Song 10

Song 10∫ The Diary of Vera

Saturday morning I rolled on my bed, blissful in the knowledge that I could sleep in for a bit. My roommate's snores lulled me back to sleep, until a knock on our door woke us both up.	đ
'It's Sister Louisa, may I come in?"	
Groggy, we both gave an a irmation. I picked up my phone and saw hat it was only 7.30am.	้สื
She opened the door just enough to pop her head in. "Good morning girls." We tried to wish her the same but it came out like unintelligible numbles. "Vera, your mom is here to pick you up."	å
That snapped me awake. "What? Why?"	
She smiled. "Because it's the weekend."	
But," I said as I li ed my bed sheets, which were much more comfortable than the ones at the gringo's house. "I have a lot of nomework I was meaning to catch up on this weekend. I told her to not pick me up."	
Sister Louisa's Mona Lisa smile didn't change. "She's waiting for you n the headmistress's o ice. I suggest you hurry."	å
She closed the door behind her and I looked at Addy with desperation oozing from my pores.	
She blinked, slowly. "I take it you don't want to go."	
'No."	
But I knew there was little choice, so I stood up and collected the necessities. I tried to hurry in the bathroom but by the time I made it downstairs and saw her, my ma looked like I'd made her wait three whole hours.	
Vera Maria," she used thattone, the one that when I was a kid was ollowed by a flying chancla. "Do you have everything you need?"	a
gave my best fake smile, because the Mother Superior was looking at us. "I thought I had to put in a request to the school for weekend eave. I didn't put one in this time."	
The nun pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose. "True, but your parents can just come and pick you up, too."	a
With pursed lips I realized that no matter what tactic I tried I couldn't outsmart my mother. I thought I could hide from her for most of the year, but how wrong was I. Once we were in the car, with all my things in the trunk, she revealed the real reason why she picked me up. And t wasn't because she missed me.	a
One of the girls cancelled." She pulled the car out of the school's parking lot. I recognized the streets she drove down on. I also recognized the mansion she pulled into. "I brought your uniform."	ť
Panic seized me by the throat. I could not be seen by Ashton cleaning n his home again. Mad as I'd been that he hadn't recognized me the irst time, I was probably luckier that way. What if he had and then had told everybody in school? Everybody would make fun of me. I'd be an example to Addy on what an outcast really was.	45 T
didn't want to see the look on his face if he saw me this time, because now he'd recognize me for sure.	

"Um," I said, not yet moving from the passenger's seat. My eyes glued on the massive house. "Don't you have another job going on this weekend that I could do instead?"

My ma turned o the car and gave me a look that was equal parts mad and confused. "Since when do I work two houses at the same time, niña? Are you crazy?"

I looked down at my lap. "No, I-" But I stopped myself. I couldn't tell her that this was my classmate's house. She wouldn't care. She might even get mad that I do.

I followed her into the house and changed into the uniform in the service restroom. I gathered all my hair into a net, hoping that that alone would make me unrecognizable. I looked at myself in the mirror and shook my head. No dice. I was still glaringly Vera. I didn't know how Superman did it. ď

I sent God a quick prayer, asking that Ashton had stayed back at the school this weekend.

The other girl who was going to be part of today's cleaning e orts joined us in the kitchen. Ma gave us the usual spiel about not bothering the house owners, no eye contact, only good morning and sorry. She divided the work into the three of us, calculating that it'd take us about eight hours each. The breaks were accounted for as well, and for each one we'd meet there in the kitchen where she could keep track of us. We had to have our cellphones with us at all times, but not use them during the work hours or so help us.

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I headed upstairs, mumbling curses under my breath but thankful that at least I hadn't got assigned to what I now knew was Ashton's room. I swore to myself that one day I'd stop being a follower. That I'd stop obeying everybody else's command and just do whatever the hell I wanted. But that day wasn't going to be today, and I had a lot to clean.

My starting room looked like a cross between a library and an o ice. The entire perimeter was made of wood shelves, from floor to ceiling, full to the brim with tomes that were rimmed in gold or looked older than Nana. In the middle sat a desk that put the Mother Superior's to shame. This one was more like a long table, where about six people could sit to have a meal if it weren't for all the drawers. I mumbled some colorful words in Spanish and cursed my luck. Eight unexpected hours of hard work were going to leave me four hours for homework today at best.

I decided to start by the desk. I put all the papers, binders and books into a pile on the chair and set out to wipe the wood surface with a special cleaning agent that would make it shine like new. A erward I rearranged all the documents exactly the same way I found them. I was pretty good at that. Little details that I worked on so that I wouldn't bother others.

The door opened and I looked up on reflex. My eyes met those of a man that seemed larger than life. I quickly looked down and mumbled a weak good morning.

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Without a shred of doubt, that was Ashton's father. Same eyes, but with a lot more steel on them. Same nose and face, but aged. Unlike his son, though, he carried a vibe that made me stand straighter and almost salute in attention.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'm just here to pick up some papers."

I stood to the side, rag and can of cleaning stu in hand. I looked down at the Persian carpet that I hadn't got around to vacuuming yet. He rummaged around the stu on his desk, opened a few drawers, grunting every time he came up short with whatever he was looking for.

I cleared my throat. "Could I help you, sir?"

Ma was going to have my head for that, but I felt stifled under his presence and wanted him to go as soon as possible before I started asking for forgiveness for a crime I hadn't committed.

He put his hands on his waist. "Maybe you can, I'm looking for a red folder embossed with the logo of Congress."

I dropped my jaw.

He seemed almost amused. "Since, I'm a Senator for Florida, and all."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

I didn't. I had no idea that my classmate and the bane of my existence as of late was the son of a senator. I felt more out of place in his presence than ever before.

"I'm Albert Winters, at your service and the people of the sunshine state."

The smile I plastered on my face was as fake as if I'd bought it o of Walmart. "It's an honor, sir."

"Now," he said as he clapped once and looked around. "It's a regular A4 folder and I need it before I fly to DC in a couple of hours."

Suddenly almost every tome in the shelves seemed red to me. I

started pulling some of them out and back in when I didn't find the Congress logo. I heard him rummage around on the opposite end of the room. This was insane. I was in a senator's house. Me, a dirt poor Latina. I hoped he didn't think I was undocumented.	ືສ
From the corner of my eye I caught glimpse of a red thing under a heavy book on what I assumed was the co ee table by the window. I pulled it out and said, "Ah hah!"	
I turned around with a pleased smile. I felt like I'd helped my country somehow.	đ
"Thank you." He took it and opened the folder, nodding once. "This is the one."	
I clasped my hands behind my back. "No, thank you, sir."	a
He gave me one last glance. "I'll make sure to tip you well."	a
Color rushed to my face. I wouldn't complain for some more money, but I hadn't done much to deserve it and all of a sudden I felt embarrassed. I was able to breathe again once he le the room and le the doors spread open. I looked around and thought it was a bit too messy for me to leave it the same as I'd found it. The best detail I could have this time was to leave it more organized, and that way a freaking state senator wouldn't lose his important documents.	ď
More nervous than ever I continued cleaning and putting order on things. I vacuumed the carpet with extreme care. The thing was probably as expensive as the entire book collection.	
The machine was so loud that I didn't hear someone come in until I almost vacuumed his toes. I looked up and screamed as Ashton stood before me. The vacuum fell to the floor and for some reason my next instinct was to run away.	a
Of course, he blocked me easily.	
"Well, well, well," he said once I gave up in trying to outmaneuver him. "Who do we have here."	đ
"Shut up," I told him, now definitely sending all my ma's instructions to hell. "Not a word."	
He put his hands in the pockets of his sweatpants. "I didn't know you worked as a cleaning maid."	đ
I li ed the vacuum and turned it o , giving him a look that came straight from copying ma when she was angry. "Okay, stop pretending. You might have forgot my face the first time, but seeing me a second time in your home should have jolted your memory."	
He ran a hand through his silky hair. "What are you talking about?"	đ
I paused, really looking at him and seeing the confusion patent on his face. It seemed real, unless he was a damn good actor. "You really don't remember?"	
His brows came together as he looked me up and down. I felt goosebumps where his eyes swept over me. I felt like I was being measured and found to come up short. But no taunting came. Instead his face turned even more stunned.	
"You've been here before?"	a
I folded my arms. "Yes. I was in your bathroom, remember?"	a
He shook his head, and a sense of urgency seemed to wash over him. His whole body seemed electrified all of a sudden. He breached the distance between us and grabbed me by the shoulders. I had to crane my head back to look up at him. A question was lodged in my throat. "You saw him." "Who?" I managed to ask.	
"My brother."	a²
My jaw dropped. "Does he look exactly the same as you?"	
He swallowed hard and stepped back, seeming to realize that he was acting weird. He rubbed his eyes and looked around him. "We're	
twins, and he's been missing for weeks."	đ
My brains were leaking out of my ears. The picture he was painting did not match. If that was his brother I'd seen, he'd looked totally fine — in more ways than one. Like he hadn't been in imminent danger.	
And he couldn't be, because otherwise his entire family would probably be freaking out. Ashton wouldn't have been so calm at school, and his senator father probably wouldn't be taking trips to DC and abandoning his family in their time of need.	
I did recall the boy asking me not to tell anyone that I'd seen him.	
I told this to Ashton, whose eyes narrowed.	
"That bastard." He hu ed as he paced. "So he's close by, huh?"	

I li ed my hands up. "I know it's none of my business, but what's going on?"

He stopped and glanced at me over his shoulder. "Well, what's going

on is that my brother, the person I trust the most in the world, told our parents this summer that he's gay and ran away from home. And won't tell even me where he is."	an Ca
My eyes went wide as saucers.	
"I, uh, don't know what to say."	
He smiled. "But now you've given me a clue to find him."	a
Stomping steps were heard then and my ma rushed into the room. "Vera Maria! What are you doing?" She gave Ashton one look and started apologizing profusely for bothering him.	
"She's not bothering me," he said, not at all catching that my ma's undertone was one of murder. "We're friends."	a
"We're what?" I asked.	
My ma did the same. "Excuse me?"	
He looked between us. "Yeah, we go to Trinity together."	
My ma's lips pursed into a tight line. I didn't know what she was thinking, but all I knew was that I was fucked.	
"I see."	
He wasn't a total idiot. He could detect that something was up. "Well I'll uh, see myself out."	;
As he slipped out of the room, and cursed me to deal with my ma by myself, she stomped over and smacked my arm. "What have I told you a million times? Don't go talking with the owners! Imagine my surprise when the senator found me downstairs and slid \$100 at me because you helped him find a document. And now I find you here chit chatting with his son? What is wrong with you?"	đ
As my jaw hung I was wondering more like what was wrong with this family. A Florida Senator with a gay runaway son and another one who had a streak of crazy that he couldn't hide if he tried.	

"You're absolutely right, ma," I told her, to her obvious shock. "I have	
no business meddling with these people."	ສໍ
I le her stunned to retrieve the vacuum and set back to work again,	
with a feeling that those words would haunt me.	a
SONG OF THE DAY: Breaking Benjamin - The Diary of Jane	ď⁵