

Flames Ignite

I've been packing for nearly an hour when suddenly, I hear my mom yell, "Honey, a letter just came for you! I think it's about that new tour! Come downstairs!" She screams. I smile.

My name is Aqua Vior. I am 18, turning 19 in September. It's my last summer at home before I go to my dream college of Princeton University, and I'm spending every moment I can with my mother. I never knew my dad, but I do know that he left me and my mother when I was about 3 or 4.

I yell back that I'll be down in a minute. I hope that the letter my mom holds in the palm of her hand is a recruitment letter to be a part of the famous boy band, Flames Ignite. The backup singer, Bobby Drowner, dropped out after some big argument with the lead singer, Jay Austine. The reason for the argument is unknown to the public, but all I really care about is the fact that they're in the market for a new backup singer, boy or girl.

I was always told by people that I had a beautiful singing voice, but I never really believed them. My mom said I should send in an audition tape anyway, and I must say, I sounded amazing! I wasn't sure if I really wanted to even be in a band, since I didn't want to be distracted from school, but I found that the band only tours during the summer, because the boys start college in the fall.

I rush downstairs and whisk the letter from my moms' hands. She squeezes my arm, and I shakily open the envelope.

Dear Miss Aqua Vior,

Thank you for sending in your audition tapes. The band had a blast watching your audition tape. After careful consideration, they've decided to make you our new backup singer! A list is enclosed of everything you will need on tour. Thank you so much for participating, and we will email you your flight and hotel accommodations.

Signed,

Tour Director/Manager, Sage Aston

I scream so loud, I'm pretty sure my neighbors could hear me from three miles away.

My mom jumps up and down. “Did you get the spot? Are you the new backup singer?”
I smile and scream some more in response.

A car waits for me on the tarmac and I am driven to the recording studio of Flames Ignite three days later. Waiting for me is the band and the manager.

“Welcome, Miss Vior, did you enjoy your flight?” Sage Aston asks. I nod yes and run to meet the members. “Hello, my name is Aqua Vior. I’m not quite sure what to say right now, but I will try my best to not let you down!” I say. A tall and lean boy steps forward. He has shaggy hair cut to one side and dyed white and black. He extends his hand. “My name’s Bradie. I’m the guitarist of the group.” I shake his hand, and he walks away without further explanation.

I shrug, then turn to the next boy. He’s the average, typical boy band singer. He has perfectly slicked hair, perfect boy band clothes, and the attitude he displays fits his outside appearance.

Rich and spoiled.

“My name is Jay Austine, and I am the only person that actually counts in this band. You’re pretty and everything, but you barely make the cut for the band, and-” Sage puts her hand up. “Jay, that’s enough. Why don’t you introduce yourself, Aiden?” Aiden smiles. He has dark brown hair and big hazel colored eyes and speaks with a slight stutter.

He shakes my hand vigorously. “Hi! My name is A-Aiden, and I’m the drummer for the band. I-I’m a terrible singer, which is why I usually stick to the drums. Hopefully, we can be good fr-friends.” I smile and say, “I know we can be great friends. In fact, I hope we can all be great friends, and I will try my best to not be too annoying.” Jay snorts. “Too late for that. You became annoying ten minutes ago.” Bradie smacks his arm. “Hey, we talked about this. Stop being so rude!” I sniffle as I try my absolute hardest to not cry at his harsh words. Aiden and Bradie both guide me to my dressing room. “Don’t worry about him. He’s rude to everyone he meets, so it’s nothing to get upset over,” Aiden assures me. I weakly smile and hope he’s right.

I’m busy unpacking, when I hear a thump. Then another, and another until it sounds like a marching band playing right outside my door. I peek out of my window, and I’m stunned.

Hundreds of people are outside, so many I can barely open my door. I spot our manager amid the crowd as she pushes through the throngs of people and squeezes through my door. She straightens her jacket and says, “I’m so sorry. I forgot to tell you that every Wednesday, we have fans who come for autograph signings. If you don’t feel up to it, then-” I wave her away. “Don’t

worry, Ill be fine. I'm really excited!" Sage smiles, then opens the door as wide as she can. As I step out, the crowd in front of my dressing room erupts into cheers.

By the time the sun goes down, I've given nearly 133 autographs, and taken about 60 selfies. As the last squealing girl leaves, the boys go their separate ways, and I go into my dressing room. A few minutes later, I get the strange feeling that someone's staring at me. I shrug the feeling off and look at the tour itinerary and map. For the first week of the tour, the band will be in Colorado for signings and pictures, then we'll go to Kansas, Aiden's home town, for his sister's birthday party, then Atlanta for a music festival, and Universal Studios in Florida. Our last leg of the tour includes eight big shows in New York, Montana, California, Washington, Georgia, Arizona, Minnesota, and the final one in Michigan.

I close the map.

I feel certain that someone is staring at me and it's not a pleasant feeling. I check my front door but see no one. I look out my back door, but don't see anyone there, either. It's only when I walk past my window that I hear someone taking a sharp breath. I fling the window open, and look to the left and the right, but I don't see a single soul. I slowly start to close the window in hopes of catching the suspect red handed. I listen intently, and I finally hear a breath being let out. I open my window again, and this time, I'm greeted by the face of none other than Jay, the self-absorbed lead singer of Flames Ignite. "Unless you want me to call the manager to tell her you're being a creepy wierdo, you better have a good reason for hiding under my window." I say, clearly agitated. He fake gasps. "What? Why would you say that? I was simply coming over to apologize for how I acted earlier." He says, then smirks, as if he's thought up the best lie ever. I cross my arms. "Oh really? If that's all you wanted to do, then why didn't you just come up to my doorway, and knock? You know, like a normal person?" I say. He laughs as if that was the funniest thing anyone's ever said. Then he just stands there. "Well, I have a good reason. Um... I was-" I shush him. "Please, don't strain yourself trying to think of something. Now, if you will excuse me, I'm going to go ignore you somewhere else." I shut the window and lean against it. After a few minutes of silence, I hear footsteps growing fainter, and breathe a sigh of relief.

After two hours of silence, I pull on my jacket and go outside for some fresh air, walking along a long path between everyone's dressing rooms. Jay's dressing room is across from me and

next to Aiden's, while I'm next to Bradie. I walk over to a bench at the front of the studio and look around. Aiden's dressing room looks amazing on the outside. Lights were strung on the front of the doorway, and both windows had a dreamcatcher and gray curtains. His door was a bright blue and had a custom-made sign that said Death by Drummer, and a quaint little welcome mat was stationed at the bottom of the stairs.

Bradie's dressing room, on the other hand, was much less welcoming. His entire bunker was black, with two lanterns strung to the top of his doorway. He had changed the lightbulbs to a specialized brand, so when he turned them on, you could see two skulls being illuminated on the ground. He had diamond patterned black and white curtains, and a Do Not Enter sign hanging on the windows.

Then there was Jay.

He covered every bare inch of his dressing room with pictures of himself. Even the doormat had a custom print of him doing a duck face. He has sheer curtains, which allow you to see the inside of his room, which, to be honest, looks just like the outside.

I start back to my dressing room, when I feel a hand on my shoulder. I whirl around, ready to tell Jay off, but thankfully, it's Aiden. He holds his hands up in a surrendering motion. "Oh, sorry, I didn't mean to scare you. I just wanted to tell you that Bradie, Jay and I were about to head off to my place for a movie night." I rub my arm. "Um, I don't know. Jay really creeped me out earlier, and I don't want to make anything awkward." Aiden says, "Aw, but it's really fun, and I think you'd like it. Before tours, we watch movies and order pizza and drinks. Then we usually camp out the night, and in the morning, we sneak back into our dressing room before Sage knows we're gone. You can skip the sleeping part if you want, but the guys and I r-r-really wanted you to feel included, a-and I-I-it seemed like a g-good idea-" I smile. "Of course, I'll come." His smile is so big, it takes up half of his face.

20 minutes later, I walk over to Aiden's room, hoping and praying I'm not too fancy. I have on a purple tiered ruffle shirt, white jean shorts, and a pair of golden strapped sandals. As I walk down the pathway, I notice Jay a few feet ahead of me. I duck behind a trash can and wait for him to go in first. After a few minutes, I peek out from behind the can, and quickly run up to Aiden's door. I knock on the door, and Aiden greets me, wearing a button up shirt, black shorts, and socks with holes. I see a row of sleeping bags and a mini television set up on the floor. I add my purple sleeping bag to the pile and drop my overnight bag on top, and the boys sit nearby and

order pizza and drinks. While we wait for the food, the boys tell me some interesting things about themselves, like how Bradie has 4 younger sisters, Aiden has never eaten cereal, and Jay has never been to a public school. “My parents believe that people who go to public school are barbarians who will grow up to be nobodies.” says Jay. I guess the other boys are used to Jays’ rude comments, and they immediately ignore him.

After our pizzas arrive, it begins to rain. Two hours later, I listen to the thunder in the distance, and turn to the boys. “It sounds bad out there.” I say. Bradie taps his chin. “Aqua has a point, the weather channel said there’s a serious chance of flooding tonight. It might be best to go back to our rooms. We can do this again tomorrow.” He says, then reaches for his bag. I grab mine too and wave goodbye to the boys.

The second I step foot outside the dressing room, I slip on the wet stairs.

I windmill my arms, but the effort is useless. I start to fall into the three-foot-deep water on the ground, when JAY grabs my arm and yanks me back inside, and I tumble to the floor.

Jay kneels by me and looks straight into my eyes. “Are you okay? Aiden said he heard you scream, and he saw you about to fall.” All I can do is nod, mostly because I’m surprised that JAY AUSTINE rescued me.

After a week of rain and flooding, most of the highways are clear for us to make our way to Colorado. At around noon on Tuesday, a double decker bus pulls up to the studio. The bus looks small on the outside, but the inside is HUGE. There are bathrooms and bedrooms for everyone, with a staircase that takes you to the second floor. In the middle of the bus is a living room, complete with beanbags and a table, along with a tiny kitchen tucked inside the corner. I share the second floor with Jay, while Aiden and Bradie have the first floor. I run to my room and start decorating. I’m in the middle of putting posters up on the walls when someone knocks on my door. Aiden’s voice drifts through the thin wood as he says, “Come on, Bradie made lunch!” I go down to the first floor and watch Bradie lay the food out with a flourish, and we all dig in, talking and laughing. After everyone’s done eating, I stand up to leave, when Jay grabs my arm. “Hey, where are you going? We were going to play truth or dare.” I shrug, then sit back down. He turns to me, an evil grin on his face, which makes him suspicious looking. “Okay, the first one is for our new member. Truth or dare?” before I can answer, he laughs. “Truth, great choice! Answer this question: Which one of us do you like the best?” He folds his arms. I stutter. “Um, what kind of question is that? I think all of you are great guys, and I like all of you equally. Not

to mention the fact that I was going to pick dare.” Aiden smacks Jays’ arm. “What are you doing? Why would you ask that anyway?” Jay smirks. “We all know what your answer will be, so just tell us now.” I sigh. “Um, okay. I guess I’d have to say... Aiden.” Aiden blushes, but Jay has a very different reaction. “WHAT? YOU PICK THAT DORK OVER ME? THE GUY WHO SAVED YOU FROM DROWNING?” He yells, standing up. I stumble back. “Hold on, this was your idea to play this game, and I didn’t even hit the water, remember? And why are you getting so worked up about this? Its just a game-” Jay shushes me. “I know I said mean things to you, but after I save your life, I thought that would have been water under the bridge. Apparently, I was wrong!” I stand up. “Wait, do you...like me? Is that why you wanted to play this game? So that you could see if I liked you back? I came here to be a part of a band, not get a boyfriend, and for the last time, I didn’t even hit the water! Calm down a little.” He lunges at me. “AFTER EVERYTHING I DID FOR YOU!” Bradie grabs his shirt to hold him back. I run out the front door, the roars of Jay fading out. I sit on a rock and take deep breaths, trying to stop my hands from shaking with rage. After about thirty minutes, I hear the door open behind me, and Aiden slowly steps out. “We... We got jay to calm d-down, so you can come back inside if you’d l-like-” I stand up. “Why did he get so upset? Why do you all act as if this is totally normal? Is this something he usually does? Is this why Bobby Drowner left the band?” Aiden wrings his hands. “Well, Jay’s...complicated. He has this annoying pattern of falling for a cute girl after saying he was too good for them. He then tries to get the girl to fall for him, but once he figures out the girl doesn’t like him back, he plots revenge on the guy the girl likes. Of course, his plans always backfire, and he ends up hurting the one he likes. It’s what made Bobby quit, when Jay kept going after his girlfriend, Abi Brenton, and I... I just want you to be careful, okay?” I nod, then stand up to face him. “I want to thank you for coming to check on me. No boy has ever really... cared about me this much. I guess that was one reason why I said I liked you.” He blushes, then I blush, then we hold hands, and then we talk for a bit longer. By the time we head back in, I feel a lot better.

After that whole fiasco, the band kept their distance from Jay. He kept coming after us, though. At the meet and greet in Colorado, he kept telling fans that I was a selfish snob who hated animals, which made people rally against me. The manager had to cancel the rest of the greet after I chased him out with a chair. At Aiden’s sister’s birthday party, he hogged all the spotlight

during the songs, and at Universal, he made sure I was the last off the bus and locked me in, and it took nearly an hour for the manager to figure out where I was. Aiden was always the first to notice I was upset or missing, which made me like him even more, and made Jay hate him even more.

He tried writing me love letters and offering to buy me anything I want, but I always refused, and he always asked me why. “I don’t want to be with a guy who tries to bribe me into loving him. That’s not how it works, and that won’t get you anywhere in life.” I once told him after he had shown up at my door with a bouquet filled with roses, cash, and daises. He had thrown the flowers and bribe onto the floor, and yelled, “Fine! We’ll see where that logic gets you next week!”

Next week was our first concert of the season, scheduled for June 30. A day later, I had gone into Jay’s room to see if I could find anything interesting relating to what he said and overheard him talking about a plan of attack. I ran downstairs to tell the others what Jay had said, and Bradie had assured me that he was probably just pulling my leg, and nothing was going to happen at the concert. I was still worried, fearing he was going to do something he might regret.

The day of our concert, at 12 o’clock sharp, Sage orders us to get on the stage. As we stand behind the curtain, I notice Jay is missing. I look around and finally spot him next to the speaker, talking on the phone. Bradie whispers something to him, and he grumbles a response and throws his phone off to the side.

As the curtains rise, I take a deep breath, and look out into the sea of screaming and cheering people. I launch into ‘My charm’, the first song of our set, my voice reverberating through the arena.

“ I was looking, and wondering where you’ve been...” Jay sings his line, and we alter back and forth, all the way to the chorus, “What about my charm, I thought you loved my charm, I really loved you, you stomped all on my heart, I was grateful for the charm, I thought you loved my charm, I thought we had a thing, I guess we both were wrong,” I sing my line, “I knew, that you had plans to leave me...” and wait for Jay to respond.

I hear nothing but silence. I nervously laugh and repeat the line in case he, somehow, didn't hear me, but I still don't get a response. I glance over to him, but all I see is the mike. I frantically look around me, and I spot him behind a giant speaker.

Right behind Aiden.

I run over to Jay, who now holds a guitar over his head like an axe. I latch onto his arm and yank down. The crowd gasps as we dance back and forth, trying to grab the guitar from the other. "Let go, Aqua! I'm doing this for us!" He yells. I go ballistic.

"Don't you get it, you idiot?! There is no us! There will never be an us! I'm in love with Aiden, not you, and I will never in a million years be in love with you. If you want to hurt him, you're going to have to go through me!" Jay continues to sling the guitar around, backing me closer and closer to the edge of the stage, which rises almost 75 feet tall in the crowd. Jay yanks me around to face him, and he pulls me close until we're only mere millimeters apart. "Aqua, if you don't move out of the way, you'll fall!" he yells. I hear a chorus of screams as I trip on the edge of my dress, and I spot the manager running towards us from the wings. I grit my teeth and snatch the guitar from him with a mighty heave, and the momentum knocks both of us backward.

My heel catches on the edge of the stage, and I drop the guitar, wind milling my arms in a last-ditch attempt to regain my balance. I scream for help and start to drop off the edge of the stage. The last thing I see are my bandmates faces, twisted in terror.

"This is Julia Swift, reporting live from the concert plaza, where a tragedy has just occurred. Flames Ignite singer Aqua Vior was in the middle of singing a new song when 19-year-old Jay Austine tried to harm the drummer of the band, Aiden Mitchell. Vior lunged at Jay before he could do any harm but fell off the edge of the 75-foot-high stage. Several fans broke down the guard rail and rushed to the aid of the unconscious singer, who was then driven to the hospital. Jay Austine was taken into custody shortly after, and later admitted plotting to harm the drummer. The singer's injuries are undetermined, but we have received word that she is in stable condition. The fate of Jay Austine is yet to be determined in court."

My mother shuts the television off, throwing the remote onto my bedside table. She paces back and forth across my room, crying and muttering under her breath.

The fall left me with a broken tailbone, a shattered wrist, and a fractured ankle, although the doctor told me it was a miracle that those were the only injuries I sustained.

I hear a knock at the door, and I tell them to come in. The door creaks open, followed by the faces of Bradie and Aiden. Bradie lays a giant teddy bear next to me, and Aiden ties balloons to my bed stand and gives me a kiss on the forehead. Bradie goes over to talk to my mom while Aiden sits down next to me. “How do you feel? The doctors wouldn’t let us ride with you, but they did call us in for questioning at the precinct. They wanted to know what had happened on the stage, and why Jay did what he did. I’m sorry we took so long.” I weakly smile. “All that matters to me is that you’re here now.”

After a few minutes of talking, the doctor asks me if I would be up for another visitor. Before I answer, Jay peeks into the room, handcuffed and surrounded by two officers. My mother and bandmates make a move to protect me, but I signal them to stop. He slowly walks up to my bedside and sits his chained hands on the comforter. “Hey, look, I’m so sorry for nearly killing you. I didn’t mean to and it will never happen again. I had to beg my officers to let me come see you, and as soon as my mom pays for my bail, I’ll take you somewhere nice, maybe to dinner. Where-”

My mother slaps him. Hard.

“You dare say that to my daughter, whom you nearly killed?! You should be ashamed for what you’ve done, you physco!” She starts to say more, but I cut in.

“Mom, stop. I can handle this myself.” I turn to him. “Jay, you are a very rude and selfish snob who takes pleasure in hurting people just for fun. I know I should be angry with you. I could curse you out and sue you and badmouth you to the public, but I’m not going to. I was raised better than that. I know there’s probably not a trace of remorse for trying to kill me or Aiden, but I’m sure your punishment will make you rethink things. And I also know that one day, you’ll be a better person. Who knows, maybe we’ll be good friends. For now, though, just remember: you can’t just buy your way into someone’s heart.” I take Aiden’s hand and smile. “You have to earn your way.”

Jay looks me in the eyes, and smirks. “And to think, I went through all this trouble for you.” He turns and walks away, the police officers flanking him. My mother shakes her head. “After everything that happened, he still thinks that way. Some people just can’t be reasoned with.”

I smile, leaning against my boyfriend's shoulder. "Maybe so. But that doesn't matter to me. I have people to care for me, and I have people to love me."

Jay may not ever change his mind. He might not ever see the error of his ways. But that's okay. At least, its okay to me. I finished the tour as best as I could and went to college. In the year since he was sent to a juvenile detention center, I haven't thought of Jay once. Instead, I became the lead singer of the band, and we recruited a new backup singer named Skyler Tompkins, who is, thankfully, not at all like Jay. My life has been great, and I intend to keep it that way.

Everyone in life has a Jay, and the best thing you can really do is find someone who cares about you. Find that one irreplaceable person, and you can live a happy life, filled with adventure and love. I know it sounds sappy, but it's the truth.

And for now, that's enough for me.