

Song 8

Song 8: Losing My Resistance

The next morning when I woke up there was an envelop that had been slid under our door. I picked it up and saw that it was addressed to me. Since I'd learned that the bathrooms were shared with the entire floor, I'd decided to wake up extra early every morning so that I could do my thing around the least amount of people possible. So I took the note with me and didn't bother Addy by turning a light on to read it.

The bathroom was actually pretty nice, stocked with enough towels and toiletries for an army, rather than the 24 girls that used it every day. There was actually enough privacy if one cared for it, with screens, curtains and a small changing room. I got down to my skivvies quickly and put my stuff away in my locker. I was used to a quick and furtive shower ever since ma and I moved in with the gringo. For some reason I always felt like he was on the lookout and it creeped me the hell out. That habit was serving me well at the boarding school and it would take me only 20 minutes to be clean and dressed again.

I sat on the bench by the lockers and pulled out the note in the envelop. It was from Mother Superior Evangeline. She requested to see me in her office before class.

I looked at the clock hanging from the wall. It was only past 7am. There was still just shy of an hour before breakfast was served, and the first class was at 9. I wondered if it was too early to drop by her office. I went back to my room and opened the door trying to make the least amount of noise. Addy still groaned.

"Sorry," I hissed, tip toeing around to drop my stuff and grab my backpack. She murmured something, followed by a snore.

I shook my head as I left my room. I wouldn't describe myself as a morning person, but Addy definitely couldn't be confused for one. Every morning was a struggle to her and I tried not to add to it.

The headmistress's office was the same one I was interviewed at, so I remembered where to find it. I made my way down to the first floor and veered right until I found the massive wood doors. I knocked on them. To my surprise they opened and the senior-most nun stood in front of me. Her glasses had been hanging from her neck, so she put them on.

"Oh, it's you." She stepped aside. "Come right in."

As I did so I said, "Good morning."

She nodded and returned the greeting. Once she was sitting behind her desk, which I thought made her look like a hobbit, and I'd sat on the guest chair in front of her, was when she went straight to business. "You must be wondering why I called you in."

I clasped my hands together. "Did I do something wrong already?"

"Already?" Somehow that made her crack a smile. "You sound certain that you'll make a mistake."

I shrugged one shoulder. "I'm not used to good things happening to me without some sort of catch."

The Mother Superior leaned forward on her elbows. "And you think there's a catch?"

I regarded her in silence with the feeling that she knew exactly what I meant, and that it was exactly the reason why I sat there.

"The catch is that I have to join the music program, isn't it?"

Her face stretched into a smile that temporarily erased a lot of her wrinkles. "Mr. Burlington told me you didn't look too excited when he announced that."

I sank further into the plush chair. "I'm terrified."

"Why?"

It wasn't complicated. It was stupid and I didn't want to explain it. It cut too close to the heart of the matter, which was that I wasn't good enough.

Instead of answering her question, I asked one of my own. "What happens if I don't want to join the program? Can I just focus on the regular curriculum?"

She stood up and paced to the large window that oversaw the grounds. The sun was coming up in the sky, painting it with hues of purples and pinks. "That'd be unfortunate. You see, every student here has to focus on their studies and their talents. Your ability to memorize text is not what got you, or any of them, into this academy." She turned to me. "Do you have any other talent that you could pursue under our tutelage?"

I didn't think the talents of fucking things up or gaining weight out of thin air were part of her curriculum. I also didn't have the talent of being born with a silver spoon in my mouth.

My lips trembled. "Not really."

Mother Superior nodded to herself. "I was really shocked, you know. We had to give the opportunity of interviewing to the rest of the qualifying applicants, but as soon as I heard you I knew you were being wasted in a public school without a heavy music program. God's given you an extraordinary gift."

I felt my face burn. Yes, I'd got compliments before. But none had been like this. They hadn't made me feel like I had what it took to reach for the stars.

"Thank you," I heard myself say with a voice that sounded like someone else's.

"It's not too late, you know," she said, sitting back down across from me. "If you work really hard and set your mind to it, I think you could make singing into your career."

My jaw dropped. That was what my mother had tried and failed at. She'd set her mind and heart out into becoming a singer since she was my age or younger. She worked every day and night and left everything behind for it. She'd begged producers and record labels. She'd sang at every bar and show that would have her. She sent her demos to every major, medium and small label that she could think of. To every radio station of her genre. But breaking into the music industry was harder than going to outer space, and all she'd gotten for her efforts... me.

I took a deep breath. "I don't think that's for me."

"Very well, but that's what got you into this school, so at the very least you should use it to get you to where you actually want to be." Her head tilted to the side. "Do you know where that is, precisely?"

I'd never thought farther than finding a way to get out of the gringo's house. I could become an accountant, a hair stylist or a cashier at a restaurant. Just as long as I wasn't in the barrio.

She must have read the turmoil in my face, because she waved a hand. "Well, you have one year to figure it out and we can help you."

This was uncharted territory to me. Someone helping me without any interest. Because I was a scholarship student, so she didn't have the incentive of me paying for tuition in exchange for guidance. The only thing she asked for was that I joined the music program and, what was it that the queen bee had said? Go to national competitions?

Easy peasy lemon squeezy, right?

More like difficult difficult lemon difficult, but I had to if I wanted to keep my place.

I stood up. "Thank you. I'll make sure to work hard in the music program."

She smiled. "You're welcome."

I had a feeling she wanted to say something more but a knock came from the door. She stood up with a grunt.

"Jesus, all of you students sure got up early today."

My jaw hung a little as she used His name in vain. I was pretty sure that was a no-no.

She headed over to the door and opened it. I stifled a gasp as my eyes met Ashton's. It was a natural reaction I was developing at seeing his pretty face.

"Mr. Winters," the Mother Superior said, motioning inside. "Please come in, I was just wrapping up with Vera."

He walked in, guitar case hanging from his shoulder. I noticed that he never carried books around. I broke the eye contact by looking down at my new shoes.

"I'll see myself out," I said.

"Thank you, Vera Maria." She looked at me with a thoughtful expression. "A name and a voice from the heavens, huh?"

Ashton's eyebrows went up.

I nearly ran out of the room and shut the massive door behind me. I did wonder for a second what she wanted to talk with him about, but the giggling feeling in the back of my head propelled me all the way to the cafeteria. I had the same feeling every time he was around. Like I had to stay away from him if I wanted to stay the same as I was.

I was early enough that I could see all the cafeteria staff come in and begin the setup. I parked myself at what was going to become Addy's and my usual table, close to the buffet, and took out my cellphone looking for something to kill some time with. I scrolled through my Facebook feed and saw a few pictures from the kids at my previous school. Leti appeared in a few of them. I zoomed in on one of them and whistled low at her makeup. Step aside, Kim Kardashian.

Then I saw that she'd posted a #tbt with me.

The phone jumped from my hands as though I'd been shocked by something. I found her on WhatsApp and sent her a quick text. She replied right away like usual, as though we hadn't spent a solid week not talking to each other. But I wasn't about to bring that up when I was just floating in the air that we were on speaking terms again.

We were in a frenzy of text exchanges, catching up with the latest, as a few sleepy eyed kids started walking into the cafeteria. The food was laid out already but I didn't care. I was busy telling her everything from my new roommate, to this whole shebang of me having no choice but to sing for the school, and grossly glossing over the pretty boy so she wouldn't act too crazy. She told me DeAndre asked her out and I squealed like a pig, which was when Addy found me.

"Whoa, what was that?" she asked as she set her tray down and perused our table. "And where's your food?"

"I'll go get it a second." I gave her a big shit-eating grin. "My best friend just got asked out by her crush and it was all because of me."

She struggled for a moment opening her yogurt parfait but once she opened it she said, "Oooh, other people's gossip. My favorite."

I started telling her all about it when a second person dropped their tray with us. Addy and I both jumped out of our skins as Ashton sat on us.

"Good morning," he said, like it was the most typical thing. And I guessed it was, just not directed at us.

Every single eye from all the early birds was on us.

"Um, what are you doing here?" I asked him.

He bent down and pulled up a black backpack on his lap. He unzipped it and pulled out three thick books that he set in front of me.

"I'm here to give you these," he said. I peered down at the books. Reading Music. The Classics. Music Theory for Dummies. I looked back up at him. "Here's the plan," he started, unprompted. "You have a week to study these. I'll quiz you. We'll meet every day after class this week before music club officially meets, and even after that. You'll practice with me and do as I say. No questions, no complaints. Is that clear?"

My hackles were officially raised. "Who died and put you in charge?"

Addy looked from him, to me, and back to him.

Ashton shrugged. "No one died, but Mother Superior Evangeline just put me in charge. If you have any complaints take them to her."

As he grabbed his tray and things again, and stood up, I said, "You're loco, amigo."

The corner of his lips raised into a smirk. "And I'll drive you loco. The sooner you accept that the better a you'll be."

SONG OF THE DAY: R.E.M. - Losing My Religion