

Song 22

Song 22 ♪ Everyday Is Not Exactly The Same

The venue was in some obscure street off of OBT. The area was packed with cars and we ended up parking a couple of blocks away in the back of a strip club. I had a hard time wrapping my head around how things had escalated to this level, but at that point I just thought the entire thing was hilarious and a by-product of hanging out with the Winters brothers.

The younger twin walked up to the bouncer with a spring on his step. I didn't think he meant to go in, especially when considering the fact that he was not interested in any female parts, so I looked at Ashton for some sort of intel. He shrugged.

"Hey there, sexy," Ayrton said with the confidence of someone who, for some reason, doesn't think he might just get beat up. The bouncer, a huge bald man with bulging arms, looked down at the pretty boy.

"ID," the man said.

Ayrton waved that away. "I'm not going in. I just wanted to know if it's okay to leave our cars parked out back here."

The man folded his arms and his muscles bunched. "No. Parking's only for customers."

Undeterred, the boy picked up his wallet and produced a green bill. I couldn't see the denomination from where I stood, but I did see the way the bouncer's eyes bulged instead. He looked around and snatched the bill.

"Have a good day," he said.

Ayrton turned to us with a grin. "Let's go, friends."

Leti linked her arm with mine. "Rich people are something else."

I snorted. She had only the gist of it.

As we approached the place, I started to see more and more people parade in the same direction. They all looked like they belonged to a music video.

"Fascinating," Addy said, eyeing them. "You'd think that only wearing black would get boring, but look at all the creativity around us."

I tried not to stare, but it was hard not to when the guy in front of you had a spiky mohawk that seemed to reach the sky. I wondered how he got his hair so stiff and pointy or if someone helped him. A silver claw jumped out of his left ear's tunnel and his other ear was pierced by bobby pins. Jesucristo.

Just on the side was a girl wearing what looked like a wedding dress all in black. Her hair was adorned by red roses and her arms and chest by tattoos. She held hands with another girl who wore cargo pants and a t-shirt with a logo I assumed belonged to a band. I looked at my group, all in jeans and t-shirts with bands, except for Leti and I who just settled for nondescript clothes from Target, and DeAndre who wore an Orlando Magic t-shirt.

My lips twitched and I told Addy, "Meanwhile look at us, we're like the casual Friday funeral gang."

She snapped her fingers. "That'd be a great name for your band. Guys, what do you think?"

Ashton and Lincoln joined us from behind and I felt an arm drape around my shoulders. I startled and looked up at Ashton's profile. He grinned down at me.

I heard Leti loudly say get it girl but it was hard to react to anything other than his blue eyes so close to mine and his lips curved up in mirth. Lips I knew the taste of.

"What was that?" he asked. His deep voice embraced me and sent my nerves tingling, and I had to do a superhuman effort to extricate myself from his trance.

I took a deep breath and looked away, and still my lungs filled in with his cologne. I stepped out of his hold and smacked him, hoping it all looked friendly and not like I'd just been about to snatch him away into an empty alley and tear into his clothes.

"Nothing," I said. My voice was up a few notes. "I just said we look like we're going to a casual Friday funeral."

He turned around to look at Link. I tried to seek refuge in my closest girl friend, but Addy surprised me by joining the boys in talking about how that could be turned into a brand. I made eye contact with Leti but what I saw in her eyes terrified me. She was on the verge of teasing me until kingdom come. The last safe refuge was DeAndre, so I snuck up to him.

"I feel kinda sorry that Leti forced you into this."

"Don't sweat it, chica. It definitely makes for a different Saturday." He smiled and lit up his entire face. I finally saw the venue in sight, its front wallpapered in posters and crammed with people. DeAndre cleared his throat and I looked back at him. "So, um. You and the white boy?"

"No way." I shook my head so much my head spun. It was definitely about that, and not at all about the question.

"For real? That looked a tad possessive to me." He jerked his thumb backward, to where I'd been standing with them before.

"We're just friends, kinda."

"Kinda," he repeated, raising his eyebrows.

"Okay, guys." Link called to everybody's attention. Once he had it he asked, "Who's paying for the tickets?"

I'd never seen twins in action until then. In unison, Ashton and Ayrton chirped, "You are."

I just laughed as realization dawned on Link that he shouldn't even have asked the question. He grumbled what I was sure had to be curses in Korean, but still marched over to the ticket booth and got in line. He ended up paying for all seven of our tickets. I was going to be nice and buy him a drink when we got inside, but at seeing the prices for a single soda I decided he'd made his bed and had to lie in it.

The place was half full and we found a spot halfway to the stage but the gig hadn't started yet. The stage was ready with a drum set and a few other instruments, but they were blaring some weird rock music with electronic sounds in between. It was loud enough that we couldn't hear each other scream, which I figured was how the concert would be. It wasn't dim enough yet, so I pulled up my ticket to see which bands were playing. I didn't know a single one, of course, but I counted six of them. I hoped the whole thing was done and I was home before ma arrived.

As more people came in we were squeezed closer to the front. An older guy with long, gray hair walked into the stage and picked up the microphone.

"Welcome everybody to this year's battle of the tributes!" The crowd roared and my body grew paralyzed.

Real talk, I'd never been in a concert before. Not one like this. I'd seen my ma on shows when I was a toddler. I remembered the cheers and the people singing along, but it hadn't been like this. Pure euphoria from a mass of people who loved one thing in common, in sound form. I felt like the only unfamiliar thing drowning in the feeling.

"Let's welcome our first band on stage," the man continued. "They are called Nevermind Nirvana, straight up from Mobile, Alabama. Let's hear it for them!"

People clapped and whistled as the band took to the stage. They were three guys who looked like they'd been plucked from a Trader Joe's or something, not on par with the audience. But once they started playing they made the whole place vibrate.

In their enthusiasm, people crushed us forward. I yelped as I felt a hand against my butt and was going to turn and glare when someone pulled me by the arm. My alarm ebbed away when I saw that it was just Ashton, pulling me away from whomever. He tucked me against him, my back to his chest, and said something into my ear.

I wasn't sure what it was, because it was pretty damn loud, but I could've sworn he said he'd keep me safe.

After that I couldn't concentrate on the music the band was playing. It seemed like my body was too busy producing music of its own. I stood stiff and uncomfortable even as everybody around me seemed to bounce, but I didn't move away. Not because there was nowhere to go. But because I didn't want to. I thought of Quinn telling me he was sure his former friend had a thing for me, and of DeAndre earlier, casting doubt on whether we were just friends.

But something was certain to me. There was no way a boy like Ashton liked me. There was no way he, with his arms around me, couldn't feel the muscle in top around my waist that no diet could get rid of and still find me attractive.

There was no way.

A sharp elbow in my ribs made me look up and catch Leti winking at me.

I turned away to face the band on stage. The guitarist jumped so high that he was probably a gymnast. And the crowd exploded in excitement. Ashton let me go and hollered.

I shook my head to myself. Leti, DeAndre and Quinn were all wrong.

SONG OF THE DAY: Nine Inch Nails - Every Day Is Exactly The Same