

"*Segura?*" *Tio* David asks again.

"Yes! *Vaya!* I'll call!" I insist, and he looks at me again, attempting a fatherly face that he really is too young for.

"Okay. Bye, *te quiero.*" He tells me, and kisses me on the cheek, before messing up my hair. He gets into his Toyota Corolla and drives to the first gate, while I jog leisurely behind him. Miraculously, I don't trip on any of the holes hidden under the thick grass, courtesy of mud and cows. When he stops at the gate that separates the mothers from the calves, I unhook the barbed wire, and pull the sticks away.

Honduras is a very poor country. Even if your family consists of doctors of all sorts and you're well off, it's not the same as being well off in America. It's a lot of things I didn't notice back in Florida.

Metal gates cost too much, so most all the farmers just take branches, cut them, and stake them into the ground, wrapping barbed wire around it and stretching the wire to the next post and so on. The first time I was asked to open the gates, I took one look at the wire and freaked out. However, a month later, I'm a pro.

As usual, I have to pull the gate out of David's way and drop it so I can fight with that one calf that always has to attempt a jailbreak, pulling the black furred baby away and tying the rope around his neck to one of the litchi trees. Despite being just a calf, he'll be a big bull soon; he is getting stronger each day, like when he butts his hard little head against my thighs and I can feel the bony nubs that will be big horns already growing.

I give David the thumbs up so he doesn't have to block the gateway with his car -that barely passes through it- and he drives to the front gate, as I quickly close the second gate, because the other babies seem to have heard their mothers mooing in the distance.

I ran to the front gate, barely acknowledging the herd of calves running and stumbling behind me. I grab a litchi off a tree from over head, and let it drop behind me. That'll keep them busy for a while. I open the front gate, and before he passes right through it he makes a phone

with his hand and holds it to his ear, and I nod in return. He drives off our farm, and onto the dirt and rock road that is a pain to drive on, let alone *learn* to drive on.

I watch for a second, and then pull the branches back and pull the loop over the next branch, which is firmly planted in the ground.

The benefit I see in these gates though is that if you don't already know where to look, you have to cut through all the barbed wire because the simple opening is impossible to tell from the rest of the fence.

I double check for reassurance, and walk back towards the house. It's about a quarter of a mile, so I take my time and pick a few more litchis off the trees, throwing several to the calves that have gotten used to me enough to know I'm a sucker for cute things. And they are definitely cute, with their ruffled fur of assorted colors, their big, brown, innocent eyes, and their soft noses. I normally spoil them.

I keep some fruit for myself, but when I get to the second gate, and by extension, the closest tree that has the baby bull tied to it, he bawls at me. I drop a litchi in front of him so he can eat greedily as I untie him. I run to the gate and thank goodness I didn't close it all the way, wrenching it shut behind me and pulling the loop.

I realize that I had no need to worry, seeing as they are all busy with their snacks. It must be the fact that I am ever-so-slightly nervous. I've never been left alone on the farm before, and despite that Paz- one of the workers on our farm and a good friend to my grandpa- and his family live down the road, it's about a mile. He doesn't have a phone either, so that's no use. I don't know any of the other people living around here, and I wonder if anyone hear me if I screamed.

I walk back to the house, and this time, I'm not so lucky. I trip in that one hole that is in between gravel and mud. I know of its existence, but I always forget until I've tripped on it.

Ugh. Thank goodness there was no cow manure around me, which would be bad. But my clothes are still dirt covered, however, it was dried under the beating sun, and I just brush it off.

My litchi fruit will have to be washed anyway, so I just pick it up and walk more carefully. I reach the shade of the house, and turn to faucet to wash off my litchi fruit. I also cup my hands and take a long drink. While the water isn't supposed to be safe for those unaccustomed to it, after two months of it and my own iron stomach, I haven't been infected at all. *Tia* Dina regularly checks to make sure I'm not getting sick, but it's all okay. I wrench *Abuelo's* knife from where it's embedded in an old table, and wash it briefly before sitting in a hammock and rocking whilst I cut the fruit from its tough skin.

The sun is bright, but thankfully, it is not a breezeless day. The only problem is that the breeze signifies an oncoming storm. It's the wet season, so most afternoons a storm will just pop into existence from nothing and disappear just as fast. I finish off my litchi and stand up, throwing the knife at the table where it embeds itself in the wood once more, standing resolute. I wash my hands once again, and then trudge out into the sun once more.

Our horse, a stallion named *Pajaro*, is tied to a rock by the milking area, where he grazes on the long grass. Despite him being a seven foot tall horse that is a bit prone to jumping, someone decided to name him 'bird'. Only my family would do such a thing.

I give him wide berth as usual, walking perpendicular to him so he easily sees me, so I don't have to fear those dangerous back legs. I reach out tentatively and watch as his ears prick up, looking at me with wide eyes, before he snorts softly and I lay my hand and the space behind his ears, petting him softly. As soon as I am sure he's not going to kick me somehow, I untie the rope holding him to his post, letting him free.

If *Pajaro* doesn't get to run some each day, he starts acting up and trying to bite the cows, or kicking and chasing our cars. I move out of his way as he takes off, and I watch, mesmerized as he approaches the wire fence at top speed before suddenly veering to the right. He does so at each corner where fence meets fence, and I go back to the house, not wanting to get in the way of his shenanigans. I throw some more dried corn to the chickens taking shelter under the stairs, and head upstairs.

The clouds are already rolling in, growing fat and dark. I reach the balcony leading to the front door just in time to hear a loud splash. It seems that *Pajaro* couldn't wait for the upcoming

rain; he had to relieve himself of the sun right now, flinging himself into the lagoon and climbing out absolutely soaked, trotting again.

I laugh, and note all the calves congregating beneath the largest litchi tree, mooing as they plop down on the grass, leaning and laying against one another. The wind blows stronger, and I head inside, closing both the wire and wood door, but opening the windows to let in the cool breeze. I go lay on the couch, settling myself on the cushions to wait out the storm. I turn on the TV, and watch *Guerra de los Sexos*, War of the Sexes, with amusement. It's such an old episode; I've seen it so many times. It's still hilarious though, but I'm tired...

I wake up to the thunder, and the severe static of the TV. It's dark outside, and oddly enough, still raining. The storms almost never last this long, but since there's no clock in the house, I have no way of telling what time it is. The only phone we have is an old rotary dial, and the TV isn't getting any signal so I can't see the news channel.

There's a growing sense of nervousness as I open the front door and walk out onto the balcony. David hasn't come back, probably because of the heavy rain, and there's no TV or music for me to listen to. I feel really, truly alone. I go back inside, making sure to lock both doors, and turn on the kitchen light before going to the room I am sharing with my mother and sister, fetching a book to read.

Whenever it rains, bugs always try to get inside to escape the moisture, so I figure I can let them congregate on the kitchen ceiling, since we have all the food stored safely in the fridge. The light is enough for me to settle back on the couch with my old, worn copy of *Monsters, Gods, and Heroes of Greek Mythology*. It's one of the three books I brought with me, and while it was in new condition when I first arrived in Honduras, by now the spine is so worn out its being held together with duct tape.

I start from the beginning, getting to the fourth chapter, where they introduce Demeter and her daughter, Persephone, when there's a loud thud outside by the balcony.

I freeze, staring at the front door. There's the thud again, so I quietly get up to walk into my shared room. Upon looking outside the window, I can tell there are no cars outside, so it's not any of my family...

I then sneak into *Abuelo's* room, and reach under his pillow. I swallow nervously, feeling the cold metal of his Colt Peacemaker, a relic of a gun that has never failed him, before I pick it up. It's very, very heavy in my hands, and I can barely stand it. I hear the thud again, and reach for the door knob, holding one arm straight and pull the hammer. I can't believe this is happening- it can't- I can't do this-

Then, my panic is cut off by a familiar whine that I couldn't hear until I got close, accompanied by the scratching of claws. I quickly throw the door open, allowing Koki, Paz's hunting dog-an American Foxhound, and Tootie, the pregnant Long-Haired Chihuahua, to trot inside. They shake themselves of the dripping water, covering me, and I laugh nervously. I am happy to go put the Colt back where it belongs: out of my hands.

"What're you two doing here?" I ask, reaching down to scratch Tootie behind the ears – she likes that- and then I head to the kitchen, looking up to make sure no bugs drop on me as I wash my hands, before getting two pieces of bologna from the fridge as a treat for my two pals. They snap their jaws, Koki eating it whole and Tootie taking a bit longer, before Koki goes to curl up in front of the door and I go back to my book. I feel protected as Tootie lies by the couch, and I let one arm dangle over the side, stroking her head. The storm is beginning to lessen, as the pounding rain is finally reduced to a light drizzle.

I get to chapter ten, as Thesus is about to cut Medusa's head-

"*MOOOO!*" I hear loudly, and a chorus follows. I run to the back balcony, flipping on the light just before I fling open the door, looking out into the darkness.

My grandfather's cows are in some sort of panic, and in the dim light that barely touches them in the dark, I can see the white cows stamping their feet and mooing louder. A bark resonates throughout the house, and I run to the front door, opening it as Tootie and Koki take

off, disappearing in the dark. I don't know what to do, but I'm too scared to follow. If I take the gun, I might hurt one of the animals-

Koki and Tootie are barking loudly, snarling. I run to the back balcony, but I can't see them in the dark. The light just isn't bright enough, and there are large bovines in the way. However, after a minute or two, the dogs break off into silence, and the cows start calming down. I keep watching, and eventually, they are silent once more. I try the phone, but still get nothing more than static. I sigh, turn off the balcony light, and lock the door. While waiting, I continue to read my book, filled with disgust as it describes the snakes that make up her hair, hissing and dying as Medusa's head rolls.

The dogs never come back, nor does anything make another sound in the night, besides the toads. I get tired, and decided there's nothing else to do but sleep, so I turn on the bug lamp and turn off the kitchen light, before going back to my room and curling under my sheets after I turn on the fan.

I fall asleep to the sound of bugs being electrocuted.

I wake up when I hear a woman screaming. Daylight is pouring in through the window, and I realize that my aunt, Lulu, is yelling for me to open the front door. I get up and do so, before she runs in.

"What happened last night?" she demands, looking me over and holding me at arm's length, I'm still wearing the same jean shorts and shirt from yesterday, and my hair's a huge tangled mess, despite the tight bun I pull it into every night.

"Well, *tia*, it rained all night. Something scared the cows, but I get Koki and Tootie took chased it away, 'cause they calmed down." I explained, walking into my room to put on my sandals, wanting to go check in the farm animals.

"They didn't chase away anything, *chica*. They brought it here." she remarks as I step out the front door-

“WHAT IS THAT?!” I scream, backing up so fast I trip onto her, and she struggles to catch me in the split second. I stare at the snake lying on the front steps.

“What scared the cows.” my aunt says with a dead pan, before she pushes me off of her, and I realize that it hasn’t moved at all. I go pick it up by the tail, staring in amazement at the teeth marks and blood just behind its head. It’s a jumping viper- poisonous, nocturnal, and deadly.

“OYE! BUENOS DIAS!” I hear in the distance, and see Tinlin, Paz’s eldest son, riding his bikes towards the gates, Koki running behind him and little Tootie’s head poking up and down in the grass.

“GOOD MORNING!” Lulu yells back, and I can feel my face heating up as I drop the viper and go wash my hands, hurrying to make myself look decent before he comes upstairs. “Si, Mary’s here!” my aunt yells, and I want to scream at her to shut up as I hear pounding footsteps climbing the stairs faster than I can pull on a pair of cotton shorts, change my shirt and pull my hair into another messy bun, fixing my bangs as I step out of my room. “Oy, don’t do that, *chulo*, that’s disgusting!” I hear Lulu chastise as I step back out onto the balcony, seeing the viper’s head roll.

Koki and Tootie climb the stairs, tails wagging, and Tinlin rubs Koki’s head, laughing about how proud his father will be and promising the young hunting dog many, many treats when they get back home.

I have to wonder, why they couldn’t have named the dog Thesus instead.