Song 30 Getting Away With It Friday night I stood in front of 200 people, frozen like I'd just looked into Medusa's eyes. Admittedly, though I'd been turned to stone my heart was beating with loud thumps that almost hurt. I could feel it on my temples, which were also dripping cold sweat. How did I even dream I could possibly do this? The orchestra was setting up in front of me, and more people kept arriving into the bleachers. Our team and the guys from Metropolitan High School were warming up behind me. Even above the loud chatter of people, the out of tune orchestra, the athletes shouting instructions and even the sounds of the night, the distance noise of cars in traic, I could hear the sound of my heart in my ears. I looked down at my hands and they were shaking. a In a few minutes I was supposed to sing the national anthem. My mind helpfully provided examples of celebrity blunders as they sang the most important song in the land in front of large audiences, broadcasted live on TV, and completely fucked it up. a Oh God, I couldn't remember the lyrics. "You look like you're freaking out right now." I looked up at the source of the voice and found Madison standing before me with her violin. "I'm going to give you a little trick," she said. "If it's to imagine that everybody is naked, that doesn't work. I did that once during a school presentation," I added, grimacing at the memory. "Somehow I ended up looking down at myself and imagining that I was the one who was naked." a She laughed. "Alright, but see that guy over there?" I followed where she was pointing and asked, "Ashton?" "Imagine himnaked." ā° I gasped and she le me standing there, frozen once more but for a di erent reason. Because now that she'd put the image in my head I couldn't unsee it, even though I was sure my imagination didn't do the real thing justice. But, of course, I was never going to see the real thing. Because that would mean he'd also see my thing, and I couldn't let that happen. I had more fat rolls when looked at up close and undressed. a I could feel my face and mood turning sour all of a sudden. It was why I was sure that there was no way he was really into me. It was all because of my singing. It was the only thing I could do well. đ I took a deep breath and focused on that. This one thing I could. Sing as if I didn't care if I had no voice le tomorrow. a I squared up my shoulders and told everybody I was ready, even before Sister Louisa got into position. The crowd was instructed to stand for the national anthem, and the music begun soon a er. I gave it my all, in my mind telling Christina Aguilera to suck it. My face throbbed when I released the last note. If it was because of the e ort, I didn't know. But there was a lot of clapping going on and I felt like that was contributing to it. a As we climbed down from the makeshi stage, I felt somebody bump my shoulder. Madison wiggled her perfect eyebrows, straight from a Vogue cover. "See? Told you it'd work." "That what would work?" I startled as Ashton appeared next to us. He looked as if it were suspicious as hell that Madison and I were hanging out together. And it was. But one way or another, she'd been right more times than I cared to admit. I ducked my head as we climbed up the bleachers to watch the game and said to her, "Yeah, I guess it did." "Are you blushing?" She cooed in a way that made me curl up into my shell. "Oh my goodness, you are. Are you a virgin?" a<sup>5</sup> It was Ashton who screamed. "A what?" a<sup>o</sup> My mouth was just hanging open. She hoisted the strap of her violin case up onto her shoulder and held my eyes. Hers twinkling like she was looking into a spotlight — the one that was on my head. "Why don't we sit together so I can give you some tips?" Her eyes slid to her ex for a second. "Because he does bite, you know." "Madison!" That was him. I just yelped and bypassed them as quick as I could to join Addy. Her mouth was stu ed with popcorn when I joined her. She gulped down half of her soda to wash it all down and said, "That was incredible but why do you look like you're about to cry?" a "I just got outed by Madison in front of Ash for being a virgin." "How'd she know?" was her question. I narrowed my eyes at her. "Why do you not sound shocked? Do I give o a whi of au de untouched maiden?" ď Addy smiled and sipped more soda. "So you are." I rolled my eyes and mumbled a yes. "See, I didn't know. I took a wild guess and your reaction told me everything." I smacked her hard on the shoulder and wished that we could just focus on the game. It was supposed to be the make or break game before going to district, but a moment later I heard familiar voices behind us. "What are you trying here, Madison?" My skin broke into goosebumps as Ashton's voice came from directly behind me. I twisted around to see him glaring at his ex. Meanwhile, she was the picture of innocence. "Just trying out this new friendship thing." She shrugged a delicate shoulder that could easily shoulder a heavy bass. "I figure if we're going to be a band together, we need to be a team. Get to know each other and all that." She tilted her head toward me. "I was just trying to get to know our front woman." "Front woman," I said, marvel laced in my voice. "I'm a front woman?" "Absolutely," Addy chirped. Ashton's eyes rolled so hard he must have made himself dizzy. "Yeah, well, you don't get to know someone by asking them things they may not want to answer." "Okay, fine." She rested her chin against her fist as she gazed up at him with a whole hell of a defiant look. "Then you answer me this. When you kissed her a while back, was that for real or just to try to make me jealous?" Addy gu awed, her popcorn spilling everywhere without her bothering to care about it. "This is way better than the game." To me, the game, anything around me, was way better than this conversation. I picked out Quinn on the field easily. The only black boy from our team. He was dashing between bases but they tagged him out. Link chose that moment to join us, carrying the biggest basket of popcorn I'd ever seen in my life. He was a noodle type of guy, very tall and slim, and I couldn't make out where he'd stu all of that. a Then Ashton's voice came. "It was for real." Two gasps followed. I was sure Addy and Madison had the same look on their faces. đ I plunged my hand in Link's popcorn and he protested, trying to take it away from me. a "What the hell? Get your own," as he said this he buried his face in the popcorn. Munching, he asked, "So what's going on?" å Before anybody answered, I chimed in with, "We're losing." "Great, that way our drummer will have more time to practice with us," Link said. Said drummer's girlfriend reached over Ashton and me to whack the Asian American boy up the head. "Yeah, but losing tonight's game might make it harder for him to get a good college scholarship, idiot." I swiveled around. "Scholarship? Why would he need one?" Weren't all kids here filthy rich, except for me? She was serious for once. "He's on a scholarship like you, virgin girl." "You're a virgin?" I elbowed Lincoln so hard in the ribs I might have broken one, but it was well deserved a er he screamed it so loud that half of the stands turned my way. Now my face and my entire body were burning with pure embarrassment. a "Changing topic before I get smacked to death by the fiery Latina here," Link said, coming to the rescue now. I turned my nose up for good measure. "Did you all get my text earlier today?" "Yeah," Madison replied. "But how are we doing this? We can't cram all our instruments into Ashton's Jeep, and I'd rather not call any of my servants for help because they'll run and tell my mom. You know how much she hates it when I don't do lady like things." Ash clapped once and rubbed his hands. I caught his smile from the corner of my eyes and ducked my head, overwhelmed by what I saw in his face. A lot of light and the desire to live and cause damage. I wasn't sure I was ready for all that. "Don't worry, fam, I got you." ď We ended up losing, and I felt pretty bad for Quinn. I hadn't even known that he was like me. No one had mentioned that he was also on a scholarship and I'd always thought his name was posh as hell. I didn't know if his home situation was better or worse than what I'd grown up with, if it allowed him to have a plan b. I figured he'd be pretty disappointed and maybe even mad a er tonight. Maybe as a result we wouldn't be able to follow through with the plan. å About an hour later he met us at the cafeteria, all dressed up in casual clothes to match ours.

And he was smiling.

moment of relief and joy.

drums, then fuck yeah."

And maybe we shouldn't have.

chainlink fence.

it."

those?"

why."

"You got this," he said. As if.

weight brings the fence down?"

but I'd devour him if he let me.

picked me up on the other side.

that looked like Itcould live inside.

amount of extra space. "Are you ready?"

an audience for the first time.

joining us."

said, "Ta da."

smear us all.

running? I've had no wall climbing training!"

as he gently guided me. "Do you trust me?"

"Okay, let me prove it. Start climbing, I'll help you."

Link, ever so helpful, said, "That'd be hilarious."

"Shut up, they're having a moment." That was Madison.

Quinn so happy?

Ash stood up and for the first time since I knew them, they shook

hands. It felt like more than just a, I'm sorry you lost your game.

I looked back at Madison and her face was a work of art. Frozen in a

Well, okay. This was good and probably long coming, but why was

"If by that you mean ready to let my anger out by smashing some

"Good," Link said, tucking his thumbs into the belt loops of his jeans.

"But how are we getting out of here? May I remind everybody that as

long as we're not picked up by our legal guardians outside of

Ash put a hand to his chest, as if it hurt. "You dare to doubt me?"

It turned out that rich people definitely had their ways. The first step

in his plan was for all of us to sneak out of school. When I asked how,

he replied, "Remember all that training I've had you do for the past

All six of us, including Addy who never wanted to miss out on the fun,

sneaked out of the building under the cover of the night and the thick

forest, the area where I first saw him, actually, which was terrifying for

canopies of the trees. Ash guided us through a pitch black patch of

me because my feet kept snagging on tree roots on the ground. It

took us forever to reach the end and stand face to face with a crude

He pointed at it like it was actually an open door. "And then we climb

I gasped and was about to scream bloody murder when Addy asked,

"Wait. I see that nobody's carrying their instruments. Won't they need

Ashton did a flourish with his hand. "Like I said, trust me."

Quinn's teeth flashed bright in the dark. "It's not our first rodeo."

One by one they started climbing until it was only me le . And Ash.

"Um, may I remind you that all I've done for the past few weeks is

He laughed so ly. I felt his hand on my elbow, burning my skin even

I swallowed thickly. "I think I do, even though I don't honestly know

I squared myself in front of him. "You don't get it. What if... what if my

My head spun as he took a step closer and looked down into my eyes,

so deep that I felt like I was drowning in his. It didn't matter that there

were other eyes on us, or that we might get caught by the nuns for

trying to sneak out and possibly face a terrible punishment. At that

second all that mattered to me was that yes, I was a fucking virgin,

"Do you want me to make you shine?" he asked, his gravel voice so

low that it sent a shudder down my spine. "Do you want to sing?"

The guys hollered on the other side of the fence. I turned to it and

I tried to climb. I could feel that he was putting as much e ort into

wedged my foot in, and then I felt Ashton's hands around my waist as

supporting me as my limbs did. By the time I reached the top, he gave

me a hearty push from my butt that made me squeal, because it both

sent me over the edge of the fence and over the edge of my sanity.

And then for a hot second I was stunned speechless, because he

"What?" I asked, turning back to see Ash climbing behind me. And

then it dawned on me. "Oh, hey, Ayrton. I didn't know you were

"And miss the o icial debut of the Casual Friday Funeral? Never."

The twin helped me straighten up as his older brother landed and

My eyes followed to where he pointed. A super creepy, beat down van

"Please, step into my o ice," Ayrton said, opening the back door to

sorts of weird things that belonged to Link with still a surprising

the van where we saw Quinn's drums, amps, guitar and base and all

A chorus of hell yeahs answered him. And so we drove o to a college

party around the UCF area, where we were going to play our songs to

Without knowing that shit was going to hit the proverbial fan and

SONG OF THE DAY: Papa Roach - Getting Away With Murder

"I," I started. Then with a deep breath I finished, "I do."

couple of months? Well, the time has come to use it."

weekends and holidays, we're under curfew at the school."

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It looked like maybe they'd already made up.

"Are we ready?"