with Natasha waiting inside.

“Now, Mr Love, on the night of the twenty-seventh of April, you were performing in O2 Academy in Glasgow. Is that correct?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

“And as Mr Thatcher made us aware during his testimony, he was not present when you left the stage that night, is that correct?”

“Yes, he had been called away.” I was trying not to panic about what was coming. I looked again to Tom in the gallery. He smiled and gave me a double thumbs up, mouthing ‘you’re doing great’ back at me.

“Mr Love, in your own words, can you walk us through what you told the police happened that night?”

I took a deep breath and bowed my head for a moment, summoning up the calm I was going to need to get through the next part of my testimony.

“When I got off the stage after the concert, I asked where Mr Thatcher was, as he was usually there to accompany me. I went to my dressing room to use the bathroom and collect my things. While there someone came into the room and told me there had been a sighting of Mrs Gibson in the venue, and I needed to leave via the fire escape opposite and get into the car waiting for me outside.”

“And do you know who it was that came into your dressing room?” McAdams asked.

“Yes, it was Mr Trevor Gibson,” I confirmed.

“And what happened once you got into the car?”

“I discovered that it was Mrs Gibson in the driver’s seat. She threatened me. She told me that she was taking me somewhere that we could talk.”

“Was she armed?” McAdams prompted.

I sighed. “She had a gun.”

“Did you fear for your life?”

“Yes.” My voice trembled.

“Did she say or do anything else that made you concerned?”

“We parked in a car park and waited for Mr Gibson to arrive. But when he did, she pointed the gun at him and told him there had been a change of plan. Instead of him getting in the car with us as he seemed to suggest he had been meant to, she drove off without him. He seemed shocked that she did that.”

“Where did Mrs Gibson take you?”

“To a cottage in the middle of nowhere. I had no idea where I was.”

“Didn’t it cross your mind to escape? You’re taller than Mrs Gibson, couldn’t you have overpowered her and got away?” he asked, beating her Advocate to the punch. This way it appeared more sympathetic to me.

“It did. But I didn’t know where I was, I didn’t know if she knew the area more than I did. She was armed with a gun; I didn’t want to antagonise her into using it. I thought I might stand a better chance of survival if I just did what she said.”

“Was the gunshot wound the only injury that you received from Mrs Gibson?” he prompted again.

“No, she hit me with the butt of the gun two or three times across my face,” I confirmed.

Advocate McAdams looked to the court and to Natasha as she sat beside her own Advocate. “Why couldn’t you defend yourself from the blow, Mr Love?”

“Mrs Gibson had tied me to a chair.”

“I would like to draw the court’s attention to exhibits ten through twenty-seven. Photographs taken at the crime scene showing the chair and rope in situ, and the injuries sustained by Mr Love that go hand in hand with his testimony here today.”

On the large screen in the courtroom which Tom had said was used to show maps and CCTV footage of my abduction when he was testifying, the images McAdams was discussing appeared. I thought I had been prepared to see them—I had been warned that they were coming, I had been shown them in private. But there was something about them being presented to everyone publicly that made my heart start to pound in my chest. I looked away from the images. I tried to look away from the gaze of all the people, but suddenly it was too much to deal with.

“Mr Love, are you feeling alright?” the judge asked me as I started to sway on my feet.

“My Lord, perhaps we can have a minute.” I heard McAdams say as the room started to spin. The Judge agreed and Advocate McAdams started to approach me with a glass of water in his hand. I wanted to reach out and take it from him, but my legs buckled from under me, and I slumped down into the stand.

“Lennox? Lennox are you alright?” I heard McAdams’ voice full of concern. I couldn’t slow my breathing down enough to answer him. Panic had adrenaline coursing through my system. Every inch of me was trembling.

The Judge announced a one-hour recess and asked people to clear the courtroom.

“I – need – Tom,” I stuttered out between breaths. McAdams looked at the public gallery where Tom was standing, staring at me unmoving, and gestured for him to come down.

The Advocate called over to someone else, “Can you get Mr Thatcher here please, and it might be worthwhile to get one of the first aiders in.”

“It’s – panic,” I stumbled out.

An indiscriminate amount of time passed, and suddenly Tom was beside me.

“Shhh,” he soothed, taking my hands in his own. “Remember that first day I met you. What did we do? Remember?”

I tried to nod in reply, but I wasn’t sure that it was recognisable. Tom squeezed my hand tighter. “Breathe in through your nose.” He did what he had told me to do. “Hold,” he reminded me. “Out through your mouth,” he told me, making an exaggerated example of what he was saying. “In through your nose, hold it, out through your mouth.”

I kept looking at him and let the sound of his voice soothe me, following his instructions until my breathing settled into a more normal pace, and my heart rate started to come down. I could feel my eyes starting to prickle with tears.

“I’m sorry,” I uttered as a lone tear trickled over my cheek.

Tom cupped my face, wiped the tear with his thumb, and stared into my eyes. “You have absolutely nothing to be sorry for. This is panic at seeing what a cruel thing that woman did to you, reminding you of what happened. Your body is just trying to defend you. Don’t dare say sorry, you’re simply trying to survive.”

A first aider appeared over Tom's shoulder. "I think we're okay now," Tom replied to their arrival without even looking over his shoulder. "Aren't we?" he asked me.

Silently I nodded. He handed me the water that McAdams had approached with earlier. "Drink this slowly."

Again, I listened, and did what he told me, sipping at the cool water, giving my body the time it needed to settle. Slowly the staccato nature of my breathing started to disappear, the trembling of my hands started to pass, and my legs returned to a solid form again, capable of taking my weight.

"Ready to stand?" Tom asked.

"Yes," I replied, as Tom took the glass from me and handed it to McAdams who was still standing on hand in case he was needed for anything.

"Big breath." Tom smiled at me grabbing my forearms with his hands, encouraging me to lock my grip on his arms in the same way. I took a deep breath and Tom pulled me to my feet. For the briefest of moments I swayed until my balance settled and I was able to be released and stand under my own power.

"I'm so embarrassed," I announced.

"Don't be," McAdams replied. "You'd be surprised how many times it can happen. You're not the first to go down in the witness box, and I can guarantee, you'll not be the last." He smiled genuinely at me. "Do you want to continue? We have ways to work around it if you don't."

I shook my head and took Tom's hand in mine. "No, I want to see it through. I just wasn't expecting it to hit me like that is all. But I want to finish this. I have to."

McAdams bowed his head once in acknowledgement. “Let me go and talk to the court and inform them that you would like to proceed.”

“Are you really okay?” Tom asked once the Advocate was out of earshot.

“It was seeing the blood on the scene, knowing that it almost cost me my life, seeing the injuries. I actively avoided looking in the mirror after it happened, because it was a reminder of it all. And I know that they showed me the photos in the trial prep, but it’s different seeing them here, feeling like everyone is looking at me and at them. It started to feel like I was on trial, not her.”

Tom’s arms surrounded me, and he pulled me in against him, hugging me tightly. “You did nothing wrong. I know that the press make it seem different and that everyone assumes things about it. Until you’ve had a gun pointed at you, you have no idea how you’ll react.”

A sudden thought came to my mind. “Have you been shot?” I asked him, pulling back from his hug.

A wincing smile crossed his face. “The scar on my shoulder.”

“You told me that was a car accident!” I stared at him in shock.

“I mean it was, I crashed the car because they shot me.”

My eyes widened. “You are not funny. Why didn’t you tell me the truth?”

“I didn’t want to be that person that makes it all about them. You didn’t ask about it until you were healing well, and I didn’t want you to think too much about it happening to anyone else.”

I shook my head. I got that he was trying to protect me. But he was still a twat for hiding it. “Any other courtroom revelations?”

He chuckled softly. “No, that will do us.”

I glared at him with a hint of humour on my face, a smirk almost forming on.

“Come on. Court is back in twenty minutes, and we can get you some fresh air before that.” He smiled and led me slowly from the courtroom.



*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:50 pm*

Having a panic attack in the courtroom seemed to have burst the bubble of stress and worry that I had carried in with me that morning. On returning to the stand after the recess I felt more confident in my answers.

“Now, Mr Love, if I could again take you back to the night in question. What was it that prompted Mrs Gibson to lose her temper with you?”

“The first time I suggested that Mr Gibson might still love her. The second time I told her that I didn’t send the notes that she thought I had. She told me I was lying and hit me with the gun again. Things escalated after that. She didn’t believe me when I said that the song she thought was written for her wasn’t. The culmination of it all was her screaming ‘no’ and shooting me.”

“Do you believe the defendant intended to kill you?”

“Yes,” I replied, there was no doubt in my mind that at that moment, Natasha was so hurt and angry about my rejection that she absolutely wanted to kill me.

“What happened directly after you were shot Mr Love?”

I paused; my memory of the moment had returned slowly over the last few months. “I remember Levi, Mr Campbell that is, had a hold of Mrs Gibson. He disarmed her. I remember hearing Mr Thatcher’s voice and I believe I lost consciousness at that point. When I came to again there were police and paramedics. I remember the flashing lights of their vehicles shining on the ceiling of the cottage as I was on the floor.”

“Do you remember anything else, Mr Love?”

“Not until I woke in the hospital after surgery,” I answered.

“If Mr Thatcher and Mr Campbell had not arrived when they did, were you made aware of what would have happened?” McAdams asked.

“Objection, My Lord, Advocate McAdams is leading the witness.”

The judge upheld the objection, and the question was rephrased.

“Did the doctors explain the severity of your injuries to you, Mr Love?”

“Yes. They explained to me that I would have died had I not received assistance when I did. I would have lost too much blood.”

“So, it was fortunate that Mr Campbell and Mr Thatcher arrived when they did?”

“It was. They saved my life.”

“Thank you, Mr Love. No further questions.”

The rest of the trial passed mostly without incident. Natasha and her Advocate tried to paint a picture of how she was a poor naïve teenager who had been abused and damaged and further led astray by the bright lights and appeal of a romance with a pop star. McAdams did incredibly well at rebutting that idea and making her instead look like a mentally ill woman who, in a deranged tantrum, tried to take a man’s life.

The jury didn’t take long to return a verdict either. Just two and a half hours after they retired to consider their decision, they came back to court.

“In the case of Crown versus Mrs Natasha Gibson, one count stalking and harassment, one count abduction, one count attempted murder, how do you find?”

The foreperson of the jury announced their verdict. “In the case of stalking, we find the defendant guilty. In the case of abduction, we find the defendant guilty. In the case of attempted murder, we find the defendant guilty.”

Relief washed over me, and I turned to hug Tom tightly. He kissed my cheek as I did and held me tight.

“You did it,” he whispered against my ear.

“Mrs Gibson, you have been found guilty on all counts. Upon hearing all the evidence in this case, I believe that your acts were carried out with a level of malice that warrants the highest sentence this court allows. Therefore, I am sentencing you to life imprisonment. You shall be removed from this courtroom and taken to His Majesty’s Prison in Stirling to serve your sentence.”

And with those words, this part of the journey was over. Trevor had been found guilty in his trial just a month before Natasha’s had started. He had been given a lesser sentence, but he was still going to be locked up for at least fifteen years.

I walked out of that court in Glasgow feeling lighter and standing straighter. I had justice, and more importantly I had closure. I was free from the drama of it and ready to move on.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 1:50 pm*

I smiled as I watched my husband from the wings as he strutted his stuff on stage in Manchester. A lot had happened in the time since we waited with bated breath to hear the outcome of the trial against Natasha. Lennox had grown from a man on edge with a lot of panic and stress to a man who was truly free.

No longer was he hiding who he was in terms of who he was attracted to. No longer was he looking over his shoulder to see if someone was after him. Instead, he was living life to the fullest. His new album was topping the charts, and he was selling out massive arenas, riding the highs of his music and everything that the freedom Alex and Johnny allowed him was bringing.

Just a few days ago we had discussed how our future after this tour might look.

“As much as I love touring, and that you’re with me again on this one, I don’t want it to be the only thing that I do for the next fifteen years.” He smiled.

I eyed him suspiciously. My man had a plan. I could tell by the look on his face that there was something on his mind.

He laughed, reading my own expression and knowing me well enough to know what I was thinking too.

“I love that you have changed everything so that you can work remotely, and be with me on tour, and everything else. But I would like us to be able to put down some roots. I like our house, I like our life in it, I would love to have more time in it, and I have been thinking about if we might want to expand on that.”

“Expand our life?” I repeated.

“Yes.” He grinned. “We have talked about it before, and I think that now might well be the right time for it.”

I licked my lips before saying it out loud. “You want to start a family.” I wasn’t asking him, I already knew that was what he was talking about.

His smile widened and his eyes sparkled. “Yes, I do. I think the time is right for it.”

“Okay.” I grinned in reply.

He looked at me in shock. “Okay? Really? No debate? No, what if? Just, okay?”

Laughing, I held his hand. “Lennox Thatcher, if you don’t know that I would be very happy to have a family with you, then I don’t know where you’ve been for the last two years.”

He shook his head. “We talked about it, but I really didn’t think you would be so open to agreeing to it without talking it over some more.”

Lennox was right. Most of the time when we had to make decisions about anything in our life together, I was the one who had to account for every possible outcome. It was a throw back from being prepared for whatever came at me, both in the army, and in my job. But this was Lennox, and I really couldn’t imagine anything more natural or right for us than starting a family together. But just like it hadn’t been much of a decision to move in with Lennox, and to ask him to marry me, this also just seemed like it wasn’t really a thing that we had to decide. It was just something that would happen because it was right for us. Because it fitted, just like we did.

“Once the tour is done, we’ll start the whole process,” I agreed. “You know us, we can figure out how best it will fit us as we go. I might like being a house husband and

staying home with the baby.” I smiled at him.

Lennox pulled me in against him and kissed me. “I fucking love you, Tom Thatcher.”  
He grinned against my lips.

“I fucking love you too.” I smiled back, happy in the life we had, and the future that we would be building together.

The End.

The Serenade Series will complete with Swan Song late 2024