

They had set up the blanket too close to the water, but they didn't care. The foamy white water sneaked closer and closer to the worn blue fabric and Kate watched it quietly. She dug her hands in the ground beside her.

"God, this isn't even real sand," she said, lifting up her hands and pouring the small grey pebbles on the ground. "Probably why no one is here at this dumb beach."

"Well, aren't you glad that the beach isn't crowded?" Trace asked, pulling her baseball cap down over her eyes to block out the setting sun.

"Beaches are no fun when they're empty," Nick grumbled, grabbing a beer from the six pack and downing it in three gulps.

"You just want to see skimpy dressed women," Kate teased, rolling her eyes. "I mean, I don't blame you."

Nick eyed her wickedly, throwing the empty can onto the rocks. He winked and Kate laughed. She and Nick had recently bonded over their shared interest in girls, and it was a nice break from their normal relationship: mean older brother and annoying little sister.

"Knock if off guys," Trace said. "I mean, I expect that casual misogyny from you Nick, but come on Kate."

Kate rolled her eyes and lay down in the sand-- rocks, and closed her eyes. "We're just having fun, stop being such a hag."

"What so you just expect me to shut my mouth and be quiet when I hear discriminating and unjust words come out of my sisters mouth like what-- NICHOLAS LOPEZ YOU PICK UP THAT CAN RIGHT NOW SO HELP ME GOD."

Kate laughed, watching the can Trace had just noticed roll into the sea.

Nick pumped his fist, "Yes! One dead turtle for me!"

Trace threw her hands up. "I swear, why do I even bother!"

Kate looked inquisitively at Nick. "I don't know, Nick, why does she bother?"

He popped open another can, gulping it down. "She bothers cuz she wants to be Mom," he said, finally coming up for air. He belched.

Trace scrunched her face up. "I'm not trying to be Mo-- If I was, you guys would be in so much trouble right now."

"Whatever Mom," Kate said, closing her eyes and laying back down, just as a wave of pebbles was kicked in her face.

She sat straight up. "What the fu---rick!" She changed her word halfway through, seeing her 4 year old brother Ezra was the one responsible for the sand. He stood in front of her, with

only bright pink swimming trunks on, his black hair that he shared with his whole family crusted with sea water, and leftovers of a peanut butter sandwich still smeared on his face.

“Where’s Mom?” He asked, a grin on his face.

They didn’t know what to say. The waves crashed on the bank, the noise filling the silence.

“She’s not here bud,” Trace said quietly, pulling Ezra into her lap, wiping the peanut butter off his face.

“Yeah bud,” Nick said, after taking another long gulp of the beer. “She’s gone. Dead. Kaput.” He started to mime himself hanging from a noose but Trace exclaimed, pushing him over, and throwing his beer into the sea.

“What the?! Who’s littering now bi--?!” But he stopped himself too, still mindful of the four year old.

Kate used this distraction as an excuse to pull Ezra into her lap, hugging him tight. She had been the youngest for most of her life, but out of the blue, her mom got pregnant, and suddenly here they were with another sibling. Half sibling, technically. Each of the Lopez kids had different dads, but shared their mom’s Latina roots and last name, Lopez.

Together, they made up quite a ragtag team of ethnically mysterious, lower class, delinquent siblings. They never called each other half siblings either, their mom had made sure of that. For as much as they argued, they all loved each other and were very close, although none of them would ever be caught dead saying it.

“Mom’s up in heaven Ez,” she whispered into his ear. “She’s always watching over us.”

“M’kay,” Ezra said, never one for dramatics, he was four after all. “Can I chase the birds?”

“Course you can Ezra, just be careful. You don’t want them flying away with you.”

Ezra shuddered, the thought scaring him. “I’m always careful Katie, I won’t let the birds hurt us!”

“Ok, bud,” she laughed, and pushed him away. “Go have fun.”

Ezra ran away in a fit of giggles, and for the millionth time, Kate felt envious of her brother’s innocence, wishing she still had that.

Kate looked over at Trace, who was still yelling at Nick.

“Can you two please just... not fight, for once?”

“NO!” Nick and Trace yelled at the same time.

Kate rolled her eyes and sighed, laying back down on the ratty beach blanket.

"I swear, you guys ruin everything"

"I ruin everything?!" Trace exclaimed, momentarily forgetting Nick, who grabbed another beer can while she was distracted. "I'm the one who planned this whole trip!"

"Only because you wouldn't let us do anything fun," Kate grumbled under her breath.

"Yeah," Nick belched loudly. "We wanted to go to Six Flags."

Trace threw her hands in the air. "Well I'm sorry if I don't want to be pushed around in huge crowds, eating crap foods, and going on terrifying rides that cost too much!"

Nick laughed. "That's the whole point of Six Flags, sis"

But Trace ignored him, starting to get heated.

"Instead I planned a nice day at the beach, screw me for trying, it's more than either of you have done in a long time!"

Kate sat up.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Nick sat down next to her.

"Yeah, what is that supposed to mean? Are you the one who dropped out of college after Mom died?"

"No that's not-"

"No, I know what you meant!"

Nick was getting heated now too.

"You mean that because I don't go around doing all the housework like a good little wife, that I'm not helping? I have two goddamn jobs, so does Kate, so what the hell are you talking about?!"

Nick stood up and started pacing, and Kate could see his eyes shine with tears.

Trace spluttered. "That's that's not what I meant, it's just, I'm home alone all the time, with just Ezra, and I never leave the house, and you guys are never around!"

Nick turned on her. "Because we're financially supporting this family!"

"Well I'm the one emotionally supporting us! I'm the one who has to explain to the four year old that Mom is never coming back! And- and even when you're not working, neither of you are home! You're always out, always going and getting drunk, even though Kate- Kate you're only 17, that's illegal! And Nick, Ezra sees you like twice a week! I know you're going through a lot, we all are, but you can afford to be home once in a while and not leave me alone!"

Trace sat down now, a singular tear dripping down her cheek.

Nick looked at her with anger, but said in a soft tone, "I'm sorry if I don't want to spend all my time in the house that our mom killed herself in."

Kate finally spoke up.

"It's not you Trace, that we're trying to get away from. It just-- just--"

"It's just whenever I walk through the door, I can just imagine her--" Nick faltered, and turned away.

"Can I remind you who's the one who found her? You think I want to be in that house any more than you? But I suck it up, because I know that that's what Mom wanted."

Kate laughed grimly. "Mom hung herself from the ceiling fan, we don't really know what she wanted."

"She's the one who wanted to get away from this family, I'm the one who stuck around! Nick kicked a shell into the surf. "I could be at Stanford right now, partying and getting a degree, but instead I'm here at this bullshit beach, because I actually care, Trace. Ok? I'm the one who cares, not Mom. Mom is gone because she didn't care about us."

"That's not true she--"

"She killed herself and left all of us here, she left Ezra here," Kate interjected.

"We don't know what she was going through." Trace said softly.

"No we don't, but that doesn't change the fact that what she did was selfish and wrong."

And with that, Nick lay down in the rocks, and shut his eyes.

Trace looked at Kate. "Sorry for saying you don't do anything. You too Nick."

"S'okay" Kate murmured, while Nick just grunted.

"And I know what Mom did was wrong, I-- I just choose to focus on the good stuff. Like how much she loved beaches. That's why I wanted to come here."

The three siblings sat in silence for a bit, the only sounds being the crashing of the waves, the cawing of the birds, and Ezra's delighted giggles.

"She wouldn't have liked this beach." Kate finally said, digging up another pile of rocks not sand.

Nick sat up and grinned slightly.

"This beach is bullshit."

Trace tried to conceal a smile, but failed.

"I tried guys, but it was the only one with free parking."

Nick stared at her for a second, then fell back down on the beach, laughing hysterically.

Kate joined him too, throwing her handful of rocks at Trace.

“Not fair guys, stop laughing!” Trace said, laughing.

Ezra ran up to them, screaming, “LOOK WHAT I HAVE!”

Kate sat up, and yelped.

Trace looked over too. “EZRA WREN LOPEZ PUT DOWN THAT SEAGULL!”

Ezra giggled, and let go of the disgruntled black and white bird that he had been gripping in his chubby toddler hands. The bird flew away, squeaking indignantly, shaking out a few loose feathers.

“Good job little dude!” Nick offered him a high five, but Trace swatted his hand away.

“No, no ‘good job’ Nick! Ezra, you can’t do that, why on earth--”

Kate eyed Ezra, who was starting to look ashamed.

“I’d run for it if I was you.”

Ezra grinned, and took off, his short little legs carrying him away from the wrath of his oldest sister.

“Don’t you run away from me!” Trace yelled, and started to get up to follow him, but Nick and Kate eyed each other, and pulled her back down to the blanket.

“Let me go!”

Nick laughed, “Not going to happen.”

“Let the kid have his fun. We shouldn’t trap that kind of skill.” Kate grinned.

“Fine!” Trace yelped, and they let her go.

“As long as he doesn’t do it again.” Then she yelled at Ezra, “AS LONG AS YOU DON’T DO IT AGAIN!”

Ezra just laughed and ran closer to the birds, kicking up piles of hard, grey, rocks.