

The background of the top half of the page features three stylized, painterly portraits of women. On the left, a woman with dark, curly hair and a green leaf in it. In the center, a woman with dark hair and a gold crown. On the right, a woman with dark hair in a braid and a white flower in it. They are all looking towards the viewer with soft expressions.

Hero's Journey Presents

Triple Threat: Mix Tape

Valencia watched herself in the mirror as she did her makeup, but did not really see her own face. She was instead looking at the parts of it: the eyes that were not smoky yet, the corners of lips undefined, the cheekbone that, already high, could be higher. She looked at it as if it were unfinished, and began again.

Her phone, idly cycling through the hits of the singer she was going to see tonight, sang synthesizer and the best beat its little low-bass heart could manage where it lay on her vanity, the glittery magenta case matching the powder-pale pink of the wire and glass. *Voy por un triste camino sin mirar atrás*, called the woman's voice, muffled by the speaker lying against the glass, while Valencia drew black lines of liquid eyeliner to make her brown eyes even larger, even more arresting.

She had already done her makeup once this morning. She hadn't been allowed to go to court for the sentencing; her father, always so overprotective and forcing her to miss all the important moments in her life, had forbidden it. She'd put on a ruffled pink dress anyway, the one that didn't do much for her ass but made her father say *mija cielita!* because it reminded him of her quince and worn the pink princess lip gloss and silk hibiscus in her hair, all to go to the living room and sit down on her father's enormous leather couch. He could stop her from going to the courthouse with its underbrush of photographers and reporters and recorders, but he couldn't stop her from watching the live broadcast. He couldn't stop her from doing *everything*, especially when he wasn't here, his face impassive and stern on the huge flat screen.

Everything would be fine, Luis insisted. Valencia was not stupid; Luis always said everything would be fine and of the five brothers she'd started out with, she wouldn't have chosen him and Hermilo to keep things going. But that wasn't her problem, not the way the careful layers of shimmering tan shadow that swept across her lid were. What did she care? It wasn't anything to do with her. She was barely allowed to watch it on TV.

Her father was a good person and so were her three brothers, even if they were all hard-headed condescending controlling over-masculine proud tyrants. She knew perfectly well that they all *would* be all right, no matter how many years some judge had said from his high white horse. They'd all be fine, she knew as she outlined her lips in soft plum pencil, a color too dark that she'd never have gotten away with if any of them were here tonight to ask where she was going and what she was doing. They were

wrong; Valencia was a natural beauty and the velvety purple color was just bold enough to keep up with her.

She filled it in with strokes of liquid gloss that were as perfect and sensuous as if she had a painter's brush and not a gel wand while she wondered how long it would really be before Luis and Hermilo had their big day on TV, too.

Aunque hay postales, hare lo imposible, sang her phone while she lined lashes like Aphrodite's, the voice low and smoky as the old CDs her father liked to listen to behind the electronic beat and synth backing vocals, *para que nunca te olvides de mi*.

Islande balanced two plates of griot and bannann peze against her forearms, both hands occupied with the full-table-sized tureen of joumou in between, the pumpkin scent to warm and strong she half expected it was probably turning her dark brown chin orange. She wouldn't have minded, but she'd gotten used to the delicious smells of the restaurant. You couldn't serve people if you were stealing their plantains all the time, and besides, Maman Katherine in the kitchen would always let her steal a bite now and then if she shared her tips.

It was a busy night and she was busy, too, juggling nine tables at once and looking to add on a tenth. Rent was tight this month, but Islande believed in being positive and getting on with things instead of worrying about them, and she figured the more she flirted with the regulars, grinning old men with hats over their bald heads and no real mischief in their mouths, the more rum they'd drink and the problem would be solved. Nobody ever forgot to tip her except the tourist tables, which she only had two of right now, looking uncomfortable and out of place in the free-moving color and conversation ricocheting from table to table. She took pity on them and brought them an extra side of only slightly flavored rice.

Manno wasn't playing tonight, so the restaurant, above the babble of voices and clink of forks and glasses, was playing the local stations, the music flowing as easily in tune with the ebb and flow of the conversation as everything else. Raucous celebrations with plantain fritters always brought a sudden burst of Wyclef Jean to give it a little rhythm, and when things slowed down and she brought out another round of welcome bottles, the crooning voices of singers who could have been her mother rolled behind the atmosphere like soft, embracing thunder.

It was one of those moments now, and Islande thought it was a good sign that it was the singer she was going to see tonight, at least if she got enough to go on with and nobody more desperate than her got sticky at the tip jar. *On ne va nul part, on cours dans le noir*, the smoky voice crooned, the words understandable even if the accent was foreign, *on se condamne à perdre au combat*. Some of the stations played French when they had to fill in the real stuff, but you took what you could get and she had a voice you could deep fry and chew up. Islande liked making a game out of it, humming the songs to herself, rewriting them so that they became more real. *Nou pa pral nenpòt kote, nou ap kouri nan fè nwa a*, she sang partly under her breath, and the regulars she passed grinned at her.

She was tired, there was no pretending she wasn't. She hadn't had a night off in long enough to not bother counting. The dry rub was coming out of her pores like a delicious perfume and she was starting to get that feeling, Djimy busy with his new DJing "career" downtown and her parents doing just as many nights she was, of being lonely in the middle of a crowd, yelling orders and smiling faces around her. But that was just part of life, adjusting to not being in school and not playing games anymore, children's things they'd left behind in the cracked earth.

The important thing was that she had time off tonight, and it was coming like the promise of a really good shower, getting to untie the scarf and let her braids fall down, getting to wear something with

too many bright colors for work. She brought the tourists mediocre gin drinks and the regulars spectacular rum ones while the radio asked, *Prêts à s'accrocher, pour qu'on soit sauvés?* and she answered back with an arm full of prawns, *Pare yo kwoke, yo dwe sove!*

Helena laid on the floor in her uncle's apartment, not particularly caring if he walked in. So what? She was dressed, technically. A pair of his old boxers with the Star Wars logo on them and a shirt she'd had since elementary school that was technically still holding together was dressed. Technically.

The beer was disgusting. She hadn't felt like getting up and going back and forth to the refrigerator over and over and over again, so she'd problem-solved by just dragging all the beer into the living room. Which meant she had a lot of warm beer, at least what she hadn't already drunk, and to be honest Bucanero wasn't great anyway and she didn't know why her uncle couldn't just buy Coors or Corona like everyone else on earth. She didn't even know where he got it, but the amount she'd drunk had finally hazed the world down to a vague sense of dizziness, so wherever it was, he'd need more.

Which was why she was lying on the floor. She'd shut everything in the apartment off, but the walls were thin and someone out on their balcony had a radio going, the static-inflected voice a woman's sensual tones. *Sale el sol y ahí estoy llegando*, she sang, sounding familiar even if she was wrong. It wasn't even close to sunrise yet. There were hours of the night left to go, possibly a million of them.

The beer was supposed to keep her from caring about things like how many hours were left in the night, all of them empty. She'd used to be able to not care about things after two or three beers, when she'd sit out on the front steps with Maria and laugh at the passersby who weren't neighbors, making up elaborate stories about who they were and where they came from. Maria was better at that than Helena and she loved it, the way Maria's dark blue eyes would light up with wicked mischief when she described the adventures in the Grand Canyon, somewhere neither of them was probably ever going to see, that the old woman below trundling home with her groceries had had.

Or whatever. Helena wasn't going to see it. Maybe Maria was. She always did whatever she decided to do and the world better get out of the way. Helena thought it was the best quality she'd ever seen in a person, before she'd realized she was part of the world, too.

She needed caffeine to go with this beer; it wasn't going to put her to sleep which meant it was just making her dizzier and more uncomfortable. She didn't care enough to get up and go back to the refrigerator anyway. She would rather stay here on the floor, where Maria and she had laid a couple of times, wildly mussed dark hair tangled together so that it made one big soft bed, listening to the sounds of the neighborhood out and around them, bad-tempered chickens and people yelling about nothing, their own heartbeats.

It wasn't like she didn't get it. She *got* it. She'd ghosted plenty of Tinder dates. That was what you did when you weren't feeling it anymore, just the way life worked, and everybody knew it. They'd figure it out and move on to the next thing, she'd always assumed. It wasn't like they cared that much. They weren't waiting around for her to call, first getting lonely, then worried, then feeling the realization trying to sneak in under the door no matter where you hid from it. They didn't sit around in the same shirt, not showering for a few days because it might be the last time they ever smelled that dime store perfume. They didn't have to flip through all the things they didn't even realize were memories now, light brown skin with delicate freckles sprayed across shoulder blades, the way she knew every piece of internet lingo and laughed when Helena didn't and probably made some up, the kind of gross gummy candies she liked which nobody could know about because of how cheap they were, the way the only words she knew in Spanish were cussing and she used them all the time anyway so nobody would know. They weren't getting ghosted by Maria.

Or maybe they were, now. Whatever. She wasn't going to find out.

She needed caffeine, probably water, maybe food which had become somewhat incidental somewhere along the line. She should get a shower. Her uncle would probably be pissed about the beer and she could go get more to replace it before he got back from wherever he was.

But Helena didn't do any of those things. She just laid on the floor, her hair spread out around her, the radio in someone else's house crying, *Tan solo un poco mas, quiero la libertad de abrir puertas y ventanas*, with her arms over her face because there was a streetlight that got too bright once the sun went down and not for any other reason at all.

Valencia got out of her Uber and put her hands on her hips, looking over the concert venue before she got in there. It was outdoor, which meant it was hot and humid but also dark and free for mingling. There was a wooden bar, the kind set up to be easily collapsed later, with fairy lights strung around it selling drinks in red plastic cups, and there was a space for dancing, although not much was happening yet. It was too early, barely eleven, and it wasn't like this singer was that much of a dance club type, anyway.

She looked at least ten times too expensively hot for this level of a concert. She was wearing the slick sharkskin miniskirt she kept in the back of the closet, covering not much but her thoughts, and she'd straightened her hair so that she was surrounded by a waterfall of black liquid, and she had heels that cost more than all the alcohol in this bar, and she was just standing by the curb like she wasn't sure the nonexistent bouncer was going to let her in.

Nobody was dancing because the singer was singing the same song she'd already heard earlier tonight, something sad and slow and a complete mood-killer, as if she didn't care about what the audience thought. *Te necesito aquí para alejar mis temores*, she sang, and Valencia, who knew that everything *would* be all right and that she didn't need *anything*, suddenly felt her throat tighten.

She refused it. She marched into the center of the concert, people moving out of her way, some with appreciative comments, some just on instinct, to the dance floor that was just the packed-down earth of some outdoor park.

Fuck that, and fuck court stenographers and pushy bill collectors and people being sad in public. Valencia wanted a dance concert where she could forget all of that, so that was what she was about to have, and everyone was going to come with her whether they were planning on it or not.

Islande stood on the pedals of her old green bicycle, letting the hill do the work so she could watch for bad pavement, the wet evening air rushing past her as if it were as excited for the evening as she was. She was wearing her biggest hoops and they bounced along with her braids, let down to flip and wiggle behind her, both freed from the restaurant for just one night and as full of energy as she was, her face glowing even before she arrived.

When she'd first arrived in Miami, holding her brother's hand with life a jumble of the fallen-down and cluttered-broken, this singer had been the first one she'd heard on the radio who didn't sing in English, a language that reminded her of school lessons and nonsensical adjectives, or Spanish, beautiful and spattery but just as likely to soak her without her understanding it as rain. She knew better now, WSRF and WQVN with their comforting, familiarly happy voices staples on the battered radio in the kitchen at home, but there was still a soft spot in her for the woman with the smoky voice, singing in French as well as English and Spanish, sometimes all three at once. To Islande, she sounded like Miami, full of language, full of people, full of things she would probably never live long enough to experience all of.

But tonight, she would experience this. She was singing to herself before she squealed to a stop, chaining the bicycle to a street light with hands eager to move on to something else. She didn't know a Kreyol version of the song being sung now, or French, either, but she hummed it anyway, hoping she would remember it to learn later.

She ignored the bar and dived into the crowd, eyes shining, red and orange tank and belt glowing against her dark brown skin. There were dancers, clustering and unclustering as if the greater movement of the dance floor was choreographed, too, and some of the crowd was singing, and they were all united no matter who they were for just a few minutes in something that brought them joy.

A part of that crowd, Islande was not alone, and she sang words from the last song she did know, *yon kolizyon etranj*, waiting for the next as her hands went into the air.

Helena had traded the boxers for a carelessly-tied sarong and piled her hair off her neck in an approximation of an updo, but those were the only attempts she made to look any different at this concert than she had lying on the floor. Online friends with stupid handles had bugged her until she promised she'd go, and now that she was here, she didn't see anyone wearing the agreed-on signals. Of course, she wasn't wearing one either. She was drinking more bad warm beer, now out of a plastic cup she had to buy for four dollars, and she had break-up hair and she didn't want to see anyone. No one at all, which was why every time she caught herself searching the crowd for a familiar face with too much mascara above a leather jacket, she stopped and got another beer.

It wasn't a very good concert, either. The song was sad, which meant nobody could really get distracted by it, and the last thing she wanted to hear was some woman wailing *pesando en ti* who wasn't living the situation. Nobody had fluorescent shoelaces, nobody was having a good time except for everyone making out on the so-called dance floor, and she was out of beer again.

Her eyes were dry and sandy and no amount of anything in any cup or bottle was helping. Helena crumpled the cup with a plastic crunch and dropped it into one of the trash bags hanging from the bar before she moved into the crowd. She didn't recognize anyone, and for a minute wondered if maybe she just didn't know how to do that anymore.

If she didn't find someone with orange shoes soon, she knew she was just going to turn around and go home again, where everything was pointless but at least didn't require any effort to be pointless. *Yo no se ni recuerdo*, the singer agreed with her.

Valencia's imperious arrival on the dance floor did not instantly transform it the way she wanted it to, so she did what she had always done when someone wasn't giving her her way quickly enough: she waited loudly. She stared directly at the singer, whose dramatically dark lipstick was a match for her own but not worn quite as well, and looked from side to side at the half empty dance space, and spread her hands as if to tell her, *look at this, what are you doing?*

It only took until the end of the current song before it worked. The next one was up-tempo, electronic, with bright lights suddenly flaring up from the edges of the stage, and that was finally something she could work with. She didn't know this one, something about a city in flames, but the chorus just called *la la la* and *put your hands up* and that was good enough. The crowd surged in and she barely noticed it, something she had expected, demanded, and now was so, bodies suddenly twisting in excitement, hands everywhere.

All that was important was that there was a beat, a rhythm, so that she could close her eyes, and once she did everything could be on fire, and everything in the world could be crashing down, and she could have nowhere to live and no family to care about her, but there would still be that rhythm.

Someone would crowd her and she'd get to decide if she wanted to allow it, and there would be beautiful people drinking and laughing--

With her eyes closed, arms stretched up into the sky as if they could catch the floating chunks of sound coming from the stage, Valencia bumped into multiple someones and the cold feeling of liquid on her right leg made her squeal in protest and open her eyes again. "Hey," she said angrily to the pale guy with blown pupils already retreating, palms out, way too careless about his now-empty beer being all over everyone else, but the other person was laughing. She had dark eyes, black in the outdoor strobes, and dark skin, and she was smiling at Valencia as she laughed, spreading out her brightly-colored skirt to show she'd gotten most of the beer herself.

Valencia had never seen her before in her life, but she felt a pull anyway. It was the smile, maybe; the girl was smiling the same feeling she'd wanted, that nothing could be wrong in the world, that everything was a reason for laughter. It wasn't loneliness, because Valencia wasn't about to be lonely with the whole world in front of her.

But it was something, so she grabbed the other girl's hands, threw them back in the air and sent her own after, and they danced. It was something and she held onto it, fiercely, because no one and nothing could make her sad for that moment, not until she let her whitening knuckles and immaculate red nails let go of it, and it was better to dance together with someone than to dance alone.

Like magic, as soon as she hit the dance floor the music shifted, turning high and energetic and exciting. Islede didn't know the song, Spanish like a wave of bright syllables washing over her, but that was all right; it didn't make any difference to the beat that let her wriggle and laugh, shoulders and hips moving without any conscious thought. It was a boisterous crowd, people bouncing off one another over and over, so it wasn't a surprise that eventually someone with beer did the bouncing and just like that, she was awash in Coors.

It would be sticky later but for now it cooled her down on this hot sticky night in the middle of a hot sticky crowd, and she started laughing, waving at the mortified beer-spiller as he vanished back toward the bar. Another girl next to her wasn't as amused, and Islede spread the cheerfully now half-brown orange skirt in her hands like a giant flower to show her. "First party foul of the night!" she told her cheerfully, her voice lost to the waves of music, and laughed again.

It worked; the other girl smiled again, her eyes dark and gorgeously lashed, her head tossing with the music as she grabbed Islede's hands, and they both laughed together as they leaned into the music. The pocket of their joy, carefree and perfect as only something after a long day of hot waitressing could be, spread out from Islede and she could almost feel everyone else around them, too, all sharing a few precious minutes before they'd all go back to garages and restaurants and bars and janitors' closets.

Her vision strobed in and out with the music, too; she kept closing her eyes, lost for a moment in the beat, but then opening them again, not wanting to miss seeing anyone around her, not wanting to be left out. When she opened them this time, spun half around from her new dance partner, it was just in time to see another girl, halfway onto the dance floor but as unmoving as a rusted car. She was dressed in tired clothes and was not smiling, and to Islede she looked lost, as if she didn't know how she'd gotten here or what she was supposed to be doing.

Whenever Islede had been lost, as a child down the wrong street or a teenager in a country that didn't speak her language, she'd needed someone to help her, and the world loved little lost girls, she knew, and made sure she got it. So it was her turn and she smiled with all of her teeth, shining with the relief and freedom of just tonight, and dropped a hand out of the sky to hold it out to the girl, waving, inviting. Because no one should be alone here, and no one should miss something that would make them happier.

Helena's so-called "friends" still weren't here. They'd probably never bothered coming, she thought with annoyance too dull to really go anywhere. They were probably just trolling her to see if they could get her to go out when she didn't want to, or maybe they'd gotten high at the pre-party and forgot to show up. Whatever. It didn't matter. She was alone in a sea of spike heels and flip-flops and nobody was wearing the right shoelaces, and nobody was wearing leather boots scuffed at the toes from being four years old and hand-repaired, either.

She was about to turn around, hit the bar on the way out and see if her uncle was home just to have someone to drink with, when the ever-changing mysterious tides of the crowd parted a thin aisle for a moment and she saw the girl. She was unbelievably beautiful; not the way Helena usually went for but all high fashion and sharp makeup, an Instagram model who was somehow untouched by the sweat and shoving around her, her brunette hair falling to her waist and the rise and fall of her shoulders as she danced changing her shape every second into something more alluring than before while the song changed also to shape around her, calling *el ritmo embriaga mis sentidos*.

It wasn't really that, though. Miami was full of hot girls. It was the confidence radiating off of her, demanding the center of attention and the respect she deserved, not on purpose but automatically, without even having to think about it. Helena, who was busy trying to get numb all night and still not there yet, felt that confidence in a sudden ache of longing right under her tongue - not longing *for* her, a stranger she didn't know who probably watched boring TV, but a longing to *be* her. A woman who was never miserable, never confused, never helpless. She was the opposite of Helena, standing there in her disheveled clothes, staring at her out of eyes on the third day of no sleep.

Next to her, another girl saw her, direct eye contact that was like an electric shock in this crowd where nobody was trying to meet anybody's eyes. Helena almost backed away from them, the beautiful model whose life was perfect, the serenely jubilant girl next to her, full of vibrant color and abandon, but she held out a hand. Helena looked at it for a second - just a normal hand, dark skin, long nails, nobody she knew - and then back at her, some stranger who wanted her to come dance with them.

She didn't really have the words to describe, even to herself, the feeling of letting something go. But she did, and when she threw herself in to swim through the crowd to the two of them and then her hands into the sky as if she too were beautiful in tropical colors and winged eyeliner, she danced with her whole body, as much as it could, every remaining drop of energy suddenly devoted to reaching for something else that wasn't lying on an apartment floor.

Todos los dos, the song rang over the electronic strings, or maybe *todos los tres*, and *descubridoras de este amor ciego*.

By the time the next three songs finally gave way to another downbeat one, Valencia was ready for a break. Her gloss was probably losing its sheen and there was a guy wearing way too much wrist jewelry who kept getting her hips confused for someone's he knew, and she was tired of slapping him.

The dark-skinned girl with the laughing smile touched her arm and tossed her head in the direction of the wooden temporary bathrooms set up, and Valencia figured that was as good an excuse as any, following after her. As always, leaving the center of a dance floor was a system shock, making her feel suddenly cold and her ears suddenly ring, but the bathroom helped, the little tin can on wooden stilts an enclosed enough area to at least hear themselves think. Of course, now she was in a tin can with a stranger, and she was immediately offended by the realization that she wasn't sure what to do about it.

Awkwardly, she went with, "Sorry about the beer," which hadn't even been her fault but was something, anyway. The mirrors gave her an excuse to look away, and yes, her gloss did need a refresher,

which gave her a further excuse to work on that while she said, "I'm Valencia. I usually go to South Beach on the weekends, but I don't know, I wanted to hear this chick, I guess."

She didn't notice they had a third person until she turned around; they'd all been dancing in a clump, so it wasn't that surprising, though. Bathroom visits at clubs and concerts were always safer in a team. "Oh, hey," she said, now with two other girls to talk to and close to throwing in the towel on it, heading back out to the dance floor. The third girl looked like somebody'd rolled her down the stairs of her apartment building. Maybe they did. It wouldn't be the first time that happened to someone around here.

That thought wasn't very much fun, either, so Valencia took control of it and said, "Hey, you totally sweated off your face. Come here, I've got backup stuff." She had eyeliner for those sleepy brown eyes and a pink backup gloss that would give her a pop, and they could do something about that fluffy dark hair, too. "Here, lean on the counter, hopefully it doesn't collapse before I'm done. *Chica*, your hair needs a salon day."

It was weird to be here instead of out there. The concert was barely her scene, let alone the bathroom of a concert, but here she was. And here they both were, and oddly enough, she liked that for the moment.

Islande tagged her new friends as the song ended, making sure they knew where she was going so they didn't think she'd just disappeared. She wouldn't have left the dance floor at all except that her skirt was finally getting sticky enough to bother her, and if she wanted to save it (and she'd better, because it wasn't getting replaced), she had to go rinse it out.

The bathroom was a concert bathroom, which meant it had a constant stream of mildly drunk girls waving and laughing as they went in and out but also enough room for her to start squeezing her skirt out over the sink while she gave the other beer-struck girl a rueful look. The woman's aristocratic features and piercing eyes were a lot more intimidating now that she could see them more clearly under fluorescent lights, but that just gave her a great reason to say, "Islande, but you can call me Issi. I love this band so I had to come! Wow, you don't need to do *any* makeup touchup, believe me." She was probably stunning completely without makeup, too, like their other new friend.

She started running water on her skirt while she grinned at the other new arrival, apparently getting a free makeover as soon as she thought it. "You can call me Issi, too!" she told her. "You have some amazing dance moves." She'd never seen any quite like them, and that was exactly why it was worth it to go out to parties and concerts. If she'd gone home to sleep, she'd never have met either of them.

Valencia was sweet, too, if her taking over helping the other girl was anything to go by, and Islande always trusted her instincts on that. "You just got off work, too, huh?" she asked the other girl, then rummaged in Valencia's purse, unconcerned because they were now friends, to come up with a comb and a few fuzzy elastics. "You get the face, I'll get the hair," she told her cheerfully, and started with undoing the bun so that the girls' hair cascaded down, thick and wavy even after what looked like a missed shower or two. "Oh, wow, gorgeous," she told her, and started working on getting the comb through it without pulling too hard. "Let me know if I hurt you, okay?"

Helena's heart was even more in her throat now in a temporary bathroom trailer, where she could see that both girls she'd danced with were, contrary to all expectation, even more distressingly beautiful now that they were fully lit and talking to each other, sounding like talking was the easiest and most natural thing in the world. "I'm Helena," she said, not sure which one she was saying it to, followed

by, "I might be a little drunk."

She didn't have an activity to participate in here with people doing their makeup and hair; she wasn't wearing any makeup and had nothing in her pockets except a few dollar bills. But apparently that didn't matter to anybody. Valencia came at her with a soft foam eyeshadow wand that made her sit still so she didn't get stabbed in the eye, and Islande - Issi - was already in her hair, with strong fingers gentle against her scalp. It was a feeling she hadn't been expecting. She hadn't been expecting much of anything for the past week.

Grinning was almost a forgotten feeling. The stretch of her mouth and jaw muscles flooded her ears and then brain with sudden chemical happiness and it suddenly was the easiest thing in the world to ask, "You a barista, too?" to Issi and answer, "You'd never know you didn't come to this scene, burning up the dance floor," to Valencia, as if she'd known them forever.

Issi turned break-up hair into something else, something ready to fluff up and bounce when she went back to the dance floor. Valencia glossed her lips with the concentration of an imperious queen. And for the first time in a while, Helena suddenly felt that everything was going to be all right for once.

The amps shook the makeshift bathroom when the dance beat started again outside, drawing Valencia back to it, that washing-away tide that would make her forget everything that wasn't a good time. But she also wasn't really feeling that anymore, and anyway, the giggling in the bathroom, she realized, had made her forget about all that, too, for a minute.

She capped her mascara and slipped it back into her mirrored bag before she said on impulse, "Hey, so... are either of you looking for someplace to live?" She wasn't *planning* on roommates, but she wasn't going to sit around and watch things happen on the TV forever. What was the alternative? Being the last member of the family, all alone in the world, probably selling feet pictures for rent? No, she'd simply decided that wasn't going to happen. So it wasn't.

Issi, eyes sparkling and necklace of beads glittering like stars, said she needed her own place anyway, and, "That sounds like such a wonderful adventure, like a getting-to-know-you party!" Helena, obviously hesitating as she looked at herself big-eyed in the mirror, didn't answer right away, but then in a sudden rush of decision she said, "Hell, yeah, give me a couch and I'm good to go." And Valencia, who barely knew either of them and certainly didn't care if they said yes or no, seized both of their hands and laughed out loud, all of a sudden.

When they left, running back out to the dance floor as if they'd suddenly remembered it was there, they were all holding hands, connected like a circuit, so that they threw all of them into the air at once, and Helena was singing *oh hold onto my halo baby* while Valencia was singing *mantenma santa y honesta* and Issi was singing *ke nou chache absolution ansanm*, and none of them felt any difference in the languages in their mouths.

