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Song 16 Carry On Wayward Girl There was something to be said about being stabbed in the back. I managed to sit at the very back of the bus by myself. Maybe everybody was so pissed at me that I'd ruined their perfect little recital that they gave me a wide berth, because the entire back was empty. I got a few glares during the trip back to the school, but I avoided human interaction and just cried in as much silence as I could. Wow, so, I didn't think that Lincoln and I were friends but I kinda thought that at least Ashton and I were, or some previous step to friendship. But friends didn't humiliate friends in front of other people like this. Friends were supposed to have your back, not drive a cold knife into it. I grabbed my phone and texted Leti for the first time in a few days. I miss you She didn't reply back right away. God, just how was I going to survive music club by myself? I'd grown too dependent on help. It dawned on me then that I wouldn't even know how to begin getting myself up to speed without completely mucking up my studies. I was alone and in a world of trouble. When we got to the school I was the very last one to leave the bus, but Sister Louisa waited for me with both boys flanking her. "Follow me," she said, and we did. Ashton tried to say something but she silenced him with a glance. She had us sit outside as she went in to see the headmistress and no doubt tell her everything about what we'd done. I broke the silence. "If I get spelled I will find you and I will cut you." Link side glanced at me. "Is that it? You'll cut us? I thought you were going to come up with a more colorful threat." I glared at him with as much venom as I could manage. "I never said where I'd cut you." That made him cringe and look away. I turned to the other boy. "Any sass from you, too?" He looked up at the ceiling. "None." The door opened and the Mother Superior asked us to come inside. We obeyed and followed the unwritten rule that if you were called to principal's for a dressing down, you had to stand. We did so, both boys around me. Mother Superior Evangeline made her way slowly around the desk and sat down on her chair with some di iculty. The younger nun stood next to her, and I had a feeling she was a lot more pissed than her elder. But that didn't mean we weren't o the hook. "I heard there was a bit of a situation at the event," the older lady started. She picked up her glasses from her desk and put them on, squinting at each of us. "Who masterminded this?" My mouth remained firmly shut. Ashton stepped forward. "Me." Mother Superior drew in a deep breath and sighed. "Winters, we've talked about this. I put you in charge of her so that you could start learning some responsibility." I couldn't help glaring at the back of his head. The headmistress turned to the other boy. "And what about you?" Link took so long to answer that I thought Sister Louisa must be plotting ways to get him to talk. But finally he sighed and crumbled under the pressure of their stare. "I was bored." Her eyebrows went up. "Are we not challenging you enough?" He had the wits to hold back answering that question. But then she turned her laser focus on me. "And you, Vera?" I shook my head slightly, not knowing what to say. Would it work if I replied that I'd trusted two idiots? She sighed and it smarted that she was disappointed in me. How could I possibly have prevented this? "I hope you all understand what you've done. You've let down your classmates and your school, and this cannot happen again." She looked up over her shoulder. "Sister Louisa, what should be their punishment?" I ran the palms of my hands down my skirt to wipe away the sweat. I was very worried about my fate, but at that second I was really plotting murder. There was a lot of land in the school where I could bury two bodies. "We unfortunately can't suspend you because that would cause further hurt to the orchestra." Her chin went up. "Each of you will write an essay of 1,500 words about the importance of the collective and the perils of individualism. I want you to use today's experience to help you understand why sometimes doing things your way causes more harm than good." That was it? I wisely remained silent, though. "And I want it by tomorrow at breakfast." I pursed my lips. Of course there was a catch. It wasn't the worst punishment but it certainly wasn't easy. I couldn't churn out that many words with little time. I glanced at the clock on the wall and figured I had a couple of hours before dinner when I could make a decent head start, and maybe finish it in my room overnight. The headmistress nodded. "You're dismissed." The three of us le her o ice. Once the door was closed behind us, Ashton tried some shit again and I raised my palm. I made that sound ma always made when she wanted to stop me on my tracks, that sounded like a very dry and nasal ah ah It shut his lips sealed. "I don't want to hear it." He looked away. "I was just going to say that the music room must be empty right now, we could go there to write our essays." Link nodded. "Good idea." "You do that, I'll go somewhere else." They both stopped and looked at me. Ashton sighed. "Are you going to stay mad forever?" I laughed, but it was an ironic one. "You white boys don't understand just how long a Latina can hold a grudge." Link smirked. "I'm yellow, though." I gave him a wide eyed stare. "And yet you're just as bad as him, why's that?" "Okay, V," Ashton said, "I admit it was wrong of me to trick you and I promise I will never do it again. From now I'l stick to the program." I threw my hands up in the air. "So you say, but how can I trust you?" I snapped my fingers when he didn't reply. "This is all my fault. I was told you were a troublemaker and to stay away from you by many people, but I didn't listen." Link looked at him. "She's not lying, though." Ashton elbowed him in the ribs. "Whose side are you on?" "My own," the other boy said. "I mean, it was fun and all but I'd like to stay out of trouble in general." "Now you're going to turn on me, too?" Pretty boy rolled his eyes and hu ed. "You play the piano in this school just so you can get into a good music program in college, but meanwhile you compose EDM music and post it on Spotify. You're seriously not gonna tell me that you're fine with one more year of playing mindless religious music." My jaw dropped. This was a brand new development that I hadn't seen coming. I pointed at Link. "EDM? How?" He sighed and pushed his hair behind his ears. "I have a ton of equipment in my room, okay?" "Look," Ashton continued, "All I'm saying is that we're wasting our talents here, just following instructions." "Oh, no. No, no," I said as I backed away from him, shaking my index finger. "I'm starting to recognize the pattern and I know exactly what you're doing. You're trying to stir shit again." Ashton pursed his lips and jammed his hands in his pockets. "Okay, I'll confess something to you both." The other boy and I exchanged a glance. Pretty boy tucked his tongue against his cheek for a second and then said, "I think we should form a rock band." Something strange bubbled in my chest and it came out as laughter. So much of it, in fact, that they both struggled to shut me up. A er a minute I managed to calm down and swatted their hands away from my mouth with promises of biting them. "You're o your rockers," I told him, giggling at the pun. "Listen to me," he said. It struck me that Link hadn't outright told him to fuck o and instead listened attentively. Ashton motioned between all of us. "There's more talent in our pinky toes than the music school in this program can handle. Link," he said as he turned to the boy. "I've heard your music. It's no joke. That's why you have millions of followers and you're not even 18 yet or have a label contract." I jumped. "Millions?" "And you." He turned to me, running a hand through his hair and biting his lower lip. "You astound me." My mouth opened. He smiled a little. "Imagine what it would be like if the rest of the world could see what I see and hear what I hear." Since that le me at a total loss for words, he looked at the other boy again. "We have di erent talents but a shared passion for music. Why is this idea so outrageous?"

Link rolled his sharp eyes. "And you, Ashton Winters, little devil that you are, are going to play Christian rock?" The subject of the question positively beamed. "Hell no." I snorted, and this brought their attention back to me. This was the most ridiculous conversation I'd ever engaged in in my life. "I have a very long essay to write and don't have time for this, so, bye." I figured I'd camp at the library to work on this. It was in the same building as the music room but posed a su icient distance between us. But they followed me there and sat across from me. "I'm intrigued," Link whispered. "But there are so many logistical issues that I can't see how this could possibly work."

We'd grabbed sheets of paper and pens from the entrance of the

library that I intended to put to good use, but they were distracting

"Like what?" Ashton asked, as low as his voice could go while still

"For one, we don't have enough people. Vera can sing, I can play the

guitar and you can play something else, but we're missing some

Ashton snorted. "You, play the guitar? You're deluded. That's my

I rolled my eyes so hard it almost gave me a headache. "Oh my God,

We put our heads down and I thought that was that, but then Link

spoke again. "You just want to play lead guitar so all the girls look at

Ashton gi ed him a dry, deadpan stare. "I play a strings instrument in

I gave them both my best resting bitch face, straight out of the pages

of my ma's Book of Pissed. "Why don't you both duel it out and leave

are you seriously fighting about who gets to play guitar in your

being audible. But a few people glared at our table anyway.

"Gee, I don't know," Link started. "Maybe because we're in a freaking

boarding school ran by nuns? You really think they'll like it if we form

Ashton smirked. "There's Christian rock, you know?"

a band to play devil music?"

me.

more depth."

specialty."

you."

me alone?"

"Let's do this."

"Yeah, right now."

following them to the music room.

"Dead. Serious," Ashton enunciated.

"Are you serious about this?" I asked them.

other boy. "How do you want to do this?"

you've already lost."

eyes to slits.

fantasy band? Go away!"

That earned us a shush from the librarian.

the orchestra. What do you think I'm best at?"

Link shrugged. "You could be bass."

"Fuck bass, I play guitar. Period."

I shushed them but they continued.

The librarian appeared next to us in a flash. "I'm going to have to ask you to leave if you can't be silent." Ashton stood up, ignoring her and her rules. He stared down at Link. "Consider the gauntlet thrown at you." Slowly Link stood up and got all up in the other boy's grill. "Challenge accepted."

I looked from one to the other. I didn't know if this was the e ect of

pride, testosterone, or both, but it was clear to me at that point that

they were both idiots of the same pod and that I was better o on my

own. And yet I found myself picking up our papers and pens and

Ashton smacked his hand on the table. "Excellent idea."

There was an entire wall at the back of the music room with cabinets full of instruments. I sat at the front line of where the orchestra would practice, watching as they pulled out two guitars from the cabinets. They looked like the kind you had to plug in to play. They came forward carrying two weird boxes that looked a little like radios but didn't seem to be. That was what they plugged the guitars into. Link did something to the strings of his guitar as he looked at the

Ashton smirked like a cocksure little bastard. "If you have to ask

He ran his hands through the strings of his guitar and the sound

let it go. Whatever he was playing was so familiar to him that he

didn't even have to look down at his hands on the strings. He just

kept a defiant look fixed on Lincoln. The second boy narrowed his

Before I noticed, he'd picked up the notes from Ashton and started

playing, too. Even though I didn't know the songs I could tell that he

made me jump from my skin. It wasn't overly loud, but something

about it set me alight. He put his foot on top of the little box and just

was segueing into a completely dierent one. He was good, too. My jaw dropped. Was every freaking kid in this school some sort of music prodigy? Ashton didn't allow him much time for glory. He cut in right away with a di erent song that almost made it seem like he hadn't been playing the same instrument as the previous one. Somehow he made his guitar produce a completely di erent sound, graver, not something I'd ever heard before. He did something weird to the strings that it almost sounded like he was destroying it, shredding it to pieces. I could tell Link was bothered, because he launched into a series of

rapid sounds that were supposed to intimidate the shit out of his

opponent. They sure rendered me speechless. But Ashton picked

"Oh my God," I said under my breath. No one heard me, of course. It

jumped to my feet, expecting an angry nun, what I saw instead made

He stopped abruptly, eyes lost on something outside the door. I

right up and played even faster.

was too loud and crazy.

even me uncomfortable. SONG OF THE DAY: Kansas - Carry On Wayward Son