

# Song 17

## Song 17 🎵 Smells Like Teen Angst

Madison and her beau, Quinn, stood holding hands and looking at us. She smiled and strode inside, pulling at the other boy inside as well. "That kind of mad playing could only be you."

I turned back to Ashton. His face looked like stone. Link just shrugged at me.

"What are you doing here?"

I'd never heard that kind of ice in his voice. When I thought about it, it made him sound like a younger version of his father. I looked around me and figured to my great sadness that if I wanted to walk away from whatever shitstorm was about to whip up, I'd have to leave right through the eye of it because I was right between Ashton, the approaching couple and the exit door.

"Were you the one responsible for that last song?" she asked, motioning at me. "I doubt the newbie over there has the skills to arrange the vocals of one song on top of another." Ashton must have decided that his best course of action there was to ignore her. He turned toward Link. "Well, I think I'm the clear winner."

In turn, Link must have decided to play along. He bent down to unplug his guitar. "Fine, I admit you're only a bit better."

"A bit?" Ashton asked with a laugh. "I swept the floor with your ass."

I smiled to myself. He kinda had.

From the corner of my eye I saw Madison fold her arms and cock her hip, obviously annoyed that she was not the center of attention. I made eye contact with Quinn, and it was super weird. I'd never exchanged a word with him but I could see it clear as crystal that he wanted to be anywhere but there.

"Are you going to ignore me?" she asked. "Because I come in peace."

Ashton snapped then. "Nothing about you is peaceful. You're a headache."

She pretended to look hurt with a delicate hand on her chest. "Really? Is this what I get for trying to be friends?"

"We'll never be friends again."

Ashton grabbed the box with one hand and his guitar with the other. He turned away and headed to the cabinets.

"Right," I muttered. "I'm just gonna take my leave. I have a lot of things to do."

That was a stupid move because it drew her attention to me.

"Was it fun? Completely screwing up our first recital?"

I imitated her hand to chest move. "Wow, is this really your version of coming in peace?"

To everybody's surprise Quinn snorted a laugh. When his girlfriend glared at him he just said, "What? That was a good one."

Ashton was done putting his instruments away and head back over, hands in pockets.

"Impressive, so she hasn't finished brainwashing you quite yet," he said.

Quinn intercepted him on his way out with his palms up. "Wait, man. I just want to talk."

Ashton smiled but it didn't reach his eyes. "Too bad we don't always get what we want, huh?" He tried bypassing the other boy, whose reflexes were just too good and reacted fast enough to keep blocking him. Pretty boy sighed.

Lincoln came back down putting his guitar away too and tugged my arm to sit back down. He joined me and whispered, "Let's just sit back and enjoy the show."

I whispered back, "Got any popcorn?" This earned me a smile.

"I've been trying to apologize for months, man, but you keep ignoring me," Quinn said. He had a similar puppy look as Ashton. Hard to resist by anybody except each other, it seemed. I wondered if they'd learned it from each other when they were friends.

"Ever thought it might be because I don't want to hear what you have to say?" Ashton countered.

Madison stepped behind him. Every possible exit he had was blocked. It was like they'd planned it. Well, if there any blood was drawn Link and I would serve as witnesses, except I really didn't want to be in any more trouble with the headmistress. In a way, Madison had been right. Being around Ash was just calling for trouble.

"Are rich kids always so dramatic?" I asked Link because, gee, they were starting to make my friends back home look innocent.

He shrugged and folded his arms. "Sometimes it's worse."

"Dude," Quinn started. "We've been friends since freshman year. Can we not throw that away?"

Ashton shrugged. "Should've thought about that before you started sleeping with my girlfriend."

I gasped. The three of them looked at me, as if remembering that we were still there.

I looked at Madison with wide eyes. "You naughty little-"

She waved a hand as if setting my words aside. "Not your business. Sure, but they were airing her business in front of me."

Quinn picked up then, looking down at his sneakers. "And I'm sorry, man. It just happened and it was wrong, but I really like her."

"Yeah, I did, too."

My heart broke a little bit for Ashton because if I'd been so hurt by his and Link's little prank that I'd cried during an entire bus ride, I could only imagine what he'd felt like when he found out about all of this. And in front of the entire damn school. No wonder he'd been a mess a er this and the whole episode with Ayrton.

"I miss you," Quinn said, going for the jugular. "I miss how the three of us used to be, always hanging out together and having fun."

The other girl stepped up next to her boyfriend, facing her former friend. "I miss us too, Ashton. I can't believe how aloof you've become."

Oh my God, I rolled my eyes. Why did she make it sound like the whole mess was his fault?

"Kay," I slapped my hands on my knees and stood. "I think I've had enough drama for today."

Ashton narrowed his eyes at me. I didn't know how this fact registered in my mind even as I tried to walk away. He was faster and in two quick strides grabbed me by the arm and pulled me against him. I felt his arm come around my shoulders and hold me firmly against him.

I looked up at him with something like creeping horror. Then I saw both Madison's and Quinn's faces, awash in confusion. But it was Link's the one that sent me into a panic. He looked like he was on the verge of laughter.

"Guess what?" Ashton asked, and I felt his voice vibrate in his rib cage against me. "I'm done missing you. I've found someone better."

Madison tossed her perfect hair back with a laugh. "Is this a joke or are you talking about her?"

"Oh, yeah. I'm talking about her."

"Huh?" I asked.

I'd grown used to being the smartest student in my class at my previous school. Perfect A+ for three years and the person in my family with the best prospects at going to a decent college. At that second I felt like I was missing a few fingers on my forehead, because I had no idea what was going on.

Ash walked around and stopped in front of me. I blinked up at him. I probably had a neon WTF sign on top of my head.

He grabbed my cheek and bent down.

And kissed me. Right there and then.

I stilled.

The pieces of the puzzle started to connect. I remembered the morning where Madison had come to warn me about hanging out with Ashton. It had been strange and unsolicited. Like it'd gain something for her more than for me.

She'd been jealous that her ex was hanging out around another girl. She still cared what he did and with whom. And for some reason she didn't want him to do anything with me.

Link had known what was coming. It had been written all over his face. He knew that somehow shit was going to hit the fan and it was going to spray all over me. Because he knew that Ashton had the touch of the stomach; everything he touched turned to shit and like a dumbfuck I'd been close enough to him to be sprayed.

And then there was Ashton.

He still cared about Madison enough to do something as crazy as kissing me just to make her blood boil.

So, knowing all of this, why did I feel like melting against him? Why did my body react to the movement of his lips against mine, as if any of this were real?

Sure as shit it wasn't, but I was enjoying it. So I played along with being played. My hand rested between us on his chest and I felt his heart beat hard beneath my palm. It must have taken some guts to pay his ex back in a similar way to what she'd done.

But he was using me. Again.

This had to stop.

The sound our lips made when I pulled away was almost like we'd been engaged in a make out session that we both wanted. I kept my eyes closed for a second longer as I licked my lips and felt they were swollen. I didn't want to face whatever was going to happen a er this. So I turned away from them and looked down at my trembling hands. I wrung them together and took a deep breath.

Then I turned back to find all eyes on me. I swallowed hard and plastered a smile on my face, showing my dimples. It was the same one ma had trained me for whenever there were customers around. Good morning, sorry, excuse me. Polite. Impersonal. Vacant.

Submissive.

"Well, that's certainly the end of this party for me. Have fun."

I dodged Ashton's hand as it reached to me.

"V, wait."

I didn't wait. I dashed out of the music room with as much speed as my pudgy little legs could produce. I heard steps behind me but I didn't look back. I kept running forward until I made it into my room.

Addy was out this weekend, so I had the room all to myself. Which was both exactly what I needed and at the same time, totally not.

I sank onto the floor with my back to the door. I touched my lips.

"Jesus, what just happened."

I couldn't keep this locked in my chest. So I caved and called Leti. I'd avoided telling her much about Ashton, but a er this she deserved to know everything so she could scream at me for involving myself in rich people schemes. And that was exactly what she did when I told her the whole story. It made me feel a whole lot better for the entire five minutes she used in order to mentarme la madre, but one hour later when we hung up, I realized I was going to have to face him again in class and at practice.

And I didn't know how I was going to do that a er he'd used me for his own amusement twice in a single day.

SONG OF THE DAY: Nirvana - Smells Like Teen Spirit