

"Don't worry about me. I'm cold blooded."

"At least come up to the house with me. I need your help."

"You need my help?"

"She told me about the boyfriend. She goes for musicians. He's a classical pianist."

"Musicians?" I asked in confusion. I could hardly believe that the stuck up woman who yelled at us after the wedding was a groupie. Though I suppose ending up with a classical pianist may account for some of her arrogance, stereotypical as it was.

That train of thought came to a screeching halt with my next realization.

"You play the guitar!" I exclaimed, excited to see this come full circle. "So what's the problem?"

"How do you know I play?"

Oops. "I saw a guitar. I mean ... I saw your cousin with one. He wasn't all that good though."

"No, he isn't. That's my guitar. He just fools around with it when he hangs out here. Drives me crazy. At least he tries. I can play, but just cover songs. She wants me to write a song for her."

I laughed. "A battle of the bands for the hand of the fair maiden?"

"Something like that. What am I going to do?"

"Why not use your suave charm?"

"Charm has gotten me this far, but I'll need to show some skills to keep it up."

"We could just call the whole thing off right now," I bluffed.

"No way. I'm gonna win this one on principle if nothing else. I told you, I don't care about the money. You have to help me."

I knew I had him. "Let's go write a song."



Dad had perched himself on the edge of his bed, guitar in hand. I stood in the corner trying to keep my feet obscured. He wanted to play in the basement, but I made some excuses about mildew and allergies and a desire to peek at the football game through his window so as not to have to explain my true inability to go downstairs.

"Don't you want to sit down?" he asked.

"It's fine. I prefer to stand when I hear live music."

"You can at least come a little closer."

Actually I couldn't, as I needed to stand behind the pile of laundry on the floor to distract his attention from the fact that I was ankle deep in the floorboards.

"The acoustics will be better from this angle."

"What do you want to hear?"

"I don't care. Play whatever."

"Anything?"

"Anything you want. Just play."

And play he did. His setlist that afternoon:

People Are Strange
We Can Work It Out
Everyday
Piece of My Heart
All Along the Watchtower

All cover songs, each one with a distinct treatment and pop sensibility that made it his own. His guitar playing was very skilled, and his vocal style comfortable yet oddly hypnotic. After hearing this much raw talent from my young father, it amazed me he hadn't become a professional musician. Maybe his inability to write his own songs held him back, but even a session musician could make a decent wage and obtain a little bit of new found glory.

I beamed when he was done. "When I asked you to 'play whatever,' I didn't expect that. That was fantastic!"

I should admit here that even though I'm a musical connoisseur of sorts, I'm not a songwriter. I've tried, but it's a very difficult craft to perfect. I know a great song when I hear one and understand the basic concepts behind a solid hit single, but authoring one just isn't a skill I have. Let the critics critique, the artists create, and the singers sing.

Dad blushed. "Thanks. It's not all that special. I'm just copying. What's so funny?"

He had caught me in the middle of some laugh, as I thought to myself it would have been amusing if he had actually played the song "Whatever" by Oasis when I invited him to "play whatever." But he couldn't have, since it wouldn't be recorded for another twenty-five years.

But maybe we could borrow it, and a few others...