

L'ashantani cantare

by Cosette

True story of the power of a song.

The Story of a Song

Chapter 1 of 1

True story of the power of a song.

My best and worst memories of weekends with my father all happened in the car. He had this '92 teal Jetta with an interior that seemed roomy compared to his old Rabbit, but not always roomy enough for the emotions that inevitably came out. I know now that he wasn't angry at me or my sister, but at the impossible, terrible situation he was in. At the time, though, I couldn't see that. All I could see was that he was yelling again, at me when I was lucky enough to protect Marcie, or at Marcie when all I could do was watch her soul recoil.

The best way to avoid these outbursts was to have music playing as he drove us to and from our mom's house. But here we had to be careful, too: some music would set him off and he'd sing with a vengeance that would forever alter my relationship with those songs. There was this tape by Opus which was full of uplifting, happy songs. You'd think there'd be no danger in that tape, but that tape was the most dangerous of all. There was a song on it called "Think Positive" which was sure to start my father on a rant about Mom's Munchausen by proxy, a rant which, if started, would go on for the entire half hour ride home. The radio was also dangerous, though not as dangerous as that tape. R.E.M. had this song called "Losing My Religion" that would start him singing along in a voice I can still hear: this beaten, desperate voice that no kid should ever have to hear from a parent. "That's me in a corner!"

But there was one tape that worked. He had this copied tape filled with one Armenian guy singing in a dozen languages, a different one for each song. And when that tape came on, we'd all sing along.

L'ashantani cantare! Co-la guitare ahamano! L'ashantani cantare. Sono me l'italiano.

The first song was Italian. We had no idea what the words meant literally, but we know what they meant for us, and we'd belt them out like our souls depended on it. And they did, in a way. Suddenly the car would feel bigger, less suffocating. Marcie and I wouldn't be trapped in a cage of his anger, but cruising along the highway happily. For those precious moments, everything would be okay.

Over a dozen years later, that tape long forgotten, I'm sitting in an Italian café in Annapolis waiting for my group of friends to show up and my husband to park the car. It's Croquet: the day when my alma mater St. John's College challenges their rival in every important way to an annual game of Croquet. More importantly, it's the one day of the year that I get to see my friends who have scattered all around the country. But everyone's late and I'm sitting by myself.

L'ashantani cantare!

Those words fill me with an inexplicable amount of happiness and relief. I can't place them just yet. The song continues when suddenly I remember everything: sitting in my father's car, the three of us singing along with this tape, which started with this song! I become disoriented: it's hard for me to remember where I am now and that I'm supposed to be waiting annoyed for people to show up. Instead, I'm sitting there beaming like my cat isn't dying, my body hasn't betrayed me, and my friends aren't late. For those few moments, everything is okay again.