

Song 19

Song 19 ♪ Sugar, I'm Going Down

I was usually right when it came to foreseeing bad shit.

The next morning I woke up early as usual and headed to the girls bathroom in my floor. I wouldn't say I was a morning person, in truth, but it wasn't o en that I woke up and was already tired. I guessed it was the prospect of another weird day with Ashton's eyes boring holes on the back of my head.

I found my favorite shower stall and cranked the hot water up. I put all my clothes into a locker and stepped under the hot stream with a sigh. I kneaded my shoulders hoping it would ease the tension o of me, but I knew that this wouldn't be enough to help me deal with a bad boy. A laugh startled out of me. Somehow, despite drowning in music every day, I had forgotten that it was precisely music what always got me out of a funk, and my brain was ready to serve me with just what I needed.

Taking advantage of the perfect echo of the shower stall, I li ed my voice into as good an impression of Olga Tañón as I could serve. She was one of ma's and my favorites. She'd never said so but I always had a feeling that Olga's was the voice she had tried to imitate on stage, just as she tried to emulate Selena's charisma.

"Muchacho, muchacho, muchacho malo, haz hecho de mi lo que tú has querido," I started singing to myself as I soaped up. "Tan solo con verte me descontrolo, con solo un roce yo me derrito."

I refused to accept the truth in the lyrics and kept jamming. This extended my usual shower time but when I stepped out of it I felt refreshed and ready to face whatever crap came my way that day.

And of course, I realized pretty quick that I spoke too soon.

My towel was gone and so were my clothes.

I rubbed my eyes, refusing to believe this. Maybe the hot water had fogged my vision. But when I opened them again I saw that yep, hook and locker were empty. I checked the other nearby lockers to see if I'd put my clothes in a di erent one from the usual, but they were all empty.

That was when I started to panic. I was wet, naked and far enough from my room that a walk back to it would be terrifying. Plus, I didn't think it'd go well if a nun saw me like this. If anyone saw me naked, period.

My heart started to beat at a trot. This could get me expelled!

"Hello?" I called out, hoping to hear a maniacal cackle at least, so that I could find the culprit and punch them in the face. I tried to cover myself as best as I could with my hands and hair as I walked around, trying to find anybody. I was on the verge of tears now. Who would do something so heinous?

"Is anybody there?" I stopped just on the door, hoping that the prankster would be standing outside and would take pity on the fear in my voice. "Can you please return my clothes?" I smacked the door hard. It wasn't fair that I had to beg when I was the one who was wronged.

Only silence greeted me, though.

I looked at the clock on the wall and began hyperventilating. Most people would start to wake up and come into the bathroom soon. I couldn't just stand and wait to be found on my birthday suit like a freaking pervert. I was full on sobbing when I figured that the bully was not going to spare me any more humiliation.

I took a deep breath and pushed the door open with my shoulder. I poked my head out and looked at each side of the hall. It appeared empty. Without thinking any further I ran to my bedroom and locked the door behind me.

Addy had been in the middle of folding her towel into her toiletries basket and nearly jumped out of her skin at my appearance. With eyes bulging out she asked, "What the hell?"

I just let out the ugliest wail out of my chest. She jumped into action and wrapped me with her own towel. Between sobs I told her what had happened and she drew in a sharp breath.

"That bitch," she said, as if she knew exactly who was behind this. I looked up at her and she shook her head. "This has Madison written all over it."

"What?"

Her face flushed with anger. "Okay, story time."

She spoke as I tried calm myself down and got dressed.

"You can probably tell, but I love clothes." She motioned around our room at her mess. "Making them, that is. I can't help but look at people and envision exactly what I'd make for them, what would bring out their best features and make them feel more comfortable with themselves. Well," she said, and folded her arms. I wiped the tears o of my face with her towel. I could tell this was a sore topic by the way her entire face pinched. "This one time at the end of freshman year, Madison caught me checking her out. In my head I was thinking that she'd look really nice in a dress with an empire waist. In her mind, she thought I was sexually into her."

My jaw unhinged.

Addy rolled her eyes. "I'm all about love is love, but first of all if I were a lesbian she's not a person I'd go for. She's too skinny for my taste and she has a black hole where her heart should be. Anyway, I guess she felt embarrassed and in her mind that gave her license to start telling all the girls in our floor to watch out for me."

"That's horrible."

"My friends back then told me not to worry, that they'd have my back, but the abuse started mounting."

My chin trembled and I bit my lip. "Oh, Addy. I'm sorry. Did your friends turn on you?"

She flashed a grin. "No, they graduated."

"Oh."

"A er that, when I was all alone, she did the same thing to me that she just did to you." Her brow's fell and darkened her entire face. "Well, it was a bit di erent. I caught two of her minions in the middle of stealing my clothes and gave them a good pummeling."

"Did they leave you alone a er that?" I asked.

She shrugged. "They did. Literally nobody else wanted to get remotely close to the girl who beat up the popular queens."

I hugged myself. "What should I do? Resort to violence, too?"

Addy scratched her head and looked down at me, pensive. "Probably. But hey, at least you got me and I got your back."

She walked behind me like a bodyguard once we finally made our way down for breakfast. Neither of us had any makeup to hide how haggard my eyes looked a er I'd cried like a baby. If I thought yesterday had sucked, today was much worse and it was only getting started.

A few people looked our way as we made it to our table. Shit started to get weird when it seemed like every person who filed into the cafeteria looked at us. At me, to be precise.

"It feels like everybody knows," I muttered to Addy.

She couldn't even deny it for the sake of my comfort, because even she was startled by all the attention.

In a plot twist that none of us saw coming, Lincoln plopped his tray on our table, pulled up a chair and sat. He showed us one of those anonymous apps where messages can only be seen if you're close enough to the OP and read a message.

"Senior scholarship student V was seen streaking naked across the hall this morning. A bet gone wrong or ghetto customs?"

I drew in a sharp breath. It felt like I was being stabbed by every eye on me.

"Ohh," Addy said under her breath. "She is so dead."

Lincoln put his phone away. "At least there are no pictures."

My grip on the table turned into a vice. "What are you doing here?"

He shrugged. "You need numbers behind you. Besides, we'll be bandmates soon."

"I'm sorry, but did someone bludgeon you over the head this morning?"

"That'd be me," a new but familiar voice said. Ashton put his tray next to mine and joined our table. He li ed his palms up as I glared. "Look, I know you're still mad at me but you need all the help you can get right now."

I folded my arms. He was right, but he was an idiot if he didn't realize that he was trying to be the cure to the sickness he caused.

"This is all your fault, the last thing I need is for you to be close to me and stoke her fire."

"Her fire?" Ashton's eyebrows went up as he opened his bottle of orange juice. "So you know who it is?"

Addy rolled her eyes. "Duh, your ex. Who else could it possibly be?"

He rubbed his chin. "Madison wouldn't do something like this. She's not an idiot."

"Oh, really?" my friend asked him, narrowing her eyes in what looked like a threat. "Because she did the same to me in freshman year, or did you conveniently forget?"

His eyes darkened in return. "No, I didn't forget. But that wasn't Madison."

"Look, defending your ex right now is not making you seem like a good guy at all," Lincoln said, to my surprise voicing my own thoughts.

Ashton took a chug of his juice and then sighed. "It was Belle and Natasha, right?" Addy's body sti ened and he nodded. "They were the ones who pranked you. They got suspended for a week."

"So what?" Addy asked, pointing at him with her fork and then looking back at the table full of queen bees. "They acted on orders."

Pretty boy leaned back on his chair and also looked out at the table where his ex sat. He nodded to himself, as if coming to a decision.

"You know what? You may be right. I might have been blind to the real Madison for years." His lips took a mean turn. "I mean, clearly she's not as nice as she seems."

He stood up suddenly, making all of us jump in our skins.

In dawning realization I saw him march over to their table. I got on my feet and caught up to him.

"Ashton Winters, what are you doing?"

He didn't look at me but said, "Standing up for ourselves."

I grabbed his arm and tried to hold him back. "Stop, you're only going to bring me more trouble."

But he was stronger and what ended up happening was that he dragged me all the way to their table.

"Madison, we need to talk."

All the queen bees turned to us and I had the certainty that I was screwed.

SONG OF THE DAY: Fallout Boy - Sugar, We're Going Down