

## Song 15

### Song 15. Betray and Disappoint

The benefit for the children's hospital was held at a private venue. The Trinity kids were dressed in full uniforms, blazers and all, and even though all of them but me came from the rich spheres of the people that surrounded us, we stuck out like sore thumbs among the finely dressed people in attendance. Plus, the place itself looked straight out of a movie set and I just couldn't pick my jaw up from the floor.

We came in through a back door by the kitchens, so that we could carry our instruments and equipment in without disturbing the party. A couple of servers walked by me with trays of tiny food that was so perfect it looked plastic. All around me there was crystal, marble, velvet and swashes of champagne color. The whole space felt expensive.

Madison walked by me saying, "A fly's going to get in your mouth." I snapped my jaw shut.

People ignored us for the most part as we set up, which gave me a false sense of security that they'd ignore us once we started playing too. Sister Louisa told me to stand by the piano and Lincoln joined me there. He looked at the instrument and nodded.

"Well, at least they brought me a good piano."

"How do you know?" I asked.

A corner of his lips lifted. "Near 18 years of experience."

I gave him a nasty look that he ignored. That was becoming a bit of a sore topic for me, my inexperience.

He pulled out his sheet music and arranged it in front of him. "Remember the order of the songs?"

"Yes." As I set up my stand to my height I added, "I hope."

The rest of the orchestra set up on the stage that had been prepared for us. With this configuration I was on the opposite end from Madison, which brought me some comfort. I stood between the piano and the rest of the orchestra, and had about five people between me and Ashton, which also made me feel pretty relieved. Being closer to him would've made me too nervous.

Sister Louisa made her way up and picked up the microphone that was meant for me. She faced the crowd and waited until she had their attention. This didn't take terribly long. It wasn't every day you were faced with a scene that looked straight out of *The Sound of Music*.

"In advance, we would like to thank you all for joining us tonight for this great cause," she started, to a modest round of applause. "As we entertain you with the music from the Holy Trinity High School Orchestra, we would like to ask you for your charitable donations to help the children in need that are fighting for their health." More applause that we all joined in. "And with that, please enjoy your evening."

She handed the microphone back to me and I felt bile rush up my throat as I set it back onto the stand. It was turned on, and the sounds of me fixing it in place echoed around the room. I turned it off and glared at it like it was my enemy. Or like it was a cockroach. Which was the same, really.

I couldn't do this.

I had to do this.

My lungs expanded as I drew in a deep breath after another. I caught Link's eye and he raised his eyebrows. A cough attracted my attention on the opposite end. I turned and found Ashton motioning for me to keep breathing in deeply. I did.

Sister Louisa raised her baton and conducted us to begin.

A moment of panic drew my mind into a blank, but the music started and I remembered that the first song was an easy one. The emphasis was on the instruments and not on the vocals. More of a melody meant for the background rather than a focal piece. It was an easy start for me then, because I didn't have to do a lot of effort aside from the accompanying verses. I looked out beyond the nun directing us and saw that hardly anybody was paying attention.

Great.

By the time the more vocal songs started I felt a lot more comfortable because nobody was focused on me. I could let myself loose and just sing. The sheet music in front of me was only helpful to keep me mindful of the lyrics, because I still couldn't read music for shit. I pretended like I was in my bedroom, all by myself, pretending that I was a princess in her castle singing to an audience made of friendly mice and little birds. I liked to pretend I was the first Latina Disney Princess and that this was a pivotal moment in my movie.

This fantasy kept me sane throughout the entire recital until the very last song. This one we hadn't had sufficient time to practice with the entire crew, but apparently it'd been one of the first songs the orchestra had played since freshman year. I was the only one who didn't know it, so we'd bypassed playing it over the week and instead Ash and Link had offered to teach it to me.

I pulled the sheet music for it to the foreground. It was a super sad song and it was kinda weird to me that we wanted to end on that note, especially when we were trying to gather money to save kids. But what did I know. Maybe the tactic was to tug at heartstrings so that rich gringos would shell out more money.

The orchestra started the music and I struggled a little bit with catching onto the beats. I caught Ashton's eye as he played his viola. He managed to mouth one, two, three.

And I began singing.

Immediately every Trinity kid turned to me. No one stopped playing, but I could feel like something was wrong. I was sweating cold even as I continued to sing, wondering if I was off tune or if I'd messed up the lyrics somewhere. Sister Louisa's Mona Lisa smile fell for the first time since I'd met her, but she didn't acknowledge whatever was wrong.

I deepened my voice at parts and raised it at others, trying to convey the pain behind the lyrics. They were about loss. I didn't really know about that, much. I could say I was lacking a lot of things, but I'd never really lost anything, so singing this was a bit of a stretch for me. But I tried as best as I could. I gave it my all.

There was a big round of applause when we finished. I stood still, hands clasped behind my back and panting as the guests clapped. And clapped.

Over the commotion I heard Link say, "Well done."

Somehow I caught Madison's eye and I knew I was in trouble for reasons I couldn't begin to guess.

Sister Louisa turned to us with her placid smile. "Let's begin to pack up."

Some of the kids had an easier time picking up their equipment than others. I dismantled my stand and waited in the middle of the stage.

An older lady dressed in red approached me. "I don't know what song that was, dear, but that was beautiful."

I did the goldfish hat trick, mouth open, closed and eyes popping. "Thank you."

She was replaced by an older gentleman who just shook my hand. And then a middle aged couple who did seem to know the song, and expressed how unexpected it was to hear it in that setting. But that it'd been perfect.

My eyes narrowed. Something didn't add up.

I grabbed my sheet music and found the song. Hello it was called. "That was incredible."

I startled as Ashton stood before me, his viola's case already hanging from his shoulder. I snatched his papers from his hand and flipped them until I found the last song. An unpronounceable name was on top of the page.

I looked up at him slowly and recognized the look on his face. He knew I was about to hit him.

"You were right, that was a pretty damn good arrangement," Link said as he joined us. Excellent timing, I thought, before smacking the shit out of both of them.

"You tricked me!"

Link froze with the shock of being hit, but Ashton ignored all that and put his hand on my mouth, trying to silence my shrieking. I bit his hand, and he jumped back, clutching it.

"Hey! That was not cool. I'm a musician, my hands are precious."

I stomped my foot on the floor. "Yeah, and I'm a scholarship student. Are you trying to get me kicked out?"

They exchanged a glance.

Ashton's eyebrows went up in that way that made him look like a puppy who'd just been kicked. "I just thought it'd be fun to put a touch of rock and roll on this."

Sister Louisa found us then. "Let's go, children. We have to board the bus and when we're back to the school, you'll follow me straight to the headmistress's office."

My eyes welled up right there and then. That had to show the two morons just how much fun I'd found their little stunt to be.

I snickered, trying to not engage the water works in front of all these people.

"V, I'm sorry."

I swatted Ashton's hand away when he tried to touch me.

"Leave me alone."

SONG OF THE DAY: Seether - Betray and Degrade