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Chapter 9: Good Friday

She opened her eyes, slowly, blinking through the rays of sun that began to trickle in through the sheer white curtains that dressed the window. It was truly a beautiful sight to wake up to. The simple window would put even the most beautiful of brides to shame; the wooden crucifix that her grandmother hung up before they moved in acts as an adorning piece of jewelry for the veiled bride that lets the sun shine through. Francesca closed her eyes one last time and listened to the sounds of living. Even though it was barely day break, the small town liked to make use of the light, she had noticed since her move here. Her Papá Vicente could be heard through the window outside whistling while doing the morning chores before he was to head off to work. Her Mamá Emmelina could be heard singing an old Spanish song while bustling in the kitchen: eggs frying, the oven being opened and closed, the smell of fresh coffee and bacon encompassing the cozy home.

Home. It was such a weird word for her mind to digest. She and her siblings have had many “homes” growing up with their mother Sasha. Yet of all of them, this is the first time she has felt *at home* in a physical place. She opens her eyes and smiles at the thought. She’s finally found a place they could all call home. However her smiles quickly fades as she feels movement at her feet. Bambi... Bambi was always her home in her heart, very much like she was Hugo and Lola’s sense of home growing up. Always a constant. They were lucky, to have her and she was lucky to have

them but, what happens after today? When the sun goes down and Bambi crosses over and her one constant is gone? Who, or where, will her heart call home next?

Francesca shakes her thoughts away. Today isn't the day to dwell on the what ifs and thens. She has to be strong, she has to be strong and put up a brave front for Hugo and Lola. They can't see their rock crumble. She has to wait to do that in the privacy of the moonlight. Once night comes then the tide of tears and heartache can flood the shores of her mind and it is then and only then that she can crumble.

Suddenly her door creaks. Little Lola peaks her head through the door, tears in her eyes. She knows what today brings. Francesca's heart breaks. This poor little girl has had to say goodbye more than most ten year olds.

"Oh, Little Bug. Come here," she pats the spot next to her. Bambi's head perks up as he barks good morning to one of his favorite humans.

Lola jumps in and rests her head on her older sister's lap while Bambi readjusts his position so his head rests next to her face. With shaky fingers, the child reaches out and strokes the soft fur of her family member. Bambi snuggles his snout closer to the small hands causing Lola to whimper and snuggle closer to the old German Shepard as well.

"Sssshhh, Little Bug. It's going to be okay. He'll be okay," Francesca coos as she strokes her fingers through her sister's hair as her sister continues her ministrations through Bambi's sandy colored coat.

"We can't let Bambi know we're sad." Francesca whispers for fear of breaking this delicate moment. She looks out the window as the sun begins to peak over the hill tops. "We have to be happy today." The room grows brighter as if in agreement. "Today, we're going to give Bambi the best last day of his life. And that means the happiest last day of his life, *¿entiendes mija?*" Lola nods

her head in understanding. “Good.” Francesca smiles. “Let’s go get ready for Bambi’s best last day ever, ¿sí?”

“Okay,” Lola says while wiping the snot and tears from her face with the back of her sleeve. “I’ll go wake up Hugo!” she yells as she dashes out the door, tears forgotten, and Bambi following at her heels.

Not even 30 seconds later she hears the ricochet of the door off the wall and a groan from Hugo as Lola launches herself into his bed to wake up the grumpy teen. Francesca shakes her head at the little girl and proceeds to get ready for the best last day ever.

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Thirty minutes later, Francesca walks in through the doorway of the kitchen, adorned in a baggy college sweater, jean shorts, and her old black converse. Her light brown hair is braided back with pieces falling out the frame her face. Lola smiles when she sees Francesca walk into the room knowing that it’s her turn to get her hair braided just like her big sister’s. Hugo is seated at Lola’s left, inhaling his food before he can even taste it.

“*Buenos días* Mamá Lina,” Francesca glides over to her grandmother and kisses her good morning. Lina smiles a sad smile knowing, seeing, how her Ceci tries so hard to be strong for her younger siblings.

“*Bueno días* *mija*,” Lina kisses her granddaughter's cheek in return.

Francesca walks up behind Lola, ruffling Hugo’s hair before beginning to braid the mess of black curls on Lola’s head. Soon, she finishes the braid and goes to sit across from Hugo.

“Ceci, *mija*, go tell your Papá Vicente that the food is ready. I’ll serve you both a plate while you fetch him.” Lina calls out to the girl while flipping an egg in the frying pan.

Francesca goes out to the big backyard in search of her grandfather. After living with them these past few months now, she'd come to learn where her personality stems from. The two Gitana's both have no problem with their solitude, and both are so hard headed, and feel the need to keep up a front for the sake of others. Or maybe for the sake of their own sanity. She still hasn't figured that one out yet.

She finds him in the chicken coop, collecting the eggs and feeding the hens. "Papá Chente, *mi* Mamá Lina told me to come get you. Breakfast is ready." Vicente lifts his head from the bucket of feed in this hands, he too can see the sadness in his granddaughter's eyes, though she smiles as she takes the bucket from his hands, offering to finish feeding while he washes up.

* * *

At the breakfast table the family sits quietly, nothing but the sound of sips from coffee filled mugs and metal utensils clinking against ceramic plates. No one says a word in fear of making a crack in the fragile glass seen in Francesca's eyes that she thinks she hides so well.

"So," Lina begins, "What do you kids have planned today for Bambi's best day ever?" another scrape as Francesca shovels a bit of eggs into her mouth.

"We're going to the beach. It's 7 o'clock now so if we leave right after breakfast we can make it back by 4 to get to the vet." No eye contact is made, just a simple sip from her coffee cup and another bite of eggs.

"You guys can take the truck," Vicente says as he throws his Ceci the keys. "A dog deserves to feel what it's like to ride in the bed of a truck at least once in his life." Just like his granddaughter, no eye contact is made. He just sips on his coffee followed by a bite of his eggs.

"Thank you." Francesca murmurs. Quickly she gets up to wash her dishes so no one will see the glassy look in her eyes.

* * *

After breakfast is done and the dishes washed and put away, the kids pile into the back of their grandfather's old pick up truck. Their grandmother makes a sign of the cross over each one of them, praying for a safe travel. Lina even blesses Bambi and kisses the top of his head before she returns to Vicente's side. With little strength Bami climbs into the bed of the truck as Francesca closes the back. Once settled in the car they all turn to wave goodbye to their grandparents who stand at the end of the long driveway; Lina with a handkerchief in hand, wrapped in Vicente's arms, meanwhile Vicente's face holds little emotion. In just a few months the couple has grown to love the old dog, and can't help but feel a pang of heartache for their three grandchildren and the cards life has dealt them.

The crystal beaded rosary hanging on the rearview mirror catches Francesca's attention as the truck bumps along the dirt road. Mother Mary and her son nailed to the cross, dangle in her line of sight as if to mock her. Shifting her focus from the rosary to look into the rearview mirror, Francesca smiles as Bambi sticks his head out the side, his tongue off to the side and ears pushed back from the wind. Her grandparents figures blur out. From the tears threatening to fall from her eyes or from the distance put between them, she doesn't know, though she argues for the latter.

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The drive is nice. They ride with the windows down, and oldies sing to them through the old dashboard radio. *I've got sunshine on a cloudy day. When it's cold outside I got the month of May.* The sun has risen over the hill tops by now, and people go on with their lives.

It's Good Friday, she remembers. The day Jesus, man's savior, was crucified. Man's savior. Bambi was her savior, she thinks. These last ten years Bambi was her savior, her sanity, her best friend. These last ten years a dog, a damn dog, was her constant. He was the only thing she had faith

in. Man's Jesus was no where. Man's savior was absent. Sure Jesus may have been man's savior but she felt as though she and her siblings were forgotten about, left in the shadows to fend for themselves. For the longest time she felt as though she and her siblings had no savior. They only had each other.

Her fingers grip the steering wheel tightly, knuckles turning white. Inhale, exhale. Today isn't a day for silly unnecessary thoughts. Today they're going to give Bambi the best last day ever.

"When we get there can we put our feet in the water?" Lola asks, breaking Francesca out of her reverie. The older sister looks over at Lola in the back, and then at Hugo in the passenger seat. He's been quiet since this morning. He's huddled himself in the corner; the side of his head leaned up against the window, eyes closed, and some type of rock music blaring from his headphones. This whole ordeal with Bambi has been hard on him too.

"Of course. Maybe we can even have a picnic on the beach too." Francesca replies, her voice pitching, trying to sound upbeat for her Little Bug. She needs to try her best to make this the best last day ever.

Bambi has settled on his blanket, catching the shade casted on the trucks bed. He pops his head up every now and again to say good morning to a new car on the road or a fellow dog riding along with their humans too; tongue lolled to the side and tail wagging excitedly. It's a beautiful day out.

"Will Bambi go to heaven, Ceci?" Lola suddenly ask. Her eyes are casted down at her lap as she shyly fidgets with her fingers.

Francesca pauses, not quite sure how to answer the girl. She looks again, at the rosary, and then in rearview mirror at Bambi and how happy and pure and innocent he is.

"He has to, Bug." Francesca assures. Lola or herself, she doesn't know. "He has to."

VERY BASIC OVERVIEW to Perdido

- Heavy Mexican Catholic influences
 - references to Mexican culture and Catholic teachings/ practices/etc.
 - Rosary, mass, sign of the cross, bible references, etc.
- Girl's best friend has always been her dog
 - In a dysfunctional life, her dog has been her only constant.
 - Parents split when she was little
 - Dog was a gift from her dad before he left
 - Mom doesn't like the dog but puts up with it
 - Lives with mom all her life.
 - Moved around alot with mom
 - Unstable income
 - toxic relationships with boyfriends
 - Always stuck watching the kids
- College age, school's difficult and she hates it.
 - Doesn't know what she wants to do with her life
 - Pressure to be better than her parents
 - Pressure to provide for her siblings
 - Financial struggles
- In the middle of school year her and mom have a falling out
 - Girl moves in with dad, a man she barely knows
 - He's married, 2 kids
 - She's not close with any of them
 - She feels lonely and isolated
 - Dog not allowed inside the house
- Dad indirectly complains that she's an inconvenience to him and his family
 - Girl leaves and stays with paternal grandparents she's unfamiliar with
 - They let her bring her dog
 - She finally has time to think and worry about just herself
 - Grandparents take over care of the kids.
- Dog gets sick, really sick

- It's too expensive, she tried to save up money, gets a second job, anything to help foot the bills
- Dog is in so much pain that she decides to put him down.
- She returns home sad and an emotional mess
 - She makes the rash decision to pack up what little she has and leave
 - Leaves a note for her family
 - "I'm fine. I just needed to do something on my own for once. Don't come looking for me, please. I love you, and I will come back one day. Love Ceci"
 - Buys a plane ticket to Europe
 - Ends up in Spain
 - Earns money/housing doing odd jobs to earn her keep
 - Gets a job in a small shop, stay with the owner and her family
 - Stays 3 months
 - Saves up enough to move around to Italy
 - Earns money/housing doing odd jobs to earn her keep
 - Gets a job in a small shop, stay with the owner and her family
 - Learns Italian there and from books
 - Stays 3 months
 - Girl bounces around to France, England, etc.
 - Girl is looking for something: happiness? Fulfillment?
 - She takes up writing: poetry, song lyrics, anything really
- For each country she learns a different lesson
 - Love, cooking, good food
 - Importance of family
 - What a family looks like
 - Selflessness, helping others
 - Befriends a homeless person
 - Faith
 - In herself. In God. In other people.
 - In Europe she travels to a lot of cathedrals where she gets emotional.

- Vatican City, Sistine Chapel, Notre Dame, Assisi
- Realizes
 - her parents are good people, just not good parents
 - Her dog will never be replaced but now she's not tied down; she can see the world now

SETTING

- Story takes place in fictional busy city of Perdido (means "lost" in Spanish), California.
 - Part of town they live in with their mom is relatively lower to middle-middle class.
 - 2 bedroom 1 bath
 - Mom in one room, girls share another, and Hugo sleeps on the couch
 - Small run down house
 - Part of town dad lives in is Upper-middle class
 - 6 bedroom 4 bath
 - Everyone gets their own rooms
 - Big Villa style house with a pool
- Grandparents live in small country town of Esperanza ("hope" in Spanish), California
 - Country/Mexican style home, cozy, colorful
- Last name "Gitana" means "gypsy" in Spanish

CHARACTERS

- Francesca Gitana, 20 (Ceci)
 - Personality: drifter, on guard, cold to strangers but shows love and affection to her siblings and Bambi
 - Oldest sibling, more of a mother figure to her siblings
 - College dropout due to family situation
- Brother 14, Hugo Gitana
 - Neat freak, athletic, quiet
 - Middle child
 - Freshman year of high school
- Sister 10, Filomena Gitana (Lola)

- Creative, likes to draw
- Innocent, youngest but mature for her age
- Mom 36, Natasha Leon (Sasha)
 - Bad with money, borderline alcoholic, may have bipolar disorder, worst taste in men
 - Works at a desk job she hates
- Dad 36, Romeo Gitana
 - Absent father figure to oldest 3
 - Disappeared after Lola was born and hasn't had contact with them since
 - Only really cares about his wife and 2 youngest
 - Manipulative personality
- Stepmom 32, Isbelle Gitana
 - High maintenance, shallow, typical suburban house wife
- Sister 6, Marabelle Gitana
 - bratty/ bully personality, tattler
 - Doesn't like that she has to share a room with Lola
- Brother 1, Lucas Gitana
 - Cute baby, innocent
- Paternal grandma 54, Mama Emmelina (Lina)
 - Typical Mexican grandma, stern but loving
 - Runs a small bakery/cafe
 - Everyone calls her Doña Lina
- Paternal grandpa 58, Papa Vicente (Chente)
 - Hard working
 - Runs the hardware store in town
 - Everyone calls him Don Chente
- Dog 10, German shepherd named Bambi
 - Part protector, part nanny, part goofball

CHAPTER OUTLINE

1. Growing up
 - a. An introduction to the life of Francesca

- i. Watching the kids, getting them to school, mental breakdowns, going to school, working, household chores, college drop out
- ii. An inside look into the reversed roles between mother and daughter.

2. Cutting ties

- a. Sasha comes home drunk and locks the kids out so she can have the house to herself with her new boyfriend.
 - i. The kids have to spend the night in a dingy hotel room Francesca paid for.
 - ii. The next morning they return home to find the front door unlocked, Sasha passed out drunk, and their valuables stolen.
- b. Francesca has finally had enough of dealing with her mother and the men her mother brings home.
 - i. decides to move herself, her siblings, and her dog to her dad's house.

3. Father Figure

- a. Francesca, Hugo, and Filomena move in with their distant father.
 - i. They all must learn to adjust to living with Romeo and his wife Isabelle.
- b. Isabelle is mean to the children, and especially harsh with Lola.

4. An Inconvenience

- a. Romeo and Isabelle constantly complain about the children living with them. Say they are an “inconvenience.”
- b. Francesca is invited to her paternal grandparents house, whom she is not very familiar with, given her relationship with her father.

5. Hope

- a. Francesca and the kids move to new town with their grandparents.

- i. They get their rooms, learn the rules, and even go to church for the first time in over 10 years. In Catholic church at that.
 - b. Francesca starts working in her grandma's cafe.
 - c. The kids are adjusting beautifully to their grandparents house.
6. Lost and Looking
 - a. Francesca still feels weary as to her position in the kids life, she realizes she has time to reflect in who she is and taking care of herself, something she's never had to do before.
7. Bambi
 - a. Francesca is trying to figure herself out. She realizes that she likes being active and fitness. So as part of that she decides to take Bambi with her to the nearest park. They make this a regular activity throughout the week.
 - b. Fast forward a few months and Francesca notices that Bambi isnt eating like he used to, is less excited to go on walks, lays around more during the day, and finally she notices he is limping and whining in pain.
 - c. Francesca finally takes Bambi to the vet. This visit costs her almost \$1,000 that she had been saving for a while. Turns out that Bambi has cancer.
8. Fighting
 - a. Bambi has been Francesca's only true companion with whom she can confide in and the one place she can breakdown and show weakness
 - i. She has to always be strong and brave with her siblings
 - b. She decides to fight for Bambi and get a second job, sell her run down car, anything to save Bambi.

- c. Unexpectedly, Bambi gets even sicker. The vet said there is no hope to save bambi's life, and that Bambie should be put down to end his pain and suffering.

9. Good Friday

- a. The day Bambi is to get put down, Francescas and the kids take him for one last day of fun and adventure.
 - i. They take him for one last spin around the block in her grandpa's truck
 - ii. They wake early to drive him to the beach for the first and last time.
- b. This chapter also discusses some of the inner thoughts and turmoil brewing in Francesca's mind. And really opens up about her struggles with her faith in God.

10. Best Last Day Ever

- a. The kids arrive at the beach, have a picnic, eat some whipped cream, and play in the water. Nothing could ruin this moment.
- b. The drive back from the beach is quiet. Bambi is moved inside the car, and is curled up on his favorite blanket with his head resting on Lola's lap.
- c. They finally arrive at the veterinarian's office. Paperwork is processed, and now they just wait until it's their turn to be called back.
 - i. While they wait, they sit outside, soaking up the sun with Bambi for one last time.

11. Moving On

- a. For people who don't understand the relationship that humans and animals can make, many wanted francesca to move on right away and to stop moping around. But she couldn't. Losing a pet is like losing a close friend or family member. There was a

deep a bond engraved into the soul. They were more than companions, they're confidants. They see us at all our highs and all our lows yet still decide to love us.

- b. Francesca finally has a breakdown. She has no one to talk to, she feels all alone. But one thing she is certain of: Lola and Hugo are happy and safe and well taken care of for once.
 - i. So, she decides to pack up her things and leave. She needs to find out who Francesca is alone: not Francesca the mom/older sister/ daughter/ granddaughter/ waitress/college drop out/without a dog. She needs to find out who she is without the influences of her family or her past.
 - ii. Francesca buys a one way ticket to Italy with the money she had saved up, even before Bambi got sick. Almost \$7,000 in savings.

12. Paper Planes

- a. Francesca arrives in Europe, Italy to be exact. She rents a room from an older couple that remind her of her grandparents.
- b. Learns Italian, works odd jobs, sight sees, integrates herself into the culture.
- c. Meets fellow drifters whom she befriends and travels with on her days off.
 - i. She even visits Vatican City and the Sistine Chapel.

13. Notre Dame

- a. On a visit to France, Francesca visits Notre Dame where she has a "coming home" moment.
- b. She realizes that she should give God or Jesus or whatever a chance. Back in Italy she tells the older couple that she wants to start going to mass with them and they happily agree.

14. Serendipity

- a. Francesca meets someone. A guy who's gorgeous and nice and slowly but surely he breaks through her cold exterior. Just a crack though.
- b. He helps her through her journey of figuring herself out and convinces her to reach out to her family after 6 months of not contacting them.
- c. This is just day one of meeting the guy.

15. Going Home

- a. Gorgeous guy convinces her to go back home He'll be waiting for her.
- b. Francesca goes home with a clearer head. She know what she wants to do, and where she needs to be right now.