Song

Song 2 J A Cross and A Girl Named Truth

I ran like the cops were chasing me.	a
I didn't even look at my watch to see if I was completely screwed. I just kept going and almost got ran over at a stop sign. But the car had the stop and I didn't, so I kept going. Ma had been right that we were close to the school, but on foot it felt like it was at a dierent freaking country and I wasn't exactly the fittest person around. By the time I	
made it to the front gate I was drenched in sweat and was having so much trouble breathing that I couldn't even tell the guard my name. "Jesus Christ, girl." He was an older hispanic man. "Deep breaths, I	
need you to be able to tell me what your business is here so that I can usher you in or out."	đ
I nodded and held my palm up, asking for a second. I drew in gasps of air and finally said my name. He blinked at me. "I'm here for the interview."	
His brows drew together. "I didn't think we were looking for cleaning crew anymore."	ď
I shook my head. "No, as a student." I could tell he had trouble processing that and my maid uniform together. But still, he walked back into the little room he had at the	
front and pulled up a paper. "Vera Maria de la Cruz Vazquez?" "Yes." I pulled myself up and tried to straighten my clothes. "That's me."	đ
"You're ten minutes late." My stomach plummeted all the way to the floor and I felt my eyes	a
sting with tears like it was a party trick and I wanted to impress. "Did I lose my chance?" He shi ed his weight from one leg to the other. "Well, I don't know.	
That's not for me to say. Let me make a call." I willed my eyes to suck back the tears to no avail, they started to roll	
down my cheeks in fat rivers. I wiped them away furiously, mad at myself. I singlehandedly fulfilled my earlier fear that ma would make me miss the interview. It'd actually been her who realized what had been about to happen and tried to prevent it. How stupid could a person be to flush their dream down the toilet in such a careless way?	
"No. Yes," he said on the phone to someone, looking at me with clear cut pity. "She's here. It looks like she's had some di iculties." To put it mildly.	å
He started nodding to the phone. "Yes, yes. Good. Right away,	đ
My knees almost gave in right then. "Thank God," I said. My lips were trembling. As I followed the guard past the gates I told myself I had to kick ass during this interview. They were already coming into it with a bad first impression, all my fault, and it was also on me to erase that and win them over.	
The thought of that made me nauseous. It wasn't something I'd ever achieved. I wasn't confident or charming and the only times I ever managed to gain some sort of admiration from people was when I sang. But these people were not here to hear me sing, they were here to hear me speak and make my case about why it'd benefit them to take me as charity.	a
No pressure. Nervous as I was, I couldn't appreciate my surroundings. I suddenly	ส์
developed the vision of a horse, only able to see ahead of me to where the guard guided me. As if he were the carrot that was being dangled toward my goal. My mind suddenly drew blank even as he led me through the hallways of the most sumptuous building I'd ever stepped foot in. He stopped at a set of giant oak doors and knocked. The wood seemed so thick I couldn't understand how anybody inside	
could hear, but only a second later a nun opened the door. I'd only ever seen a nun on TV, because my ma and I hadn't grown up	đ
as faithful or regular church goers. But I couldn't say this aloud. She was really young, I noticed as she smiled. "You must be Vera." The guard leaned a bit closer to the nun. "Be nice to her, the poor girl	đ
came in running on foot." The word poorwas so on point it was almost like he knew me and my family.	đ
The nun said, "We're always fair." It took me a second as I was walked into the room to realize she hadn't said they'd be nice to me. But fair. Fair meant they were definitely going to consider my lateness. I was screwed.	
I stood in front of another nun, older and with an air of authority, that sat by a man with crinkles on the corners of his eyes. "Please take a seat," the younger nun said, pointing at a plump chair	
they had in the middle of the room. Once I sat and she joined as well, I realized that the set up put us all into a circle of sorts. And that was nice, because at least I didn't feel like I was facing a line of people with an invisible wall between us. "I'm Sister Louisa, this is Mother	
Superior Evangeline, who is the headmistress of this school, and this is Robert Burlington, the head teacher of the senior year." I placed my hands neatly on my lap and hoped they wouldn't focus	ໍ່ສໍ
on the sweat stains on the maid dress. Or focus on the maid dress. "Pleased to meet you," I said in what I tried to make my most	
pleasant voice. "I'm Vera." The headmistress lowered her glasses down her nose to give me a better look. "I Googled your name." Whatever I thought she'd say, it definitely hadn't been that. "There are a couple of ways it can be interpreted. You could say that it means faith or truth. Faith to Mary,	
mother of God or the True Mary, the true mother. Very pretty, I like it." With eyes wide as saucers I said, "Thank you."	ත් ත්
I realized right then that I was totally out of my depth. I wasn't religious at all and I was going to have to fake it to get in. Which I was sure was some sort of sin. I swallowed.	
"My mother chose it for me, hoping it'd bring me blessing." I stretched the truth and laid it thick there. All my mother had ever said about my name was that Vera was the name of her grandma on her dad's side, and that she'd always liked it. "We're very devout to the Lord."	3 ⁴
A bolt of lightning should have stricken me right there and then. "That's good," the man spoke then. "You'll be surprised to know that	ໍ່ສໍ
not all of our students are Catholic, but we do hope to convey in them the sense that there is something greater than what they can see and it's a lot easier to educate them when they already believe."	5
I plastered a smile on my face that made my cheeks hurt. I had to shi the topic somehow before they started asking me if I knew my prayers.	
"Ah, I'd like to apologize for being late." I squirmed, really meaning it and hoping that I wasn't shooting myself in the foot by attracting attention to my obvious mistake. "This is not a habit I have, but I didn't realize that my um, workplace, was not as close by as I expected."	
The man nodded and the Mother Superior asked, "Workplace?" Ah, shit. I hoped that wasn't a big no-no.	
"Yes, ma'am. I help my ma clean houses sometimes." They murmured unintelligible words that had me breaking into a sweat.	
"That's fine, child," she continued. "But you do know that were you to be admitted into this institution you would have to cease all such activities, correct? While we do value and praise hard work, we want our kids to focus all of that energy into their grades and extra curricular activities."	
The younger nun picked right up there. "Our school has a system similar to a college. You live in house during the week to ensure total focus on your education, but during weekends you're free to stay in	

the dorms or stay at your family's. Even during weekends we recommend that students focus on their personal growth and not on activities that may drive their attention outside of what really matters the most." a⁴

In other words, focus on studying and not on earning wages, which I was sure was not a concern any of these kids had. What they didn't know was that ma didn't pay me for helping her out, outside of keeping me fed and with a roof over my head, which this school would provide instead if I were to be accepted. And on weekends I'd just stay here with the excuse that I had too much school work, and I wouldn't have time to clean houses again. I'd thought it through and it was perfect.

I nodded. "I understand."

"Now, Vera," Mr. Burlington said. "You do realize that you intend to

join this school in your senior year, and how that can be an immense challenge. Why should we choose you and give you a single year of education, rather than any of the potential freshmen applicants we've had?"	
I blanched. This was nowhere near the list of questions Leti and I had prepared for. I prayed hard that some inspiration would beam down on me because all I could come up with was selfish reasons. And inspiration somewhat came to me then, saving that maybe the truth	
inspiration somewhat came to me then, saying that maybe the truth was my best bet. A er all, that was the meaning of my name, right?	
"To tell you the truth, I wouldn't know." I could tell that this answer puzzled them, so I continued, "I'm certain that it's much better to receive the full benefit of four years of education in this fine school, rather than one, and that yes, surely another kid from a poor family deserves it. But I also know that that doesn't mean I don't deserve it either."	
The Mother Superior leaned her elbows down on her knees. "Go on."	
I swallowed down the last of my reservations. "What I mean is that, even though you look at it as a single year of education, the way I	
look at it is an opportunity to completely change my path for the better. Don't I deserve that chance, too?"	å
I drew in a shaky breath, awaiting their reactions. The Sister Louisa's expression didn't change from when I met her a few minutes ago, frozen into a Mona Lisa smile that betrayed nothing. Too bad she was a nun, otherwise she could make millions o of poker. The Mother Superior looked kind of intrigued and Mr. Burlington nodded in a way	
that came across as more non committal than it did as an agreement. It was he who made the next question.	đ
"Do you have a special talent that would make you stand out from the other candidates?"	
I did a double take. "I'm sorry?"	a
The Mother Superior waved a hand. "A talent. Something that I probably can't do."	
My eyes shi ed from one face to the next. "Like playing the xylophone or something like that?"	
Mr. Burlington chuckled. "If that's something you can do, yes."	
Sister Louisa explained then, "You see, in our school we don't just focus on the obvious academics. We have strong sports and arts programs as well that attract talent from all across the country. Every student must pursue both academics and talents, which, along with spiritual pursuits, we believe make a well rounded individual."	മ്
"Uh" I trailed o , looking out the window to the thick branches of an old tree outside. What could I do that made me stand out and make them think they absolutely had to choose me? I thought of earlier, when I was singing in a bathroom and berating myself for wasting my time that way instead of preparing for this moment. When all along that had probably been the best prepping I could do.	
I shi ed my focus back on them and dead sure said, "I can sing."	
The man clapped once. "Lovely! Why don't you give us a sample?"	
"What?" My jaw unhinged and dropped. Somehow I hadn't expected them to ask for a demonstration.	a
Sister Louisa smiled wider. "We choose only the best of the best. Are you the best?"	
Of course I wasn't. My name wasn't Celine Dion.	ď
Oh my God. Any possible acceptance hung on me singing. It had been so long since I last sang in front of an audience. I could feel my heart racing to catch up with my breath. I was breaking into a sweat, so I rubbed my palms on the skirt of my maid uniform. Any shred of confidence I might have shown earlier seemed to have vanished.	ď
"Um, what would you want me to sing?"	
"Surprise us," the Mother Superior said with disinterest. That upped the bar even more.	
"Think," I murmured only to myself. What could be a decent song that would showcase my voice, with notes I could hit and that would not o end religious people? I sought for inspiration in my beloved Disney Princesses and as always, they didn't fail me. I looked up with a smile.	
"I can sing Let it Go from Frozen."	đ
Their eyebrows went up and none of them looked bored or complacent anymore.	
Mother Evangeline said, "That's a tough one."	å
The younger nun nodded. "To be sure."	
I was a bit amused that they even knew the song and the movie. It had to be something else to see a bunch of nuns watching animated movies.	å
"Please go ahead," the man said, motioning with his hand.	
I stood up and cleared my throat. It'd always been easier to me to sing while standing up, easier to breathe this way than sitting down. I sent a quick prayer that my pipes wouldn't shut down thanks to my	

nerves. Then I drew in a deep breath and started with the low tone at the beginning of the song. I tried to imagine that I was Elsa in a castle of my making, and that if the ice couldn't bother me that, surely, the eyes of three strangers couldn't, either. They observed me even as I kept singing and the song escalated all the way to the final, high note

that always le me breathless and feeling like I was on top of a mountain.	
I gave them an uncertain smile when I was done and realized they hadn't moved a muscle throughout.	
I clasped my hands in front of me. "Thank you?"	
Sister Louisa stood up. "I believe we are done here."	a
Panic washed over me. I held her hand as she came over to lead me out. "No, wait. Please! I can show you a di erent song. Maybe something with more sentiment."	
She patted my arm. "That was quite lovely my dear, but you were late and we have an entire day packed with interviews. We'll definitely call you back."	a
I stood for a second, confused. I thought that would go well, but they didn't seem impressed. I had good grades and somewhat of a talent, but I'd been late and I was applying to take somebody's entire four year education for only one year. My eyes prickled again and I nodded.	
"I understand, I'm sorry for being late, again. And thank you for the opportunity."	
"We'll call you," was the last thing she said before she shut the door between us. Which felt metaphoric as hell, if you asked me.	
I realized that there were a couple of kids sitting outside waiting and that that was it. That had been my chance and I'd blown it.	
"Good luck."	a
They looked up from their phones as I said this, and as I le the school I realized that I'd meant it. Even if this meant I had to find another way to leave everything behind, I would.	a

I was like a weed. Ugly, but I never gave up.	a
SONG OF THE DAY: Evans Blue - A Cross And A Girl Named Blessed	a