

9 The Beginning

May 4, 2002

One day, just months after we met, in early May 2002, Dominíc and I were driving around town enjoying a nice little roller-coaster ride. We had mixed unending bumps of Bird's mind bendingly pure cocaine with a couple tabs each of Halcyon. The effect was bizarre: the drugs would trade off in successive waves. The coke would surge for a bit, then the tranquilizing Halcyon would pour lead into the moment, grinding everything to a mushy halt. The tranquilizer just threw mud on everything, convoluting reality, stretching the moment, swallowing the bitter edge you get with straight railing.

We were tooling around Hollywood in Dominíc's black, thrashed-out little **CLK-430** Benz with an incriminatingly large bag of coke just sitting open in the center console. (This shit made me nervous.) Every few minutes we would dose up with a blast or two. Every 30 or 40 minutes, we'd pull over somewhere and assault our systems with a severe ramping session. We were due.

Dominíc, otherwise known as Bird in our exclusive little circle, deftly whipped the Benz onto a quick side street off Melrose, and then ducked into the narrow alley behind a string of bizarre clothing shops and ethnic restaurants. The bountiful streets of L.A. bleed forth a magnanimous spring, a perpetual source of life and vitality. Indeed, Los Angeles, City of the Angels, is one astonishingly prodigious metropolis of vivacity. Veritably vivacious! Stupendous Megalopolis! Our Viva-City! Did I mention I kinda like it here? A sublime energy from the City of Angels seemed at that moment to emanate from the very cement that was our private, local world — our pathetically divine world of intricately twisted freeways, splendiferously solid skyscrapers, and sandwiched-in and ever-stretching sidewalks and parking lots. My being now pulsed with an energetic desire. Desire to reach, to explore. Desire to grow, to conquer, and to deliver. Veni, Vidi, Vici! Desire to expand the boundaries of my soul, and search for a purpose... search for a purpose for my soul. Search for a new beginning, with new commitments. Well, to search for food right now... I just smelled burning animal, which has once again, as usual, awoken a yearning in the unrelenting hunger pit down in my famished belly.

Dominíc opened up the console and scooped up a phat pile on the end of a key and then dumped it onto my hand, right in that little pocket on the back of the hand at the base of the thumb — basically in the web of the thumb. "Say hello to mommy, Pepe." I quickly blasted it, and he followed suit. Half of my face was completely numb from the coke, and the other half was dazed from the Halcyon. So far, the day had been quiet and peaceful — even enjoyable. I looked up to see another key-full coming my way.

"Let's get something to eat, man. I'm craving Mexican," I drooled.

"What you need is a nice little Chiquita, bro." Bird didn't know the details of the tragedy with my beautiful Paulina and Amber, only that they had perished.

"Yeah, I guess so." I briefly sank into the muddy memories.

"Oh, forget it, ese. Don't think on it so much right now. Less go over to my cousin's cocina. They make the best carne asada in town, Pepe. You gonna fuckin' love it."

SERENA CHAPTER 9 - THE BEGINNING

The funny thing was, as I began to realize, anyone with an accent remotely resembling Dominic's, was a *cousin* of his. At first, I thought, "Damn, this guy has one big extended family." Then I saw the reality for what it was: you stick tight to your blood, especially when it's spread thin. Awesome philosophy. So what — we still had the in's.

We cruised over to Dominic's cousin's cozy little food brothel for some tasty ethnic vittles — and it was a food brothel, as we called the simple and unbelievably prolific dive holes. This dive hole happened to be the Anglo-realized barking epitome of any of a thousand sketchy-looking portable taco stands found on any given street corner in Mexico from Tijuana to Tapachula. They're all a bit scary, but most are actually really good. One must take the plunge of faith, into the unknown, into the potentially heave-inducing concoctions of a random and unknown beef, chicken, dog, or fish vendor, in the same sense that one must shed the initial and innate proclivities of self-preservation to be able to slice open a brethren and introduce medicinal salvation through the wonders of surgery.

We sat down to lunch, where Bird flirted with the young Latina waitress, who was, by the way, quite a delectable side dish herself, although not technically on the menu. She had this beautiful accent and spoke some Spanish through the sweetest smile with Bird. Her lavish breasts were most resoundingly engaging, full and sumptuous. This awoke another appetite in me that, unlike regular hunger, had been rather dormant for quite some time. I did indeed want her, this Latin vixen, but just as a sex kitten, nothing more. I found myself imagining — imagining myself with her, caressing her naked flesh, dining on her luscious breasts, penetrating her soft warmth, making furious love to her. My heart was pounding from more than just the lines of coke.

Delicious smells wafted in, smuggled through the air on heavenly drafts, divining the imminent delivery of our dinner dishes. These Pavlovian vaticinal scents politely proceeded the arrival of our food which came nestled in tantalizing swirls of inviting aromas. Dominic had the Carne Asada Combinación Plato; I had the Grilled Mahi-Mahi Health Burrito that was smelling really, really delicious. The El Dorado was prepared as an entrée, with sauce, and delivered by the delectable Maria, who herself contributed nicely to the redolent bouquet of titillating scents with her lovely natural perfume. Fresh fish flesh! Delicious dolphin! Mahi wrapped warmly and snugly in pounded flour jackets and lettuce wigs. Poor, pilfered Pesky pescado — swimming and surfing this morning, sizzling and served by noon. Mmmmm.

Apparently, we were both quite the starving ones. Between the chips, the entrées, the sultry banter with Maria, we left little time for conversation amongst ourselves. We didn't miss it.

During the engaging meal, my mind wandered backward, wondering over a series of related memories. I remembered the first time I had tried a fish taco. I was down in Ensenada with Dennis, a college buddy. We had driven down for the weekend and had torn into the night with a vengeance the evening before: beers and tequila shots, with an occasional rejuvenating street taco or two, and the periodic puff on a classy Cuban cigar. Our dive of choice ended up being Papa's and Beer, where the mingling and drinking festivities continued. We met some Americans and some locals and, over darts and foosball, embarked on a relentless party tour and methodically invested in what would tomorrow be a stout and cruel hang over. Finally, as the joint started thinning around 2 a.m., we left with this guy, Paco, a local, to surf the surrounding bar scene a little.

SERENA CHAPTER 9 - THE BEGINNING

After meandering through a couple of packed clubs, the three of us were out standing on the street curb with a thin and scattered group of people when [Paco](#) flagged a cab. Just as we were piling in, the [Federales](#) rolled up in a screeching scream of a welcoming committee, jumped out and grabbed us. For about 30 seconds, I thought we were hung, but they only wanted [Paco](#), our would-be-tour-guide-gone-astray. They simply tossed me and Dennis aside. Ahh!! Whew! What a rush. After that, we decided to just walk back to the hotel, a few short blocks away.

Waking up the next morning was an unfortunate inevitability. The paralyzingly stiff headache was my first greeting of the day, followed immediately by an unbelievable thirst exacerbated by the parchy sweaters jammed into every corner of my matty mouth. I didn't want to even move, but Dennis had already showered and was motivating, so I raised my pathetic corpse, and tried to encourage the saliva to start flowing with a couple of half-fast lip smacks. Dennis recognized my dire straights and reached authoritatively into the still-chilled ice chest at the foot of our lovely twin bed and produced a pair of icy Dos Equis. One Dos down, a splash under the shower head, and the mission turned to comida — time to eat!

Stepping out into the dirty streets of Ensenada, we hook the corner and head towards the marina when we stumble right into a friendly corner taco stand. Dennis braves the beef tacos, I opt for the fish. I try a bite of the beef, or dog, or whatever it was, and find myself chewing gristle chunks the size of an obese, adult rodent just trying to extract a pinch of actual meat. Gnarly. The fish is heavily battered, and very tasty in cabbage and a warm, spicy, sauce. We each throw down our tacos in a fit of gustatory ecstasy and my love affair with [Pesky Pescado](#) was firmly ignited.

Right now, back at the local dive with Bird, this deliciously healthy mahi-mahi burrito was throwing me into a delightful, gustatory spin-out right here in Ceviche's. Eating, I remembered how Valium always made me crave ice cream, and how incredibly good the Valium made it taste. I was passengering on a road trip one time, pleasantly numbed on Valium, and loaded up on ice cream treats at every stop and by the end of the day was so covered in dribbles and drops of ice cream and chocolate coating and crumbs from the endless slew of snacks that I was caked up like a Jackson Pollock! But damn, it was good. Deja vu right.

I also remembered the days when we would throw MDMA Ecstasy around like it was fucking Vitamin C. Methylenedioxymethamphetamine was beautiful wildfire, spreading a mecca of sorts across campus. The dorms were the perfect breeding ground for experimentation, and guys and girls alike were gobbling the X up. When the FDA red-shelved MDMA (Ecstasy), and manufacture became a black-market proposition and effort, reliability and tablet efficacy dropped off and I became afraid of the supply. But who cares, 'cause right now, this health burrito was throwing me into a delightful, gustatory spin-out right here in Ceviche's.