

Song 25

Song 25 ♪ I Can Get No (Self Satisfaction)

Ma thought she was punishing me by taking me back to school just before curfew on Sunday night, and I did a pretty good job at pretending to be surly, but she did me a favor instead. She parked the car by the entrance and I jumped out to gather my bags. I looked up at the looming building with a sense that it was enclosing on me and for the first time I had the impression like it was what I wanted to escape, instead of ma.

All because of a stupid boy.

When she rolled down the window and told me to behave and stay away from those kids, I even agreed with her whole heartedly.

I waited until her car disappeared down the street to face the front door. If I stumbled upon somebody on my way upstairs, and by somebody I had a very specific person in mind, I would pray for spontaneous combustion to get me out of any possible conversation. I was really irritated that from the beginning of my time at Trinity, a rich, white boy was shaping my life around him. First, it was ma and now this. When was I going to become the owner of my own fate?

I squared my shoulders and pushed the door open. A partial answer was that if I kept running away from the things I didn't want to face, I was sure to keep allowing everybody else to push me around. Like water in a river, just taken by gravity and smacking rocks around.

I wanted to be the gravity.

There were a few younger kids lounging around the stairs as I made my way to the girls room 43. The door was unlocked and I figured that Addy was inside. I found her sprawled on the floor cutting fabric of a vibrant orange color, listening to some chill music. She looked up at me.

"Hey."

My brow creased. There was a tad of tension in her voice. I scrambled my brains trying to think of what I might have done to upset her, but came up short. I dumped my backpack on my bed and pushed my suitcase under my bed. Then I sat down to see what she was doing.

There were lines drawn all across the fabric into what I assumed was the pattern, but I couldn't make out what it was supposed to be.

"Is it a sweater?" I guessed.

"A jacket, actually." She pulled away and set the scissors down for a moment, looking at her work like it had been a while since she looked at the whole instead of the detail. "Persimmon is my favorite color and I kind of want to make me a persimmon power suit. With buttons of different colors."

I could see her in it, tall and powerful and taking no sass from anybody. "Sounds awesome, actually."

When the praise didn't soften her expression, I knew something was up. I folded my hands on my lap and took a deep breath.

"Okay, what's going on?"

She folded her arms and leveled me a stare.

"Frankly, I'm a little wounded," she said.

I looked down at my hands, fretting with the hem of my t-shirt. "What did I do?"

There was a break of silence before she sighed. "I guess it's not big deal and I'm just being a prick. But why didn't you tell me?"

My head was still spinning with confusion. "Tell you what?"

Addy shrugged. "About your family, your background."

I had an epiphany at that second, as my body reacted to how freaked out I was when understanding dawned on me. I broke into a sweat as if I were a mall fountain being turned on. It was why I couldn't stand being in the spotlight. I couldn't help but to disappoint. If I told everybody here where I came from, they'd turn their backs on me. Now that they'd found out, they probably thought I was beneath them and a liar.

"Did you think I was going to judge?" she continued. "Because, I get it, this school is full of snobs who think they're all that, but I didn't think you felt like I was one of them."

"No!" I jumped out of the bed and fell to my knees next to her. "No, I don't think you're a snob. I just... I didn't want you to think less of me."

Addy tilted her head and a curtain of strawberry blonde hair fell over her shoulder. "Why would I?"

I closed my mouth. Lowered my hands. Then I gave it a solid thought. Her honest, earnest eyes had only the hurt at possibly being found judgmental. There was no disgust, no apprehension in them. I felt even worse, because that meant I had assumed she wouldn't be able to handle my reality without even giving her a choice in the matter. I almost smacked my forehead when I thought of the twins. I'd also judged Ashton when I thought he was his brother, but once he found out the truth he hadn't given a single flying shit about it. Ayrtion had even mentioned he preferred my neighborhood, and hadn't even seemed delusional about it.

I drew in a deep breath and filled my lungs to capacity.

So, rich people were capable of being open minded. Some, more so than poor little old me.

"Right. I see." I pursed my lips and looked her dead in the eye. "I'm sorry. I subconsciously was protecting myself from getting judged, but I guess I kinda judged you back that way."

To my surprise, her face broke into a smile. "I have a friend who is just like you, in a way. I mean, you're not the pretentious little ass that he is, but he's also like, deathly afraid for people to know his parents came from a south american country to clean houses and then married rich."

"Wow." I leaned back against my bed and decided that I trusted Addy. If I could open myself up to her I had a feeling she could be as good a friend to me as Leti, but with a lot less hot headedness. "Well, my ma's plan wasn't to come from Venezuela to be a cleaning lady."

She started. "From where?"

"Venezuela."

"Holy shit, I have to introduce you to my friend. His parents are from there."

My jaw dropped. It dropped even more when she showed me a picture and. Hot. Damn.

"Is he single?" I asked.

Addy put her hand on my shoulder and shook her head, waves of pity radiating off her. "I'm sorry. He's probably taken by ten different girls right now. He's what is commonly described as a Latin Lover."

I gagged. I'd seen my fair share of those in the barrio, and thanks partly to me being, well, me, and having Leti as a friend, they kept the hell away. An undisguised blessing.

"On second thought, maybe don't introduce him to me," I said, which made her laugh. "But then, I guess I can't blame him. If my ma had married rich I might have become worse than Madison and my friends. Instead she got pregnant young and didn't succeed in showbiz like she wanted."

This perked her interest, so I told her the whole, sad story. Addy pulled out some snacks from under her bed and we shared them as we talked. She was an only child from soon to be divorced parents who thought that giving her anything she wanted was the same as showering her with love. I told her that parents, no matter their social status, seemed to all be dumb.

"So, wait," she said as she chewed on some Skittles. "Does your mom know you're joining a band?"

I rolled my eyes. "Oh my God, I'm not joining any stupid bands."

"So you say, because you haven't seen yourself singing with Ashton to know how you came alive." She grabbed her cellphone again.

"Lucky for you, I recorded you guys."

I made a grab for her phone but she held it out of my reach with her superior arm length advantage. "Give me that. Delete that video!"

"Hell to the no, you guys have more chemistry than all the crap in the AP Chemistry lab." She used the pause made by the stunned silence to press play on the video and showed it to me. I cringed as I saw myself on screen. Wide, awkward and drowning under an explosion of curls atop my head. And then there was Ashton. Confident, gorgeous Ashton.

But then we started singing.

It was like seeing two different people on stage. He became this intense, commanding feature. He attracted my eyes and for a moment I didn't see anything else. But then mini me opened her mouth on the screen and this gigantic voice came out. Even with the poor quality recording and all the background noise coming from the table where Addy had been sitting, I heard this stranger's amazing voice and I felt it in my bones.

"Who the hell is that?" I asked, stupefied.

"That's you, idiot." She zoomed in on me. At a particularly dramatic line in the song I saw my entire body expand, as if it wanted to be larger than it was. As if it wanted to compete with my voice and it didn't care who was watching. For a second, it seemed, like I hadn't cared who was watching.

I always cared. I was always conscious of what people would think about me. But at that second, on the small stage of a random karaoke bar in the shadiest parts of Orlando, I hadn't given a damn and had just sang.

I sat back on my haunches, realizing the enormity of what I just saw. I looked back at my friend. Her face was full of excitement. As though she'd just seen a celebrity.

"This is crazy, that can't be me."

Addy ignored me and tossed her phone away. "Okay so I'm not a graphic designer but I'm thinking of some ideas for a band logo."

"What?"

"And also, I think the aesthetic of you guys on stage is going to be crucial," she continued, not noticing that I was having a mental breakdown right there and then. "But I guess you'll all need to decide first what kind of vibe your music will go for, and then let me know and I'll whip up some cool outfits."

I raised my palms up and shook them as though I was trying to conjure a wall out of thin air. "Addy, stop. Wait, you're talking as if this were a fact. I haven't joined a freaking band! I don't even know how I'm going to face Ashton tomorrow."

That stopped her for a second. "What do you mean?"

I scratched my elbow and looked away. "I, uh. Well, yesterday was kind of... And he said--"

"That he likes you. In front of everybody, I know." Her grin showed all of her pearly whites. "We all gave him a lot of crap about it the entire ride back a er that."

I put my face in my hands. She pried one of my hands away so she could make eye contact.

"Just tell him if you don't like him and that's that."

"I don't not like him."

I gasped at my admission. I broke into a sweat again, especially as she also gasped.

"No wonder seeing you both sing together felt like watching something intimate." She winced as I smacked her, hard. "Okay but he likes you and you like him. What's the big deal?"

"My honest thoughts?" I asked her and she nodded. A sigh that robbed me of my energy left my lungs. "I think... he just really likes my singing. That's it. He doesn't even know me much."

Addy shrugged. "It's only been shy of two months since we started school. Neither do you. But by that logic, why do you like him?"

I groaned and raised my knees to hug them, trying to become a little ball. With a small voice I admitted, "He's cool and hot. And I don't like like him, it's just a little crush. Meanwhile I'm awkward and ugly. He's confused when he says he likes me. It's just my voice. Ashton Winters can't possibly even have a crush on me."

"Ugh!" Addy threw her arms back and sagged against her bed, her patterns forgotten on the floor between us. Her eyebrows crashed as she looked into my eyes. "Listen to me, all of that makes a lot of sense. Except for the part where you're convinced you're ugly. But in matters of the heart, there's no logic. You should chuck all that out the window and just have fun."

I pursed my lips. "Yeah well, trust me. I'd have a lot more fun if I didn't have to deal with Ashton Winters."

Of that I was completely sure.

SONG OF THE DAY: Rolling Stones - I Can Get No (Satisfaction)