

Song 36

Song 36 ♪ I Write Tragedies, Not Romances

In full disclosure, I had my doubts. Like, on the one hand I le the gringo's house that night feeling vindicated but on the other hand I had the niggling question circling my mind of what this would mean to me.

I sought music as a refuge from the following week onward. And music that I was getting interested in now, rather than what my ma had taught me to like. I realized I'd stopped listening to Selena and Olga and Celia and had replaced it for heavy doses of guitars. One night I brought this up as Leti and I were texting.

I thought so at first she texted me, confirming my worst fears. I saw the three dots working at the bottom of the screen as she crad another text. The dots disappeared for a second and I sat up in my bed. It was late enough that Addy was already asleep, dead tired a er she spent the whole a ernoon designing clothes and listening to Lady Gaga on full blast.

Then the text came in.

Look, I was pretty shitty about you moving to your new school at first because, yeah, I felt betrayed. And then you started talking about your white boy and I thought you were going crazy thinking you wanted to be like them. But then I saw you singing that weird shit they call music and actually? My thoughts? You are better than them because you're built with 100% raíces hispanas. You're more hungry for success than they are, and you won't stop working until you get 37

My eyes ran through her words several times, as if to check that I wasn't hallucinating. My heart was shattered and I was hurting that my own mother couldn't support me the way my friends did. Even when we fought or didn't talk for a while, like it happened with Leti and I sometimes, I was always going to be thankful to have them.

Gracias, perrawas all I could text her back because I was already sobbing and I had to try to not wake Addy up. I unlocked the screen as I got another text from her.

De nada. Don't make me say cursi shit like that ever again

I thought about that exchange a lot in the upcoming weeks of both orchestra and band practice. I seemed to finally be finding my place in the world. This world. I jumped into orchestra practice right a er class every day, where I worked to hone my technique and understanding of music basics. I was not getting ugly glares from some of my club mates, and even the two girls who pranked me were acting exceptionally nice to me. But that might have something to do with the fact that our band's Youtube video was pretty much going viral and they were basking in how cool it was to be close to famous people — their words, not mine. I just let them be and enjoyed the flash of fear in their eyes every time they looked at me.

Then a er orchestra was band time. I didn't focus on technique there, but on heart. On trying to deliver a performance that would shake my floor if I were in the crowd. Of course, I didn't always manage. I still had a problem of being jarred out of focus when something changed in the melody that I wasn't expecting.

Link shook his head once and said, "The weird problems of someone with perfect hearing."

Quinn was having an easier time of things now that the baseball team had been kicked out of the big tournament. They still assembled for morning practice and had the occasional friendly, but most of his spare time he spent with us, hitting the drums so hard that he'd developed larger arm muscles. A feat that Madison made sure to brag about, which was both gross and funny to me.

I also got to experience the curious e ect of the parting masses as Ash and I walked down the halls hand in hand. I knew there were a few bad whispers but he was pretty good at wrapping me up in a cocoon of purpose for the band and a cocktail of fluttery feelings in my belly. The latter were in majority because of him but as Thanksgiving drew closer, they started to become more and more about the contest.

It was a week before the day, when Ash and I walked into the music room together, talking about one of our new attempts of a song, when life gave us a proverbial slap on the face.

"Welcome everybody," Sister Louisa was with Mr. Burlington as she greeted us. We all took our usual places in the orchestra and a er the noise settled down she continued. "As you all know, we have our Thanksgiving showcase next week, which o icially kicks o our season of events. We'll be very busy this winter."

It wasn't like I'd forgotten about it, but I did put it to the back of my mind.

Mr. Burlington dropped the MOAB then. "Remember, we'll be dismissing class a tad early on the 22nd so that we can drive to the venue. I expect all of you prepared to depart at 4.30pm sharp. We will get there at close to a quarter past, and the recital will begin at 6pm."

I sucked in a breath so sharp that I must have stolen half of the oxygen in the room, and even though that caught some attention, Ashton raised his hand like a whip and asked, "But I thought the recital was on the 21st, what happened?"

The older man looked confused. "Oh, I'm sorry but where did you get that information?"

Ashton's frown deepened as he turned to Sister Louisa and said, "Don't you remember? When we were all, er — praying in the chapel. You said the recital would be a couple of days before Thanksgiving."

She tilted her head as she regarded him in silence.

"Did I?" Sister Louisa asked. "I must have made a mistake. Why do you ask?"

And God help me for sinning but at that very second I hated her. All along I'd thought she was a stern person, more so even than the school's own headmistress, but the sweet innocent tone of her voice made me feel like there was no mistake.

I saw Ashton swallow hard and I could imagine that what he was swallowing were some specific colorful words. In my mind I was freely calling her all sorts of blasphemies I didn't feel a little bit sorry about.

"Our band has a contest that night," he bit out.

My whole body and soul froze at what she said next.

"Well, I guess you're just going to have to skip it, won't you?"

"We're not gonna skip shit," Madison screamed a couple of hours later when we had the room all to ourselves again. I would've liked it if she'd blurted that out in front of Sister Louisa's face to see how that went.

And even more, I'd have loved to be able to back her up.

But I couldn't.

"I can't," I said. Four pairs of eyes swung to me. It was one in particular I had trouble meeting head on.

"What do you mean you can't?" he asked. My Ashton.

I looked down at my hands as they wrung each other. "I mean, I have to sing at the recital and I can't be in two places at one."

"That's because you don't have to." As he said this, he sounded more confused than anything else. "You can only be in one."

As the silence stretched I gathered the nerve to look up at him and saw the understanding dawn on him in the way his face turned to ice. I cringed and was already to feel a certain prick in my eyes.

"I'm on a scholarship," I reminded him and the other guys. "My entire future is riding on this."

He shook his head in jerky motions. "I get it, but what if your future is not the orchestra but this band?"

But at that second I was exposing the ugly truth that I didn't see eye to eye with him on that.

Quinn stood up from his chair and stood in front of me. I didn't find any anger or disappointment in his face. Instead he put one hand on my shoulder. "I understand. If I'd had to choose between the baseball team and the band, well, the band is just for fun."

"It's not just for fun. This is life or death for me." Ashton ran a hand through his hair and pulled at it slightly. "I'm not going to go through my life following my dad's orders and plans. I'm not going to law school or becoming a politician. I'm a musician. That's what I want my life to be."

"Yeah, and that's fine, Ash," Quinn said. "But you have to understand that other people might not have the same goal as you."

That seemed to strike him to his core. I'd said something similar to him once, but this one stabbed him in the heart.

Madison grabbed her dark hair and pushed it behind her shoulder before leaning back on her chair and leveling a strange look on her boyfriend. "I'm with Ash on this one. You can only do great things by making great sacrifices."

"Oh yeah?" her boyfriend asked her. "And what are you sacrificing? Because may I remind you all, you're in this school, practicing with expensive instruments and dreaming of a bohemian life when it's all paid by your parents."

Her colors rose to her cheeks and she bit her lip in a way that looked painful. "How's that our fault? And do you even see all that money buying us happiness? Ash and Ayr and I have shitty parents who are much happier living their lives away from us, but now it's wrong for us to want to do our own thing?"

"But that's the thing," I said so ly. I didn't care that there were hot tears streaming down my face in front of all of them. "Despite all of that, you can. You have the means to be free. Quinn and I, people like us have to follow the rules of the game to a T and hope we can make it. For me, that's making sure I can keep my scholarship. So I have to put the recital first."

Link scraped his chair against the floor as he stood up. I looked at him for the first time and he was furious, his face contorted into a mask I'd never seen before. And as he begun talking I was sure he was going to curse Quinn and I to hell and back, especially me.

"I'm a musician too and that's what I'm betting my future livelihood on, but the reason I'm here with you all, in this school, is because my dad works 24/7 in Korea so that I can live out my dreams." He picked up his case and marched over to the door. Before leaving he turned around and said, "And I'll be damned if I get in the way of other people's struggle. So I guess this fucked up band is over because I'll support Vera on this, and shame on you all if you don't."

Right then doing the right thing and its consequences finished breaking the last part of my heart that had remained whole.

SONG OF THE DAY: Panic! At The Disco - I Write Sins, Not Tragedies