

# Song 34

## Song 34 J Sing, Sing

Since we were pretty much on lockdown, it meant that we had a lot of time on our hands. A week went by after the incident and it felt like all of us were changed.

Ayrton came back to school. He told everybody who wanted to listen that it was because he didn't want to bother his aunt anymore. I rolled my eyes and let him say whatever floated his boat but I knew that he was brimming with excitement to be back. He was the one who helped us find a good charity to donate his dad's money to, though, and we all gleefully got together at the library after school one day to write letters of encouragement signed by the estate of Senator Albert Winters of Florida. We couldn't wait to see his reaction after the media picked up on it.

One Friday evening we were all lounging on the grass by the lake. The air already had a certain bite of fall chill, so I was in my sweatpants and a flu y sweater I'd got a couple of years ago.

Addy poked at it. "I like this, where is it from?"

"Target," I said with a grin.

Dead serious she said, "They make the best stuff." Which I found funny, knowing that she was hardcore into fashion and wanted to pursue it as her long term career. She flipped open her sketchbook and passed a few sheets of paper around to the rest. "Check out some ideas I have. Maybe one of those would be a cool logo for the band."

Madison twirled her hair as she pointed at one. "I like this one. Makes me think of fangs."

Link's eyebrows went up. "I'd have thought that would be a bit, um, too goth of a look for you."

The girl's fingers froze as she stopped playing with her hair, the better to focus her might onto glaring at him. "Do I look like I'm into Barbies or some girly type shit?"

"Actually, yeah."

Apparently that had been the wrong answer, because it earned him a punch to the arm. That sent Quinn's head falling over her lap and he groaned a complaint that Madison drowned with kisses to his face.

"Why don't we record a music video?" Ayrton asked. "We could put it up on Youtube and start racking up a following that way."

"Not a terrible idea, except for the part where we're stuck at school," Madison said.

"So what?" Ashton said then, resting his chin on his fist. "It's an awesome idea-"

Ayrton cut him off, "Thank you, clone."

His brother ignored the comment and continued. "We could use the music room as the setting. Link can produce the song with his equipment and we can just record the video with our iPhones."

Lincoln nodded, and was about to say something when I gasped, realizing something crucial.

"Wait, wait. Me? On camera?" My eyes went wide as saucers. "On Youtube?"

They all looked at me like I was crazy. It was Madison who dared to ask, "You haven't taken pictures of yourself, right? They're called selfies. Have you seen your own face that way before?" I rolled my eyes, annoyed that she sounded like Leti and about to spit some snark at her when she said, "Because it's not terrible. I don't know what you're afraid of."

Addy lifted her hand as if asking for a pause. "Wow, did I just hear Madison Hollingsworth compliment somebody else?"

"Yeah, savor it. It's not gonna last."

I caught Ashton gazing at me as though he also didn't think my face was all that terrible.

"That's all well and good, but which song are we recording out of the handful we have?" Link asked.

"I was thinking that maybe we could write a new one altogether." We all looked at Ashton as he said this. He leaned back on his elbows. "A song about rebellion. Would that be exciting, Vera?"

I stiffened at being singled out. "Why do you ask me?"

"Well, you said that the vibe you want for our band is that, pretty much. Excitement." His eyes hypnotized me as he painted the picture. "You want the crowd to vibrate to the frequency of my guitar, Madison's bass, Quinn's drums, your voice."

Link protested. "What about me?"

Ashton waved a hand. "And whatever the hell it is you do."

"Hey!"

This brought a shudder out of me. I was sure that I was smiling the same way he was, as if we were hungry wolves in front of our prey.

"That's exactly what I want," I said. I had a brief glimpse of what this could be. Our music a shotgun. The ricochet from the crowd, the screaming of a mass of people reacting to our music. "How do we do this?"

"We tap into our experiences," he said. "Good and bad. We make a song that represents our generation. A song that pisses off our parents because we have the rest of our lives ahead of us, while they've let their hopes and dreams go. And we take this song to the battle of the new bands and kick ass."

That was the start of it.

We all wanted to get this one right. There was a lot of fighting as we tried to decide on the lyrics, over whether this word that rhymed actually said what we wanted to say. It was even worse when we had to put music to it. Every day after school, we stayed behind in the music room to practice. And every day somebody would stomp out in anger. I wasn't immune to this. Even though I never would see myself as a diva, those days took a toll on me. I grew sick and tired of singing the same thing, over and over, hoping for different results.

One night in particular I tossed my microphone on the floor and left the room. I thought it'd be better to cool off outside than to strangle Ashton with the microphone's cord, although the fantasy was definitely in my mind. He in particular was pissing us all out.

Ashton followed me outside. He grabbed my hand and forced me to a stop.

"You're not giving up, are you?"

"No," I said as I whirled around. "But you need to understand that perfection doesn't exist. Not even in your mind. What you envision may not be what the rest of us want."

He ran his hand through his perfect, silky hair and I was pissed that I both wanted to stomp on his foot and kiss him.

"I know. I just really want us to take off, you know?"

"Then don't clip our wings," I said.

It got better the next days after that, until the weekend came and we were ready to record the music video. We'd asked the school for permission and they'd granted it. I was the only one who seemed shocked by this.

Addy laughed as she helped me get dressed in our room with the clothes she made. At a glance, I seemed to be wearing a regular t-shirt and jeans, but she'd added a few pins and spikes here and there for artistic touches. Leti Facetimed us as she explained how to do my makeup.

"I don't know what surprises you so much," my roommate said as she watched me botch up a winged eyeliner for the second time. "We pay a lot of dough to be in this school."

"These are the coolest nuns I've ever met," I admitted.

"You're right about that." Leti's voice came from Addy's iPad. "The ones from our church wouldn't even smile if you paid them. Why's your hand shaking so much? No wonder your makeup looks like a mess."

"Are you nervous?" Addy asked me.

I gave her and Leti a watery smile. "What gave me away?"

Addy took over after that. She finished my makeup and we made it downstairs. Once we reached the hallway with the music room, we noticed that there was a commotion. A bunch of students cluttered the entrance and we had to elbow our way in. All the chairs and stands were lined up outside, up and down the entire hall. Once we made it to the music room, I saw that it was empty except for the band's instruments in the middle.

Ayrton greeted us at the door. "Welcome to our studio for the day! Let me walk you through my creative vision." He hooked his arm with mine and walked me to the middle, where the rest of the guys were already with their instruments. "You're all going to stay pretty much in the middle, and I'll be circling around as I film you while you pretend I don't exist."

"Sounds rad," my roommate said. "I assume that means I have to stay outside."

"You and that little crowd out there," he said easily.

Addy saluted. "I'll keep them at bay."

I watched her go and close the door behind her. I turned back to face the guys and jumped out of my skin.

Madison had dyed her perfect, shiny, long blonde hair a pitch black.

I put my hands on my face. "What the hell did you do?"

"Meet the real me, bitches," she replied, with a wide smile with lips blacker than her eye liner.

I saw Link shaking his head on his side as he tried hard not to laugh.

"And here I thought she was a Barbie."

Quinn still looked like the picture of a jock with his muscles and chiseled looks. Anyone would think he'd be horrified at what his girlfriend had done to her beautiful hair, but that apparently was just me, because he seemed unconcerned with the change.

"Are we ready?" he asked.

"One second," Ashton said. He stepped over the cable of his guitar and walked over to me. The corners of his lips lifted as he looked me up and down. "You're perfect."

Then he gave me a soft, too brief kiss on my lips and pulled away.

When I opened my eyes he was handing me the microphone.

"Time to fly, V."

I took the microphone and got in position, facing Ayrton's camera. I lost track of everything except for the music and the words coming from my heart.

We

We, the young

We just want to be heard

We don't want to be hurt

Is that a promise that you'll keep?

We just want to grow

We

We, the young

We just want to be the voice

Of the young, the strong

The weak that never speaks

We don't want to feel alone

Be the fire in your veins

That keeps you soul

Your mind awake

We the young

Are here to stay

We the young

Are here for change

We the young are here

So pray

It was only a few days later when Ayrton uploaded the video on Youtube that I started to get an idea of what had happened that afternoon. I'd gone into that room thinking I was just playing with some friends from school. Like kids who dressed up and played at being rockstars, instead of Disney characters or something.

But in a matter of days, we'd racked up hundreds of thousands of views.

SONG OF THE DAY: All American Rejects - Swing, Swing