

I put back the CD in my hand and placed the earphones onto their holder. The entertainment section in Barnes and Nobles was full. People bumped into me, motivating me to leave the cramped space and into the barren aisles of books.

I glanced at the rows of cherry wood shelves. The knot in between my shoulder blades eased. The worry of tests and homework wouldn't come back until Monday. The stress of aiming for straight A's disappeared as the mingling scent of freshly printed pages and coffee from the Starbucks café wafted towards me. All I needed to focus on for the Saturday afternoon was roaming through each row, falling to the temptation of reading as many books as I could.

I stepped towards the Y.A. section, thirsting for another vampire novel by Amelia Atwater-Rhodes.

A group of girls gawking at a tall, mocha-skinned teen were in my way. The girls had the typical Miami Beach tan, similar to a burnt piece of toast. Their hair was a shade of dark chocolate and up to their mid-waist.

“Excuse me.”

The girls' beady eyes traced over my black flip-flops, jeans, and red shirt.

I cleared my throat. “Sorry, I just wanted to get through.”

They parted in a second.

I ducked two rows behind them where quiet resumed.

“What did you think of her?”

I leaned across a bookshelf, peering at them. The guy pointed my way and the girls nodded.

He drew invisible breasts across his broad chest. “Her boobs are too big.”

\*

The first time I was made aware of my shape, I was in the eighth grade, running across the dew – kissed grass. My knee-length skirt and white-button down gave what I always thought of as the same shape as a strawberry-stuffed Pop-Tart, everything concealed in a package that alluded to no mystery. I caught my breath near the bleachers.

One of my friend's, Jorge, raised his eyebrows. “Rebecca, you can be the next Pamela.”

I shoved tendrils of my hair into a ponytail. “What are you talking about?”

“You know, Pamela Anderson.” He drew imaginary breasts, the size of beach balls, across his chest.

“What does that have to do with me?”

“When you were running over here you looked like Pamela on Baywatch. I swear, your breasts are as huge as hers.”

I laughed. “Shut up, Jorge.”

That was the first time a friend, not to mention any person, had put me in the center of attention for something that wasn't academically inclined. Jorge had dug out a hole and planted a seed of poison ivy into my mind. At first, I could barely notice it was there, but as more focus rained on the subject the vines sprouted and grew.

\*

I hid under the cover of one from several tents at the Miami Book Fair. Cardboard boxes were stacked with books, each one had a sticker stating the price. I picked out a Marilyn Monroe biography and flipped to the first page.

“Excuse me.”

I looked up. “Yes?”

A man with ash-tinted hair and a mustache grinned at me. “I see you like Marilyn Monroe.”

I nodded.

He cleared his throat. “I found these for you.”

He handed me several Marilyn-themed novels. “Thank you so much! Do you work here?”

His eyes skimmed over my chest, as quick as a beetle swimming over a river's surface. “No, I'm just looking around like you. I noticed you reading that book and thought you might like those as well.”

I swallowed. “Well, thanks anyway.”

I opened back to my page.

“Miss?”

I sighed. “Yes?”

“What's your name?” He extended his hand.

I shook it and tried to pull back my damp palm, but he held on. “R-Rebecca.”

“What’s your phone number?”

I blinked a few times. My heart thundered down to the pit of my stomach creating a storm of nerves. Another one. Another guy whose eyes were glued to my chest and led me to believe they were something else in the beginning. One more disappointment that tasted like dark chocolate, a bitter and dark reminder that there might never be Prince Charming.

“Excuse me?”

“Give me your cell phone number. I can call you and we can go out sometime.”

I shook my head. “No.”

I grabbed the books and huddled them close to me, taking a few steps away from him. He stepped across from where I was, blocking the path.

“Why not?”

My voice wavered. “N-No, thank you.”

He reached for my hand. “Don’t be like that –”

I took a deep breath, ignoring the nerves swarming through me. “I don’t want to go out with you, okay?”

His eyes turned like coal as they ran across my legs, to the Marilyn Monroe books in my arms, and back to my chest.

He spat out, “Bitch,” and walked away.

\*

I grabbed my bottle of water from the car and trailed a few feet behind my grandmother. The air wasn’t as thick as a sauna for the first time in weeks on a rare summer’s day in Miami. A breeze sauntered past me, playing with my cotton shirt and Nike shorts.

My shoulders eased back and any worries about tests disappeared. I moved to the side of the path letting a couple pass by me. I smiled at them.

The girl glared at me, her lips puckering as if she had drunk lemon juice. She wrapped her arms around her boyfriend who was rambling about a football game. They walked towards the parking lot and left me with an appetizer of what would become a regular meal that I would consume on a daily basis.

\*

We stepped out of the ice cream shop, one that promised North Carolina's best home-made treats. A rainbow-flavored cup was cradled in my hands.

My Dad nodded towards a few benches across the street. "Let's eat the ice cream and then go back to the cabin."

Laura and Carlitos, my siblings, dashed across the street and settled into their places underneath the shade of a tree.

I licked off a spoonful. A blend of tangy orange and ripe cherries mingled on my tongue. A tinge of vanilla darted from one side to another, leaving me to guess all of the flavors in the rainbow mix.

"Rebecca, you really look like you're into that ice cream, huh?"

My sister glanced at my Dad and giggled.

I sighed. "It is delicious."

Dad grinned. "Ate the whole thing, already?"

I looked down and shrugged. "Most of it."

"You've been hitting on the sweets pretty hard since we've gotten here – blueberry pie –"

"That's my favorite!"

"Chocolate frosted donuts."

"Didn't you buy that for everyone?"

"All I'm saying is maybe you should take it easy on the sugar intake. You don't want to get too big. Remember we haven't exercised in a while."

I swallowed and put the ice cream down. It was melting, but I had lost my appetite. The vanilla and fruit flavors lingered in my mouth, tasting more like fresh fruit drenched in sour milk.

It was no longer only my breasts that needed a size reduction, but also the rest of me.

\*

I grabbed a book and sat down. I sniffed away the tears, I was fourteen when I had a bra size of 36 C while the rest of my friends were getting into a cup B. I rolled my shoulders back and sighed. It didn't matter what they thought. The eye-widening stares

like gorillas from boys to the self-conscious punches given by my family faded within moments. I had the power to kill the poison ivy that tarnished my self-image. Besides, I looked at my body, curvy fit me just fine.