Song 27√ We Will Shock You

The next day was what felt to me like the beginning of the end. a The period before lunch ended and Addy and I stood up, chatting about how hungry we were. I was really hoping there was pizza at the cafeteria today, because I felt like I needed a treat a er acing a couple of assignments. And then Link got up behind me and intercepted us on our way to the door. "Ladies, follow me." a Addy and I exchanged a glance. I narrowed my eyes at her and she shrugged. "What? I really don't know what his deal is." Out of curiosity, we followed him. He stopped just outside where Ashton stood, unfurling a colorful poster. The other boy reached out to help him tack it on to the announcements board of our floor. Once they stepped back and I was able to see the content of the poster, I felt like my stomach plummeted to the ground and I realized that I never should have agreed to his challenge. "Drummer and bassist required for the coolest rock band on Earth. Auditions this Friday," Addy read with a sense of awe to her voice. "This is finally happening, huh?" a "No." I took a step back, shaking my head. All of them turned back to me. "No, no." I stopped when I bumped into someone. I turned around to find Quinn and Madison, holding hands as they looked at Ashton or the poster. I wasn't sure. a Link broke the sudden tension that had fallen into the group. "You guys applying or what?" The queen bee flipped her perfect hair back and said, "As if. Let's go." She tugged her boyfriend's hand away and even though his body followed, his eyes stayed on us for a while longer. Was that longing on them? a I turned around, seeking for an explanation from anybody. Addy at least looked as confused as I was, but the two boys were back to focus on the poster. "Ta da!" Ashton spread his arms open as if regaling me with a great feat. "Challenge accepted." a I balled my fist at him but then I remembered this was Holy Trinity High School For The Rich And Uptight, and that I had the upper hand in the demographics. Rich kids with the world on their hands wouldn't be interested in this. He could do whatever he wanted. a I regarded the poster again and nodded. "Good move, but you're still going down." He faced me o with an annoying little smile. "We'll see." By the time lunch was done, this was all everybody could talk about. The whole school was abuzz with the fact that the top hottest senior wanted to make a band. I overhead a bunch of girls in the bathroom talk about how they planned to start learning drums or something just so they could join his band and stare at him up close. A er a bout of giggling about how gorghe was, one of them complained that four days was not enough, and that it was so unfair of him to not give them more time until the audition. I stepped out of my stall at the same time as someone else did. Madison. The younger girls took a look at us and scrammed. "Fools," she said as she lathered her hands with the nice soap they put out in the bathrooms. "What they don't get is that that's precisely the point. Anyone who is ready to audition in such a short notice is already prepared." I paused. Then I looked at her. She deliberately checked her makeup in the mirror with probably more care than was necessary. No way, she wasn't going to-She rolled her eyes. "It's only logical." a I couldn't shake o the feeling that something was o as I watched her leave. Nothing about Madison seemed casual. Maybe it was because of the way people referred to her that I had a feeling like she was focused, controlling and manipulative. Sure, we'd been wrong when we thought she was the culprit behind my disappearing clothes, and maybe I was reading too much between the lines, but it kind of seemed to me like she was interested in this audition thing. But that had to be crazy talk. For one, she was a violinist. I had a sudden imagine of her banging on the drums without any reason or tune and a laugh bubbled up out of my throat. Even for me, just because I could sing the one rock song I knew didn't mean I could pull o the entire genre, not that I was seriously considering it. But Madison? She looked like a real life Barbie. Like if she broke a nail she would make the world burn for it. If she'd gone to that rock concert on Saturday the masses would have swallowed her whole. The girl had less street cred in all of her than my le foot. a⁵ I dried my hands and tossed the tissue down the trash, along with that random thought of Madison in Ashton's band. I was sure she was just interested because she still wanted to know whatever her ex was up to. A couple of days later the call for auditions was all over social media. Leti texted me about it, which was the craziest thing to me. "How did you even find out?" I half asked, half screamed at her over the phone on loudspeaker Thursday night. She laughed. "I added your friend Addy on Facebook. She made my wall explode." Since I was sitting across from my roommate as she did her homework, I grabbed a pillow and tossed it at her. It caught her straight on the head, and since she'd been listening to our conversation she wasn't terribly surprised. She still socked me right in the nose with hers, and the strength of the blow caught me o guard. "God damn it, Addy. You're too strong." She shrugged. "You started it." I rubbed my nose and picked up the phone again. "Why do I feel like you both are conspiring against me behind my back?" "Not against you," Leti said. Addy nodded as she typed on her laptop. "For you. We agree this band needs to happen." My phone started buzzing with a second incoming call. I nearly dropped it. "Why's Ashton calling me right now?" As Leti cooed in the background, Addy jumped and grabbed my phone. I stood on my bed, because surely this way I'd be able to reach for it, but then she got on her bed and did the same, so the advantage was gone and moot. "Hey Leti, I'll put you on hold," she said and then clicked on the screen. "Hey Ashton?" "Addy?" I heard him ask as I folded my arms. She laughed. "Oh wow, you sound so disappointed that it's me and not Vera." I grabbed her pillow and chucked it at her, but she dodged it easily. "What do you want?" I asked him. He cleared his throat, as if prompting us to start behaving. "Not much, just calling to ask if you're joining us for the audition tomorrow." Addy replied, "Yes, she is." "Why the hell would I?" I exploded. My roommate started sniggering as if she were being tickled on her sides by feathers. I could almost see Ashton shrug. "I thought you'd want to see firsthand if you lost the war or not." a I let out a grunt in frustration because he was right, again. I was pretty confident that nobody in this school cut it, but I couldn't pass up savoring the moment of glory and gloat in his face about it. So on Friday night I found myself sitting first row in the music room, as Ashton and company set up a makeshi stage for the auditions. Addy rubbed her hands together beside me. "Ohh, this gon be good." 🗲 I pursed my lips and glared at her. "You're hanging out online with Leti way too much." "Speaking of." She pulled out her cellphone. "She asked me to record the really bad ones for a laugh." a I sank in my seat. They were evil and I loved them, but instead of pushing this along they should've helped me sabotage it. Link brushed o his hands as he perused at their work. "Looks about ready." Then he looked up to the doors and smiled. "They look ready, too." Addy and I turned around. To my shock, the door was brimming with people waiting to be called in. As Ashton passed by us on his way to them, he gave us a triumphant smirk. Had I been missing a key bit of information here? I turned to Addy and asked her if by chance there were other rock prodigies in this freaking school and she shook her head. The first audition was so bad that I realized one could simultaneously feel like dying of secondhand embarrassment and also of choking back laughter. Addy recorded the whole thing and sent it to Leti, who, a few minutes later filled her entire screen with the laughing emoji. Ashton's confidence hadn't been pegged down a notch just yet. "Wait for it," he told me. He sat next to me and tugged at a strand of my curls. "You'll see." å And see I did. A sea of people who had less of an idea of what they were doing than what I had of being there. I leaned back on my chair as one person a er another passed, some tone deaf, some so terrified they couldn't even show if they knew what they were doing, others who thought banging at the drum or strumming some strings incoherently was going to be enough for Ash and Link. By what was probably the twentieth kid was done, I could tell that the two boys were starting lose their composure. My face hurt from smiling so hard. "So, Ashton. What happens when this band doesn't happen?" I asked him. Deadpan he turned to me, "Plan B is to open auditions outside of Trinity. Don't worry, this band will happen." I snorted. But then I looked back at the sound of the door opening for the next contender and choked on my own saliva. Madison and Quinn strutted down the music hall to the stage. Addy's jaw dropped. I looked at Link, whose eyes had never seemed so big before. Ashton's face was the true work of art here. It was frozen in a snarl that would have made him seem scary if he weren't so pretty. "What are you doing here?" Madison put a hand on her chest, her expression one of casual surprise, if that wasn't even a thing. "Why do you ask? We're here to audition. Unless the positions have already been filled." One look at us and she had her answer. "I didn't think so." "This audition is not open to you," Ash said. Then he looked at his ex best friend. "Or you." Quinn rolled his eyes. "Cut the crap, Ash. You know you need us. Nobody else in this school can even come close to meeting your standards." "And you can?" I blurted out. I li ed my palms up as many glares were directed at me. "Honest question, though. I thought you were an athlete." He relaxed at that and nodded. "Yeah, but I was also Ashton's roommate since freshman year. He taught me how to play drums so that he could play band." "Wait, wait." I shi ed narrowed eyes to Ashton. "You had a band before? With Quinn? Who else?" He pressed his lips shut. I pointed at Madison, wordlessly. She smiled. "Whoa," I said. Everything suddenly made sense. Why she seemed to know so much about this whole auditioning thing. The two missing members had been in front of my nose all along. Ashton had a trump card if he wanted to use them and win this freaking challenge, but he was refusing to because—well, they did do a nasty on him. a "It used to be Ash, his brother, Quinn and I," Madison supplied, walking over to pick a bass. She tuned it to her liking with the same care she used when setting up her violin before practice. She looked just as elegant with the massive instrument hanging from her frame. It seemed too big and heavy for her, but she handled it with ease. I looked at Link. "What about you?" He shrugged. "I was more of a solo act." "Then, what changed?" I asked him and jumped out of my skin when

"You're very dierent to Ayrton," Quinn said as he sat behind the drums.

I fiddled with my hands. "Well, no shit."

The pretty black boy twirled the sticks like they were second nature to his hands. Then he asked his girlfriend, "How are we doing this?"

"You lead and I follow," she told him, which was not something I ever thought I'd hear. It always seemed to me like she jerked him around everywhere and he just complied to her whims.

But then he clicked his sticks three times and hit the drums with so much energy that I stumbled back a few steps, until I felt the chair

with the back of my legs and sat down. Madison made her bass

squeal almost like it was a guitar and she was transformed. In her

expensive private school uniform and cascades of blonde hair, she

was like an apparition of rock and roll made woman. I didn't know if

they'd rehearsed this, but the ease with which they played, tuned to

each other, was not something that anyone could pull o easily. I felt

like when I was watching those tribute bands, like there was a

di erent world out there and my feet itched to take me into it. I

looked around me. The same awe was written on Addy's face. Link

smiled as though he knew this would be the outcome all along, and

Ashton looked resigned. And that was how I knew I never should have

I wasn't even going to start coming up with excuses to back out of my

told him that, sure, if he found the last bandmates I'd join.

"So, okay, I admit it's kind of funny to see Ash squirm," Madison said

with a kiss blown at his surly face. "But I'm also intrigued about his

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he pointed at my face.

vision for a band with you in it."

I jumped to my feet. "Me?"

the bastard probably did.

word, because I didn't want to. At that second, with my blood reaching a boiling, I wanted to learn how to sing this music and make the world burn.

SONG OF THE DAY: Queen - We Will Rock You