Song 18

Song 18: I'm Definitely Not Okay (I Promise)

School was for studying, not for fooling around.

I decided to live by that rule from that Saturday night on.

I finished my essay and handed it to Sister Luisa before breakfast the next day. I snatched a bunch of food from the breakfast bu et while it was still so early that the cafeteria was mostly empty. Hopefully it'd be enough for the rest of the day because I had no plans of leaving my bedroom. That way I minimized my chances of running into Ashton and company and could focus entirely on my homework.

Thank goodness for calculus, history and literature. I put on headphones and listened to old school merengue and salsa as I worked. It kept me sane for the rest of the day.

When Addy arrived to our room from her weekend away she found me hacking away on my old laptop as I finished up an essay for AP Lit. She brought in two suitcases that were so big I had a hard time imagining where all the stu was going to fit. Our shared desk was pretty large but it was taken up by her sewing machine and supplies. Plus, any shelf space that could be found was to the brink with fashion magazines, scraps of fabric and a shocking number of buttons. She saw me eye the suitcases with concern and cringed.

"Okay, I think it's fair for me to make a bit more of an e ort to be a better roommate." She walked back outside and came in carrying the biggest pizza box I'd ever seen. "I hope this helps repay you for the bother?"

I set my laptop aside and jumped to my feet, almost panting like a dog. "Are there any pineapples in there?"

"Ew, no."

I jumped at the box. "Thank God."

We sat together on my bed as we worked on the box together. Then she asked the million dollar question.

"How was your weekend?"

I swallowed a cheesy bite and looked her dead in the eye. "Do you really want to know?"

She tossed her strawberry blonde hair back and away from her slice. "Of course."

The whole sordid story spilled out of my mouth like a bad case of hangover puke. I'd spent the better part of my day immersed in schoolwork and trying not to think about anything, but the feelings started to bubble to the surface as Addy gasped in turns, scowled or cursed.

At the end of the story I whined, "You warned me and I didn't listen, I know."

She smacked my leg. "I wasn't about to say I told you so, I'm not gloating about this." She fell silent as I munched on the crust of my slice first. "Well, the worst part is that you'll have to deal with them in class and at practice."

"You're telling me."

"What are you going to do?" she asked me.

I shrugged. "My best friend Leti says I shouldn't let them treat me this way and she suggests swi revenge."

Her eyebrows went up.

I smiled a little. "For your information, I'm ignoring her advice. I think the best thing I can do is avoid them."

Addy leaned back against the wall and stretched out her legs. They fell o the bed in uncomfortable looking angles. She was tall and big, and the individual size beds must be a pain in the neck for her.

"That's probably the best you can do. Ones they see that you're not responding to their fuckery anymore they'll grow bored and find somebody else to mess with."

I thought about it. That was probably true. The rich gringo kids seemed to live their lives hard and fast, with a rhythm the rest of us poor mortals couldn't entertain. Addy was right, they were probably going to get bored with me soon.

"Thanks, Addy."

"Any time."

My phone chimed in the silence and I paid attention to it for the first time in hours. I picked it up from among my books and papers and looked at the screen. An entire reel of missed phone calls and texts greeted me. A couple from ma, Leti, one text from DeAndre. But the most common name on the screen was Ashton, all phone calls except for a single text.

I'm sorry

I pursed my lips. In the short time I'd come to know him, I was beginning to understand that he o en put himself in the position of having to say that sentence. I wondered if it really meant anything at all coming from him.

Addy looked at it from above my shoulder and whistled.

"Girl, this may prove to be a challenge."

I sighed as I set out to reply to everybody but him. "I hope not," I said.

Of course, the next day was a disaster. I managed to make it to first period without any Ashton sightings but as soon as class started he was behind me, tugging my hair and passing notes that I kept dumping on the floor. I hoped for a teacher to notice this and reprimand him, but he was a sneaky bastard and didn't let himself get caught.

During one period change he stood up and so did I, at the same time. We faced each other o . When he opened his pretty mouth to say something I cut him o and said, "Excuse me, I need to go to the restroom."

He was wise to not block my way, but the short exchange still caught the eye of everybody in class. They followed me as I le the classroom and I could almost feel them still on me as I locked myself in a bathroom stall. I was mad that my skin got goosebumps when he looked down at me, and that my eyes had gone straight to his lips as though I had any right over them. Dios mio, I hadn't even been this thirsty when I'd gone to the pool with my friends over the summer and seen DeAndre shirtless.

I put my face in my hands. Somehow I had to control myself.

I finished my business and washed my hands and my face. I walked out of the bathroom thinking that I'd better kill the five minutes le until next period outside of the classroom, to see if that helped me regain my sanity. Then I caught Quinn coming out of the boy's bathroom and made the mistake of making eye contact with him.

"Hi," he said, walking over as he dried his hands with a paper towel. "You're Vera, right?"

I gave him a tight smile. "Nice to meet you."

He tossed the towel in a nearby bin. "You don't seem to mean it."

I sighed and ran my fingers through my mass of hair to straighten it for lack of anything better to do.

"Look, I don't personally have anything against you, it's just I'd rather not get involved."

He gave this vibe of being a good guy, which made it harder to super impose the image of an unscrupulous guy who'd stab his best friend in the back by, what was it, sleeping with said friend's girlfriend. That wasn't the kind of stu good people did, and as a general rule I tried not to hang out with bad apples, whether they be poor like the guys in my barrio, or rich like this guy.

He folded his arms and looked down at his shoes. "It seems to me you're plenty involved already. Are you and Ash dating?"

"What?" Was this guy on crack? How could he possibly ask something that outrageous.

His eyebrows went up. "He kissed you."

"Oh," I said. Then I waved my hand. "No, we're not dating. I don't even know why he did that. I guess I was just standing at the wrong place at the wrong time."

"I don't buy that." He looked over my head for a moment, as if thinking, and then back to me. "I don't think Ash would grab just anyone and kiss them to make a point. I think he likes you."

I clasped my hands. "Fun talk, but I don't want to be late for class. Bye."

Quinn followed me, because of course we were going to the same classroom anyway. "Don't get me wrong, at first I thought it was all a show he put so that Madison would get pissed, and I think it worked because that kiss sure looked real to me."

I gritted my teeth and tightened my fists. "It wasn't. Please stop talking about it and focus on why your girlfriend would get pissed instead and leave me out of it."

He sighed and muttered, "You're probably right. I just wish things were di erent."

I'd been honest when I told him I didn't have anything against him, but at the same time I didn't have a lot of sympathy for him. I looked up at him over my shoulder. "Wishing and doing aren't the same. If you want things to be di erent you'll have to accept one of two outcomes."

"What are those?" he asked, with hope lighting up his face.

I held one finger up, "One, that it'll be a steep climb to earn his forgiveness and two," I said as I held another finger up, "That it might never happen."

Quinn looked pained. "You're probably right."

"And either case doesn't really involve me," I said for good emphasis.

I was also probably in for deep shit somehow. Ashton's and Madison's eyes followed us as we walked into the classroom together and I had a feeling it was going to be a very long week.

SONG OF THE DAY: My Chemical Romance - I'm Not Okay (I Promise)