

# Cori

I was lying in bed looking at the ceiling. “Get up,” I told myself. I didn’t move. My alarm was beeping and getting progressively louder the longer I chose to ignore it. Finally I rolled over and slammed the “off” button. I could hear my dad yelling something to my younger sister and me about breakfast. I put on my favorite pair of black skinny jeans and pulled an old AC/DC t-shirt over my black and red ear-length hair. “Take your breakfast in the car. You’re not going to be late to school *again*,” my dad said when I walked into the kitchen.

“Dad, I don’t *want* to go to school today,” my little sister whined while giving him puppy dog eyes.

“No, I’m sorry Tanya, you two are going to school today,” my dad said, very clearly closing the door to further discussion on the topic.

We packed into our tiny VW bug and headed off for school. As we rolled up, many little sixth and seventh graders called out Tanya’s name. No one said my name. I walked around the side of the school to the courtyard. Eric and I always met there before school. If, that is, we both get to school on time. It’s happened, but it’s rare. “Hey Eric!” I yelled, as I saw the back of his blue and black streaked hair.

“Hey Cori!” he yelled back in the exact same voice, probably mocking me, but he was grinning. We hadn’t seen each other in about a week and a half. It was the first day back from winter break.

Eric and I are best friends, I guess, but we’re not exactly the type to call each other everyday and squeal about going to the mall. We mostly just see each other when we see each other.

We’re not exactly freaks, but people outside of our small friend group usually stay away. Our group is pretty much just a bunch of loners that happened to find each other. We don’t talk much. We mostly listen to punk-rock music and write.

Yes, even “those weird punk kids” write. It’s kind of strange, I guess, that all my friends love to write as much as I do. We all sit in the courtyard behind the school and share our writing and write more and add on to each other’s stories or poems. I’m the

only one that writes songs though. I have a pretty good voice, but no one would ever know besides Eric because I can't sing in front of people.

Eric and I walked into the school when the bell rang. Well, actually about five minutes after the bell rang, but who's going to notice?

"That is really the most annoying thing our school organizes," Eric said, as we walked past the sign for the talent show in two days. I rolled my eyes.

"Absolutely painful," I said, completely agreeing with him.

"I mean, it's just a bunch of annoying prep cheerleaders that aren't that talented singing and dancing with their annoying little voices and their annoying little songs," Eric said. I smiled, finding his rant entirely on target and very entertaining. "Maybe you should sign up for it," he said, laughing and obviously kidding, as we walked to first period. "You have a pretty good voice."

"You're joking right? Me? In front of all those people?" I said.

"Of course I'm joking, you would never sign up for something like that," he said, turning right into his first period class. Mine was on the other side of the hall.

As I walked in, the teacher gave me a tardy slip (at this point I was at least ten minutes late). I walked to the back of the class, where I could get a good view of the people this semester. A ton of preps. Great. That's what me and my friends call those popular girls that wear pink and sparkles everyday and always match and always have the answer. I, personally, think they look like freakish Barbies, but all the boys seem to love it.

The preppiest of all the preps, Ashley, raises her hand even before class has started. "I would like everyone to know that the annual talent show will be held in the auditorium in two days," she said; her nasally voice beginning to give me a migraine. She would sign up for the talent show. She would pick some awful pop song and somehow find a way to make it even worse.

One thing that talent show was in desperate need of, was talent. I could go and sing, I thought to myself, laughing a little. Like I would ever sing in *public*. Let alone in front of a real live audience. Anyway, the talent show was stupid. I wouldn't sign up even if I liked to sing in front of audiences.

Eric and I were sitting in the cafeteria, quietly eating our sandwiches. We didn't talk much. Usually we didn't need to. Today, Allison, one of my other friends, was explaining how she got her nose pierced. She talked enough for Eric and I put together. At least when the topic had to do with piercings. She had six of them and each had their own story.

Ashley and her preps walked past our table. "Ugh," Eric and I said simultaneously.

"What?-Oh," Allison said when she noticed them walking by.

"Well look who it is," Ashley's headache-inducing voice rang out.

"Oh god," Eric said. I rolled my eyes. We were sitting at "their table," and we knew it. The sole purpose of us sitting there was to piss them off.

"You have to move, this is our table, remember?" Ashley said. Her forehead crinkling the way it always did when she was about to get mad.

"I know," I said, grinning.

"Well then why are you here?" she was getting really annoyed now. This was hilarious. Eric was now openly laughing. I could practically see the steam rising out of her ears. I decided not to say anything. If she wanted us to move, she and all her toothpick sized Barbies would have to make us.

I walked into 5th period class to see about 10 preps freaking out. Half the girls were crying. Usually I would have ignored them, assuming they were just over-reacting about something stupid. Like one of them having to take PE for the first time since 4<sup>th</sup> grade. But I didn't ignore them because Michael Caldwell was looking worried. I halfway had respect for the kid. He was smart. Really smart. And managed not to get tormented on a daily basis because of it. I went to go check out what was going on.

"OMG! Ashley is actually in the hospital?!"

"IKR! Do you think she's going to be okay?"

"Does anyone know what happened?"

"She just...passed out. On the floor," Ashley's best friend Brynne said quietly. Everyone got quiet. "The doctors think it's from not eating." This was met with more sobs and cries of "I told her she should've eaten something!" Well, I'd had enough of that. I started walking to my seat in the back when I heard something that caught my

attention. One of the guys asked what was going to happen with the talent (less) show. She was the grand finale after all.

Finally, it was 7th period. My last and favorite class: Art. It was also the only class I had with Eric. We were sitting next to each other when I decided to tell him my idea.

“So, Eric, you know Ashley?” I said, taking my collage off the shelf and beginning to work.

“Yeah of course, why?”

“Well, she’s in the hospital. She won’t likely recover for another two weeks. The talent show is in two days. She won’t be able to be there.”

“Were you thinking about, signing up? Taking her place in the finale? Cori, it took you over a year to get up the courage to sing in front of me. Do you really think you could do that?” Eric said, getting a chunk of clay for sculpting.

“Well, I don’t know. But I think I want to,” I said, shrugging.

“Don’t get me wrong. I think you’d be great. I think you could really put some talent into that...I don’t feel right calling it a talent show. So I’ll just call it the talent/ess show,” he said grinning mostly to himself.

“Do you think I should do it?” I asked.

“Yes.” He turned toward me. “After some...training.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I said, looking at him inquiringly.

“You’ll find out,” he winked.

After school, Eric walked downtown with me to begin my “training”. We were walking past our favorite store, Acme, when Eric stopped a random pedestrian and asked them to listen to his friend (me) with an amazing voice. “She’ll be singing a lovely song of hers that she wrote about a month ago.”

“Well alright, will this be quick? I’m kind of in a hurry,” she said, but smiled as though she really was looking forward to hearing me sing.

I felt my heart thud in my chest. My breath caught. What had he just said? That I was going to sing for this woman? I couldn’t sing for real people. Especially people I had never met. “Eric, I don’t think I can do this,” I whispered.

“Cori, yes you can. They’re total strangers. You’ll never see them again.” I thought for a minute. I really did want to be in the talent show. I knew Eric was right. Before I could think for another second, I opened my mouth and began to sing.

After I had finished, I knew the woman had enjoyed it.

“You have got some real talent, young lady. I can’t wait to see you on television someday.” Wow, I thought. I didn’t know I was that good! But I decided not to get my hopes up too quickly, unless other people didn’t like it as much.

Eric went from stranger to stranger, and I sang for every single one of them. I was met with the same response every time. People really liked me! But the second to last person I sang my song for felt differently.

“I think you need to go and find something productive to do instead of fooling around with unrealistic things like this,” the woman said, puckering up her lips and sounding just like my mother.

“Oh, do I? Because I’m actually enjoying myself,” I said getting a little defensive.

“Yes, you do. Singing isn’t going to get you anywhere you silly little girl.”

“No no,” I shot back, “you are not allowed to criticize me for doing this. For getting up all my courage and singing for complete strangers. Something that has always terrified me. At least *I’m* doing something I enjoy. What are you doing with your life? You’re probably one of those people that sits behind her desk all day telling people that following their dreams is stupid because you never could. Sorry, but I’m not going to take this from you,” I said.

Well that shut her up real quick. “S-sorry,” she stuttered. Eric gave me a high-five, I turned on my heel and we walked away.

I was definitely signing up for that talent show.

The next day, there was a sign-up sheet outside my first period class (the one with all the preps) for auditioning for the finale in Ashley’s place. I signed my name on the fifth line after four other people. All girls. All preps. Go figure.

The day was completely normal until third period. I was sitting with my friend Rae when she said something about Ashley. I was completely zoning out, like I always do in math, so I responded with “What?”

“I just heard that Ashley wasn’t going to be able to be in the talent show and I was wondering who would take her place in the finale,” Rae said as though it were obvious.

“Oh, well I signed up this morning actually. I think I’m going to audition,” I said, bracing myself for her response. She wasn’t a huge fan of the talent show.

“What? You are? I thought you agreed with all of us on how stupid it is. I can’t believe you actually signed up!” she said, laughing in that ‘I’m allowed to tease you ‘cause we’re friends’ way. I smiled back.

“Hell yeah I signed up!” I said, laughing with her. “And I am going to kick some serious ass!”

“Well, I guess I’ll go because I like you and all,” she said, doing her best Eeyore impression, facial expression included.

“I’ll see you there.”

At lunch, I was sitting with Eric when our friend Dylan walked over. “Hey Cori, I heard that you’re signing up for that talent show in Ashley’s place! Come on! I can’t believe you! That’s ridiculous!” he said.

“Yeah, I am, got a problem?” I said, realizing immediately that this was going to be a showdown.

He looked at me in disbelief. “You? No way. Not you. I can’t believe you of all people are turning into one of those annoying little Barbies. It’s sick. That’s what it is. Absolutely disgusting.”

“Well it’s not like I’m asking you to do it. You don’t like it? Don’t come. Simple as that,” I said, glaring at him.

“I wasn’t planning on it,” he retorted.

“Oh darn. I’m really going to miss you there ‘cause I don’t think I’m going to be getting enough crap from everyone else about this already. I could really use yours. Thanks, but no thanks,” I said incredibly sarcastically.

“Fine. Whatever. You’re insane,” he said, clearly defeated.

After school that day I went into the auditorium to audition for the finale. I wasn’t particularly excited about this, but I really wanted to be in the talent show, so I went

anyway. I decided not to sing one of my own songs, because I wanted to save that for the real talent show. I chose “One Love” by Bob Marley. One of my all-time favorites.

“Hi, I’m Cori and I’m going to sing “One Love” by Bob Marley,” I announced.

“Is that song like, even on the radio?” said Brynne, who had taken Ashley’s place as head prep and naturally, was one of judges.

“No, it’s not. It’s one of the best songs ever written. Not to mention the best song you’ve ever heard by far I can almost guarantee it.”

“Okay whatever don’t waste my time, just sing,” Brynne said, clearly thinking I was going to be awful.

“Well here goes,” I said, starting to sing.

When I had finished, eyes were huge and jaws were dropped. I was satisfied with the reaction. I had nailed that song and I knew it. “That was, like, okay, I guess,” Brynne’s voice shot through my force field of confidence. I was crushed. Okay? I thought it was at least better than okay. Then, to my surprise, one of the preps trying out (one that was particularly awful) stood up.

“I think she was the best. It’s like what I always say. Just because you don’t agree on the same lip-gloss doesn’t mean you can’t be friends. Just because you don’t like Cori, doesn’t mean she isn’t a good singer,” she stated matter-of-factly.

“I agree,” said another prep.

“Yeah, like, I do too?” said another, her voice going up at the end making it sound like a question.

“Me too,” said yet another. Then the other judge Macy, decided she agreed too. Brynne was defeated.

“Congratulations, you did it. You’re in the finale,” said Macy.

“Yes! Thank you! Thank you so, so much!” I replied excitedly.

“But you know the dress code don’t you?” Macy said as I started to walk away.

“What dress code?”

“Well, you’re going to have to dye your hair back to brown, wear a dress, preferably pink but solid red is acceptable, high heels, and lots and lots of accessories,” Brynne said slyly, knowing I wouldn’t agree.

“No,” I said, annoyed that they would even suggest this.

“You have to,” said Brynne. “Otherwise you can’t be in the talent show.”

“No. Sorry Brynne, but I’m not going to dress like some stupid Barbie just because that’s the “dress code”. I’m going to wear my ripped jeans, a band t-shirt and my black converse. And you, Brynne, are going to thank me for it because I’m finally putting some talent into this “talent show.” Clear?” I said angrily. I had gone through enough. This was too far. “It’s not like you’re going to be able to find anyone else. The talent show is tonight and to be honest I’m your only hope.”

“You have to wear a dress!” Brynne screeched.

“Oh my god Brynne, it’s not that big of a deal. She’s good. Let her ignore the dress code. People will just think it’s part of the finale,” said Macy, clearly a little annoyed.

“Okay fine, but I still don’t think she should even be in the show,” said Brynne.

“Well you’re out voted,” I replied with a smile.

“Thank you Cori,” said Macy. “I’ll see you at the talent show tonight.” I thanked her and left, overwhelmed with nervousness and gratitude. The first thing I did was call Eric and Rae. They were both happy for me and said they would see me tonight.

Finally, I was there. At the talent show awaiting the finale where I would take center stage to sing my very own song all alone in front an audience of 100 people at least. I was nervous, I guess. But just a little. Mostly I was excited. Excited for everyone to finally hear my talent and to see Brynne’s face when I walked on stage in all black.

I stepped backstage. I was up in two minutes. I was going over the lyrics in my head when I heard the announcer say my name and song title. I stepped on stage. I could feel my palms sweating. They were sweating so much that I would have to hold the microphone with two hands so it wouldn’t slip. I heard the introduction music begin to play. I closed my eyes, and prepared to sing.