

Song 4

Song 4 Welcome To The Boarding School

They decided to let me change to Trinity.

They decided

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As if they were the ones giving me the opportunity. Or as if they were not going to save a ton of money thanks to it.

Ma's real concern had been about what she'd do when she was short of a girl for a job, but she perked right up when she read the part in the letter that said I was free to go home on weekends. The gringo remained silent throughout the whole thing, but I could tell he was pleased with the life twist. With me gone they were free to pretend they were a real, wholesome family. Except for the drinking problem, but at that moment I didn't give a shit about those details.

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Because I was in! Starting September I'd be wearing the school uniform of an elite school that for sure was going to get me admitted to a good university on the opposite coast of the country. A dream come true.

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Leti was mad at me. I didn't know if it was because she found out I asked DeAndre to ask her out or if it was because she was still feeling betrayed that I thought Trinity was a better school and that I was ditching her for it. And I did think it was a way better school, she just refused to understand I didn't think its kids were better than us. But that was her problem and not mine, and this was my time to shine.

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My ma helped me pack on the Saturday of Labor Day weekend. Sunday was my official move-in date into the dorms. According to the package they sent along with the acceptance letter, new students had to arrive at least two days before class start for a few mandatory orientation activities. Returning students had just to arrive the day before.

I felt like I was going to freaking Hogwarts.

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It didn't help that the school looked all classic and sober on the outside. It was like someone had dumped a British castle in the middle of Central Florida, but it didn't look out of place in the area surrounded by \$5 million dollar houses. As ma drove me over to the school on Sunday, I had to refrain myself from squealing every 30 seconds and also from waving goodbye at the fancy houses I hoped to stop cleaning pretty soon. I was so gonna stick to my plan of not leaving the school on weekends. Visiting the barrio wouldn't at all be like going on a field trip to Hogsmeade.

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There was a short line of cars entering the school. Each one was being checked by a guard. When I squinted I could see it was the same guy who led me into the school for my interview a few weeks ago. He leaned down to ma's window level when it was our turn and recognized me right away.

"You made it!" He looked delighted. Like I wished my own mother did. "Welcome to Holy Trinity High School, I'm glad they let you in, kiddo."

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I beamed. "Thank you."

He still checked our info before letting us in, which didn't amuse my ma.

"If he already knew you, why did he have to check all our papers like he was working for la migra?" she asked.

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I shrugged. "Probably because they care about keeping rich kids safe, I don't know."

Our car was the most rundown in the entire parking lot. The old little Corolla couldn't hold a candle to any of the cars with brands so expensive that I had trouble pronouncing. My tongue always got twisted on all the Italian cars, and was it JAGuar or JaGUAR?

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We got out of the car and debated whether to bring my one suitcase in with us, or if to wait. We went for the latter, and that was a good thing. As soon as we stepped into the building we were ushered into a large room along with the rest of the parents and new kids. I counted about thirty kids for what I assumed was mostly the freshman class and maybe a handful of new students for the other school years. Class sizes were small, which helped the impression of exclusivity.

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I recognized the Mother Superior and the younger nun from my interview when they stepped into the room along with a group of other people. Teachers, I assumed. Mr. Burlington wasn't among them, and with a startle I realized that he was now going to be my head teacher.

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How crazy was this?

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They welcomed us into the school and explained the rules and guidelines. Everything from how the time table of classes worked, to curfews and the mandatory "romantic relationships between students are strongly discouraged and sexual relations are strictly forbidden."

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Ma and I snorted at the same time. We also pretended that we'd done nothing and were in complete agreement when the sound attracted a few looks.

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When we walked out of the room she patted my hand. "I'm glad I don't have to worry about you getting involved with a boy."

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I looked at her, pretending to be confused even though I totally knew what she meant. "What do you mean?" I asked.

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She shrugged. "Well, that kinda thing is for different girls, you know? Girls who are really into boys."

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And whom boys are into, she meant. Surely no boy would ever want to get me undressed.

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In a clipped tone I said, "Right."

Sister Louisa found us then, and she had the same enigmatic smile as she did during my interview. "Welcome home, Vera. We're so glad you decided to join us."

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I was absolutely intrigued by her choice of words. Home? That I decided to join them?

I looked all around me at the checkered marble floor, the wood paneled walls that didn't seem to end, stained glass windows and religious art sculptures that flanked a sprawling staircase. This was so far from what I'd known as home that it was mind-blowing to think we were only a few miles away. And yet it already felt like I belonged here much more. Because it was the first place where someone accepted me for being me, rather than putting up with me simply because they had to.

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But it wasn't like the decision to be here was completely mine. I knocked on the figurative door, they opened it and my ma didn't trip me on the way in. That was pretty damn different.

Still, I smiled back at her. "I'm so happy to be here, thank you."

She nodded and introduced herself to my mother. Then she said, "Please follow me and I will take you to your room. I believe your roommate is already settled in."

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"Is she also a scholarship student?" Because that'd be great. An ally.

"No, just an early arrival."

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Oh.

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We followed her up the staircase and she explained the general layout of the school. The upper levels of the left wing were exclusively the girls dorms, for all the school years. The boys' was the entire right wing. Everything in between was the main classrooms and laboratories. Unlike a typical American high school, each class per school year had an assigned classroom and it was the teachers whom rotated. This entire system helped the teachers make sure that kids were not escaping and hiding around.

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"The nuns," she said, "live on the ground floor of the right wing. If you ever come into trouble or need help, you're free to come to us at any time of the day or night. We're also here for counseling."

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She explained that there were usually 12 girls and 12 boys per class and so the identifiers for rooms started by 1 for freshmen and 4 for seniors. So for example, since there were two girls per room, we had six rooms per school year. She turned to us. "You'll be in room 43 of the left wing. There's a 43 in the right wing as well, for two boys."

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I noticed then that where she'd stopped was right outside room 43. We were in a long hallway on the third floor where, on one side, the rows of doors started by 3 and the other row by 4.

Sister Louisa knocked on the door and we heard faint steps.

A huge girl opened the door. And by huge I meant she was so tall that both my ma and I had to crane our heads back to meet her eyes. Her eyebrows went up.

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"Hello," she said in a way that came across as tentative to me. Like we were possibly any intimidating.

"Hi, Addy," Sister Louisa said. "This here is Vera de la Cruz, your new roommate and classmate, and her mother."

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The girl's cheeks colored just the slightest bit. "Oh, hi. I'm Adele Holt, nice to meet you."

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We shook hands. Hers dwarfed mine, but her grip was so . Shy. Like me.

I liked her immediately.

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"Very well," Sister Louisa said as she turned to my ma. "Would you like to come with me so that we can speak more about the school?"

Ma gave me her stink eye that meant I better behave, or else a chancla was flying my way. "That's fine. I have to bring up her suitcase anyway."

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I watched them walk away with a lot more glee than I cared to admit. I was sure most kids would be sad to be parting ways from their mom, but boy, was I doing us both a favor.

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I felt free.

"Um." My roommate's voice pulled me out of my head. "I heard you're a scholarship student."

I opened and closed my mouth, thinking of all the possible reasons why she'd bring this up right away. And most of them were not that friendly. "I, uh. Yes, I am. Is that bad?"

She gasped. "No, not at all! I'm glad you are. I was pretty sick of being stuck with a snob in my room for the past three years." She waved one hand as if dismissing a thought. "I mean, don't get me wrong. I'm technically a snob too, because my parents can actually afford this place, but I make it a point to not be a total douchebag and that hasn't exactly gained me popularity around here. I'm just saying that if you're looking forward to joining the exclusive social circles of this place, you and I shouldn't hang out much."

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My dimples were probably showing as I smiled up, way up at her. "You know what? I don't give a shit about what the rich kids think and I like you already. How about we tell them to fuck off and we become friends instead?"

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I could tell this had floored her because there didn't seem to be anything in the world that she could hide with how open her expression was.

"Okay, cool." Her obvious delight faltered. "But don't say I didn't warn you. The kids here are brutal, and the richer and prettier they are, the worse they get."

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I gave her a salute. "I'll keep that in mind."

Puh-lease, I was from the barrio. How bad did these kids think they could be?

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SONG OF THE DAY: Guns N Roses - Welcome to The Jungle

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