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## *IX - It's been a while*

Nadia had her passport checked. In fact, this was the third checkup of her passport since landing but she had been through it before and simply waited patiently. The femme behind the bulletproof glass had inserted the little plastic card into her machine and was now running a checkup on the DNA-sample in the passport, the photo, the previous ports-of-call and so on. Everything got checked. Nothing was left to chance. Nadia knew it annoyed some furs having to wait but she didn't particularly like to fly, and it made her feel safer. It wasn't that she was afraid of flying. But there *was* a slight nervousness there every time she got into the air.

"Here you go Miss Leon. Everything checks out," the airport-official said.

Nadia smiled and took her passport back. She nodded to the two bodyguards and continued on. She had to get her bags off the conveyor belt...then go find Mr. and Mrs. Lopez. She had called from the airport before leaving to make sure they knew what gate she'd arrive at, so she felt pretty sure they'd be there.

The bodyguards didn't respond to her nod. They simply looked big, strong and somewhat menacing. Nadia couldn't help thinking they attracted more attention than she would on her own. Still, there was no point in being careless. While she wasn't

exactly the number one face on the gossip-homepages, her father was extremely rich and there were certainly enough wackos out there who might try to take advantage of that.

Sighing slightly, she shook her head. Worrying about flying, worrying about getting abducted, worrying about the next terrorist attack, worrying about...

Enough of that. She was there to have a great summer and she intended to. She'd tell the bodyguards to turn back and let her walk the last few hundred yards on her own, but first of all she knew they wouldn't...and secondly, it wouldn't do them any good. They would have to leave through the gate, then go through check-in again to get back on the plane.

At least she would be allowed to stay with her friends in peace, without having them looming over her like that.

Again, she couldn't blame her father. Airports were busy places and anything could happen there.

She got to the conveyor belts and looked for the right one. As chance would have it, her luggage was some of the first to come rolling past and she picked it up, heading for the gate out of the arrival-area. No more security-checkups. No more hassle. She walked through the gate and looked around to see if she could recognize anyone. At least she knew Mr. and Mrs. Lopez would be very easy to recognize. Or at least Mr. Lopez would. There weren't that many maned wolves around after all.

"NADIA!! OVER HERE!"

She smiled. That made things easier. They had recognized *her*. Then again, how many lions with the markings of a doe were there in the world?

"Mrs. Lopez?" she said and turned around, smiling to the gray vixen approaching her.

Jean nodded. "That'd be me, but please...for the love of...don't call me that. It makes me sound like a dry old school-teacher," she said and smiled. "My my...didn't you just grow into the spitting image of your parents?"

Nadia grinned and shrugged. "I guess I did. Even though I've had to deal with a lot of bullying because of these markings."

"Well, you wouldn't be your parent's daughter if you had caved in and gotten a dye-job," Jean said and winked. "Is that all your luggage?"

"Yeah, I figured I might buy a few things while I'm here instead of bringing too much..."

"Alright, but I brought a few strong males to carry anyway. Just in case. Esteban is outside by the car, and Charles went looking for something to cart your luggage outside in."

Smiling again, Nadia picked up her bags. So this was it. She'd arrived in San Francisco. All that remained was to have a great time, and she felt pretty certain that part would be easy.

###

"It's been a while since we tried..."

Fox wasn't quite sure how to explain this to Miriam, and it annoyed him. He of all furs should know how to deal with a sore topic and touchy furs. It was different when it came to his wife, though. It still annoyed him.

They were sitting in their garden. This time of year, Los Angeles was usually sweltering with heat and this year was no different. Their garden wasn't large, but it was a lot more comfortable than being indoors. Miriam refused to have air conditioning in the house for environmental reasons, and no amount of airing would make staying indoors bearable. But despite the size of the garden, they were sitting apart. Miriam was reading a book and he was trying to just relax. It was a forlorn hope. Relaxation was a word that had somehow worked its way out of his vocabulary the last ten years or so.

Miriam looked up and towards him with a sad, rather tired facial expression. "And after how it went last time, Fox, I don't think it's a good idea we try again at all. I can't bear more recrimination."

Sighing, Fox was about to retort, but he stopped himself. Esteban had said some pretty wise things about this and he knew he would do well to remember that.

"I know," he said. He wanted to say more. Somehow find the right words and he even knew what they were. They just wouldn't come over his lips. He was ashamed of himself for it. This was not how he had thought he would be. He was an open-minded fur. His circle of friends was the ultimate proof of that, if he ever needed to prove it to anyone. But that was something he'd given thought lately. Who had he ever needed to prove his open-mindedness to?

Himself.

That was the only answer. No one else. And he had succeeded, spectacularly. He liked his friends, and he wouldn't dream of getting rid of any of them. But he had only ever needed to prove that he was open-minded to one fur, and that was himself. It was grating on his conscience to have come to that realization. Somehow, he felt like he owed Jean an apology. Her and others, for that matter.

Sighing, he turned to face his wife again. "No more recrimination, Miriam. I've been wrong to blame you. It took a hangover and some Esteban'ish wisdom to make me realize that...but it was never your fault. I apologize...and I hope you'll forgive me."

Miriam looked up from her book and took a moment to observe her husband. She had wanted him to apologize for his behavior for years, but now that he did, she realized she wasn't sure if she was ready to accept the apology. That thought frightened her. If she wasn't prepared to accept it, then...

No, she wasn't at that point yet. What if Fox was serious about this? What if he meant it? Would she be the one to reject an apology if it was honestly meant?

She took a deep breath and put her book aside. "If we're going to do this, Fox...it's just about the last chance we have."

"I know."

"I want you to make me a promise."

Fox nodded. He wanted to make this work. More than anything. "Anything," he said, smiling a little.

Miriam took one long look at her husband again, trying to gauge his sincerity. She saw no hint of anything but honesty on his face, though. Finally, she nodded to herself and leaned forward a little. "If it doesn't work...we're going to accept the facts and adopt instead."

Nodding again, Fox smiled. "Absolutely. I promise...that's exactly what we'll do."

Miriam nodded and picked her book back up, going back to reading. "I'll go talk to the doctor tomorrow then...ask her what I can do to help make it work out this time," she said. She wasn't sure if this was a good idea, though. She wanted to talk to the doctor about that as well, but there was no reason to tell Fox that.

Not yet anyway.

###

Charles didn't exactly know how to feel. On one paw, it was really cool to have Nadia there, and on the other, the looming meeting with his biological mother constantly threatened to ruin his mood. From the looks of things, his sister felt the same way. And it hadn't taken Nadia more than ten minutes to pick up on the ambivalent mood.

She'd asked what was wrong. Charles admired her guts for doing so. Many furs would've simply assumed they had something to do with it and kept quiet, which in this case could have led to the whole visit getting ruined. In return, Nadia had received a straight and honest answer. In fact, she had nearly received a straight and honest answer from both of his parents AND himself and his sister at the same time. They had nearly stumbled over one another to explain that it wasn't Nadia's fault.

Nadia, in return, had nodded and fallen silent for a little while. Then she had offered to come along for the meeting. She had reasoned that it would be really awkward for the adults to meet, and clearly Charles and Frances both felt uncomfortable about this meeting, too.

Charles hadn't been able to bring himself to accept, but he had been honestly grateful for the offer. It had helped the mood a lot too, to get it out in the open. They were seated in the back garden with some ice tea and a sliced up watermelon, talking and catching up. Charles felt good about that. His parents were clearly forgetting their worries for a little while, asking about Nadia's parents and how they were doing. Nadia was quite happy to answer, and she had brought a lot of photos of her home and family.

There was a lot of ooh'ing and aah'ing going on.

Still, Charles couldn't shake the feeling of imminent dread at meeting his biological mother.

He got up and beckoned for Frances to follow him. Nadia was mid-explanation about something on one of the photos anyway.

The twins headed into the kitchen and Charles turned to look at his sister. "You look miserable..." he said, matter-of-factly.

"So do you!" Frances answered.

Charles didn't place any significance on the way his sister snapped at him. She was clearly a bundle of nerves and he knew she meant nothing by it. Instead, he nodded and gave her a hug. "Hey, it's okay, Sis...we're both on edge over this."

Frances hugged her brother back, fiercely. She was shivering slightly. "I don't want to do this, but we really need to. Why did she have to do this for, anyway? Why did she feel a driving need to come into our lives and mess up our family like this??"

Charles smiled crookedly and let go of Frances again with a shrug. "You know...I think that's an excellent question for us to ask her when we meet her."

That clearly stumped Frances momentarily. "You mean...?"

"I mean there's no law in the book that states that we must be even cordial and civil towards her when we meet her. Now...I'm not going to shame Mom and Dad by being a real prick about this, but that's not going to keep me from demanding some answers to some really basic questions."

"Like 'Why?' and 'What the Hell were you thinking?'"

"Exactly like that, yes," Charles said and leaned against the kitchen table.

Frances nodded, clearly thinking hard about that. "I think you're right. We don't have to sit there and call her 'Mom' or anything of the sort. We don't even have to pretend we like her."

"We don't know her, Frankie...we *can't* like her," Charles pointed out.

"I've been telling myself that I hated her guts for what she did to us, but that's not right either, is it? I don't, really. I don't know her and I don't care about her. What we're doing...we're not doing for *her* sake. We're doing it for Mom and Dad's sake..." Frances said, thoughtfully. She was visibly starting to relax.

Charles nodded again. He took a crumbled up piece of paper out of his wallet before putting it back in his back pocket and looked at it for a while, before returning his gaze to his sister. "Her phone-number. She'll be in town another week according to her letter. If we don't meet her soon, we won't have the chance to ask her those questions..."

"...and we'll waste the only chance we have to make Dad relax about this again, once and for all," Frances answered. "And besides, we've got a visitor now...we can't really do this to Nadia. She's really nice and yet she's landed right in the middle of this. The longer we wait..."

"...the longer she has to put up with this crap. Alright...what say you we call this femme right now and arrange to meet her tomorrow?"

Frances just nodded and went to pick up the phone. She returned to her brother and held it out for him.

He took it. Knowing his sister, it was probably better if he actually made the call. It felt like he had a whole colony of bees buzzing around in his stomach, but he still started pressing the numbers. This was the right thing to do. For everyone involved.

The phone rang on the other end.

It was picked up.

Charles took a deep breath and nodded to his sister. "Hello...this is Charles Lopez. I believe you've sent a letter to my sister and me a couple of weeks back? Yes Ma'am...that'd be me. I'm calling because I'd like to arrange for a meeting tomorrow. Just you and me and my sister. No one else..."

###

Kalen had been thinking a lot since his conversation with his mother yesterday. The whole situation about him being an only child had gone from a non-issue to filling up his world in a very significant way. He'd taken his car that morning, after breakfast, telling his mothers that he was heading for the practice field, to throw some footballs around. It was true, too. He'd done so. But he'd long since gone on. He'd spoken to Coach Larsen about Steve and she had agreed to give the wolf a chance on Kalen's recommendation.

Apparently, Steve had already asked for that chance, himself. Coach Larsen would take him through a workout that afternoon to see what he could do.

Kalen hoped it'd work out. The wolf might have been a royal pain in his backside for years, but he had been raised to think everyone deserved a second chance and Steve *had* been the one to extend a paw.

He'd spent no more time thinking about that. Instead, he'd been thinking about the conversation the day before as he had left the practice field. There was one fur he really wanted to talk to about this.

Two, actually, when he came to think about it. Turning left at a T-intersection, he shook his head at his own thoughts. So he was an only child and there was nothing that would change that. It wasn't something he necessarily wanted to change but he felt horrible about the reason why.

He turned down another road, coming up on a nice, suburban neighborhood. He'd been there so many times he knew the way in his sleep, and he pulled up in front of the relevant house and got out. Sticking his keys in his pocket, he walked through the front yard to the door, knocking on it.

It took a while before anyone responded. When the door finally opened, Kalen was greeted by a large, squarely set equine femme with warm eyes. "Ohh...hey Kale. What's up?"

"Hi Julia...I need to talk to my Dad if he's here?" Kalen answered. He liked Julia. He always had. She was just the right kind of wife for his dad, too. Someone who took no nonsense from anyone and who would tell even the president to shut up, sit down, eat his sprouts and be happy about it.

The large femme nodded and tossed her head. "He's out back. Come on in, I'll go get him..."

"Nah, it's okay," Kalen said with a smile. "I'll go back there. I need to talk to him about something serious..."

"Oh dear oh dear...what's her name, Kale?" Julia said.

It took a moment before Kalen caught the glint in the femme's eye. "Hah hah, very funny," he chuckled. "It's nothing like that."

Julia grinned and nodded. "Well go on then. I'm sure he won't mind."

Kalen nodded and wiped his hooves on the doormat. Then he slipped on a pair of rubber hoof-covers before entering. In a house full of equines, anyone with an ounce of sense would go for carpets over wooden floors but carpets were impractical in a kitchen, and he had to pass through that to get to the back door. As a result he kept some hoof-covers in his Dad's house too since he visited so often. He didn't particularly feel like slipping on the kitchen floor and breaking a leg during state playoffs.

Or at any time for that matter.

"Hey Dad!" he called out as he opened the back door. "Got a moment?"

Colton looked up. He'd been painting the tool-shed and would welcome a break. "Sure, any time. I thought you'd be on the practice field getting ready for this week's match?"

"I've already been there...look, Dad, I've got something I need to talk to you about. It's pretty serious..."

"Alright, who is she?" Colton asked.

Kalen groaned. "Julia already tried that. Her name is Yohni, Dad...it's about Mom. I need to talk to you about something...you know...family-related."

Colton put down the bucket of paint and the brush, wiping some sweat off his forehead with the back of his right arm. "Alright. Let's hear it then..." he said, sounding curious. "I assume when you say it's about your Mom that you still mean Yohni?"

"Of course. You know how I feel about that. I'm spoiled rotten...I have three parents to give me presents at Christmas and birthdays," Kalen said and sat down in a wheelbarrow, tipping it in the process. It made for a comfortable, if rather low, chair.

Chuckling, Colton nodded. "Yeah I know...and I agree. Anyway, what has you so contemplative?"

"The fact that I'm an only child and the reason why. She told me yesterday..."

"You sure you want to talk to *me* about this? I mean, I don't mind...but isn't this something you should be talking to your mothers about?"

Kalen nodded. "Yeah I'm sure I need to talk to you, Dad. Because I need some advice. Mom felt really awful and it showed, even though she tried to say she wasn't worried about it anymore. I felt like I ripped open an old wound...and I didn't mean to."

Colton scratched his cheek, smearing paint into his fur without noticing. He was starting to understand what Kalen needed from him and he would like to help. It was the kind of situation no fur liked to be in. Having inadvertently caused a loved one a lot of pain.

"You want to ask if I have any ideas how you can make it up to her, I take it?" he asked.

Kalen nodded again, looking hopeful. "You've always been great with femmes, Dad. Just look at your marriage. You're one of the happiest couples I know! Julia told me once that you're really good with compliments and that you always make her feel appreciated and loved."

"Well, it's kinda different doing that to your wife than to your own mother, Kale..."

"I know but...there's gotta be something I can do?"

Colton smiled. "First of all, you can relax about it a bit. I know your mothers and I know she's probably not blaming you in any way. In fact, this is probably already forgotten..."

"Dad, if it hasn't come to your attention, I'm a teenager! I'm *supposed* to worry about these kinds of things..."

Colton couldn't help laughing. "I know. Okay...I don't have an answer for you here and now, except not to worry too much about this. But I'll think about it, okay? If I come up with something, I'll let you know."

Kalen nodded and smiled. "Sure. Look, I'd stay and help with the shed, but..."

"No you wouldn't!"

"Would too! Only there's this girl I gotta go talk to about this as well..."

Colton raised an eyebrow. "A girl?" he asked and picked up the paintbrush again.

"For chrissakes, Dad...just because I'm sixteen doesn't mean I can't look at a girl or even talk to one without trying to get it on with her."

Smiling crookedly, Colton dipped the paintbrush in the paint again. "Are you gay, Son?" he asked.

"DAAAD!"

"Alright, okay...I'm just teasing you, Kale..."

Kalen shook his head in disbelief, but he couldn't help smiling. "You're unbelievable. No, I'm not, to answer your question. I'm just in the rather weird situation that every girl at school except Frances wants a date with me..."

"And you're not jumping at the chance? You gotta be gay!"

"DAAAD!!!"

Colton gave up even trying to keep a straight face. "Sorry, sorry...I'll stop. It's just not what you'd normally hear from a sixteen year old high-school Quarterback, you know."

Kalen shrugged and sighed. "I know...it's just...seriously, Dad, they all want to go out with me because of my left arm and my five-step drop, you know?"

Colton started painting again, still smiling. "That's a novel way of putting it. What's wrong about that, then?"

"Dammit, Dad, most of them don't even know my last name. Even if they do, over half of them would never even talk to me if it wasn't for me being the QB, okay? I want to go out with somebody who doesn't give a damn about how far I can throw a football or who doesn't care what my ass looks like in a pair of uniform-pants!"

"You want to date someone who doesn't care about football?"

"I didn't say that. It doesn't matter whether she cares about football or not. What matters is why she wants to date *me*!" Kalen said, sighing.

Colton stopped painting again for a moment and looked at his son. "Damned...you are something else, Kale...you really are."

Kalen shrugged. "Anyway...it's nothing like that with this girl. I mean...she's gorgeous, don't get me wrong. I'm not blind or anything. But she's my friend, y'know?"

Nodding, Colton smiled again. "Well then, you'd better go and talk to her then, don't you?"

Kalen nodded and got up, out of the wheelbarrow. He brushed himself off and smiled a little. "Yeah, I guess I do. You take care, Dad...I hope you'll be there for the game this weekend. It's on our home turf..."

"Count on it..." Colton said and dipped the paintbrush in the paint again.

Kalen left. Colton didn't start painting for a while. 'But she's my friend, y'know,' Kalen had said. Finally he nodded to himself. "That's usually a good way to start a relationship," he mumbled and finally got started on the last bit of the tool-shed.

###

Esteban was more his old self than he had been for weeks and Jean couldn't thank Nadia enough for the positive influence. It was nice to simply see her husband smile and laugh again. Charles and Frances had told her that they intended to talk to their biological mother the next day, to 'get it over with' as they both put it. Once again, Jean had told them not to be too quick to judge and reminded them that they might end up liking this unknown femme. That there would be nothing *wrong* with liking her. Frances had looked like she was going to be physically sick at the suggestion, but Jean had still made both children promise not to be too judgmental. She had no illusions about them

actually going in there being friendly, but at least she could ask them to be on their best behavior.

She hadn't raised them to be mean.

Nadia's offer to go with them had been well intentioned but obviously not convenient. But Jean could certainly see both Lizzy and Leo in the girl. Helpful, kind and not afraid to speak up. All hallmarks of both of her parents.

Jean walked up behind her husband and slipped her arms around his chest, leaning her cheek against his back. "It's good to see you happy again, Love. I've missed it."

Esteban made a content sound and nodded. He had been just about to make a cup of tea for Jean and himself, but that could wait a moment. The embrace felt nice. "I'm sorree I've been so...deestant."

"It's okay. I've been just as worried as you. But if we both came apart...I dare not think what that would've done to the kids," the vixen said, softly.

Again, Esteban nodded. "I know. But...Chica...they are *my* cheeldren! And *your* cheeldren. And that...creature...let them go. She has no right to them. She doesn't even have a right to know them!"

Jean turned the wolf around and shook her head. "No she doesn't. But *they* have a right to know *her*...if they wish to. We've always been honest with them about the adoption. We've never kept it hidden and it's never been a factor. They are our kids. They'll *still* be our kids when they've met her."

Esteban sighed and slumped. "I know, Chica...I know. I just weesh she'd have stayed away ees all."

"So do I, but I trust both Charles and Frances completely. They'll make the right choices. In fact, I don't even think they see this as a matter of choice."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you see them hooting and howling and jumping with joy because they're going to meet their biological mother?"

Esteban was about to answer. Then he stopped and shook his head. One ear perked up, the other flopped slightly and he canted his head slightly in that way Jean had long since come to recognize as his most contemplative expression. "No. They don't, do they? They seem...angree?"

Jean smiled a crooked little smile. "Esteban...Love of my life and moon in my evening sky...dearest, sweet lobo...you are so unbelievably *blind* sometimes it's almost cute," she said, in a slightly admonishing tone of voice.

Esteban looked slightly worried. Whenever Jean started talking like that, it usually meant he'd made some kind of minor blunder. "Erhm..." he mumbled and tried to figure it out.

"Charles and Frances adore you. You're the best father any teenager could possibly ask for. Dammit, you've even got something *I* don't have when it comes to parenthood. You've got coolness factor! I'm just a dusty historian who teaches at University and who writes books and articles. Who cares about that kind of ridiculous nonsense in High School? Whereas you, my dear, film blockbuster movies! When their classmates come to school talking about some awesome movie they watched this past weekend at the cinema, Charles and Frances grow two inches in the eyes of their peers because they are *your* kids!" Jean explained, patiently.

"I'm...not always there for them when they need me..."

"Bullshit. You're always there! The only times you're not there is because you're not at home, because you're out filming aforementioned blockbuster movies. Which makes them 'cool by association'. I can't remember ever seeing you say no to one of them if they needed to talk or if they just needed their Dad. Ever."

Esteban kissed Jean's hair and put his arms around her. "Gracias, Chica...I guess I needed to hear that."

"You damned well did," Jean grumbled but still snuggled up in her husband's arms. "No more long faces?"

"No more long faces."

"Good. Let's bring some ice-cream to the living room. I'm sure Nadia wouldn't mind some of your homemade pistachio-marzipan stuff."

Esteban's tail began to wag. He clearly wouldn't mind either.

###

"He's a pretty good looking guy, Dina," Catherine said and grinned.

Dina closed the door behind Kalen, turning to her neighbor with a shrug. "He's just sixteen, Cat. But he's one of the nicest guys I know..."

"True, he's kinda young. But he's going to grow into the most drop dead gorgeous hunk when he gets another three or four years behind him," the wolf said with a smile. "You sound thoughtful, though. Is something wrong?"

Dina looked at the closed door for a moment, before shaking her head. "Yeah, he probably will. Considering who his mother is, I think that's pretty much a given," she said. "And no, I'm fine...he just came by to talk to me about...being an only child, that's all..."

Catherine raised an eyebrow. "Ohhh...any particular reason or is that private? And who's his mother if I may ask?"

"I wouldn't mind telling you if it was myself, but I don't think I should spread his private-life around. He came to me in confidence."

"Makes sense. Anyway...don't hold out on me...you make it sound like his mother is a celebrity of some sort..."

Dina smiled crookedly. "She is. Do you know Gabrielle Ryder?"

"What, you mean the designer of creator of RAW and Gay-rights activist?? You gotta be kidding..."

"And former porn actress to boot. She's one of those forty-something year olds that makes most teenage boys drool lustily."

Catherine looked severely grossed out at the mental image. "Eew...you didn't have to get that graphic. Seriously though...he's Gabrielle Ryder's son? But...I thought..."

"Being homosexual doesn't wreck your reproductive organs, Cat. And as far as I know, she's not really much of an activist. It's more a matter of her giving some interviews in the past where her sexuality was mentioned, and she simply said that she longed for the day where a fur living in a homosexual relationship wouldn't constantly be grilled about it as if it was abnormal. But yes, she's married to another femme..."

Nodding, Catherine smiled. "Well, I can certainly see where he gets his looks from then. Anyway, I'd better get going. I have to by at the gym in fifteen minutes..."

"Get a move on then!" Dina chuckled and headed back to her own little apartment.

Catherine took off and Dina went to make herself a cup of coffee. So...Kalen had decided to confide in her about his worries. She was a little surprised and quite honored that he would do so, but she had to admit, she got along very well with the equine. They could...just talk. She didn't know that many sixteen year old boys she could sit down with for hours and just talk, without feeling that he would be talking to her bosom within ten minutes. It was refreshing and pleasant and Kalen was a highly intelligent young fur on top of things. Impressionable, like most teenagers...but possessed by more afterthought than most.

And some of his mother's famous attitude, certainly.

What made Kalen so much fun was that his attitude never once became self obsession. He was able to make as much fun of himself as anyone else. And as Catherine had said, he was pretty easy on the eyes too. Not that she entertained any thoughts of dating Kalen. He was too young for that...even if he was highly mature for his age. And besides, he was a good friend, and she rather liked having friends in this town, since she was the newcomer. She didn't want to mess that up by going out with him.

"Dammit Cat," she giggled to herself, "you didn't need to get me thinking along these lines."

Reassuring herself that there was nothing going on, she picked out a mug from the cupboard before checking her calender. She had no plans she couldn't cancel this upcoming weekend, anyway. There was a football game she really ought to go watch. Kalen had told her about it, and since both he and his family had been so nice and helpful since she arrived in San Francisco, the least she could do was turn up.

The coffee was done already and she poured herself a mug before heading to her bedroom. She flopped down on her bed and booted up her lap-top. The Internet connection established immediately. It was a wireless system, covering all of Campus. Free of cost. All it took was a small program installed on the machine, which was only available to students and employees.

"Let's see..." she muttered. "Kale plays for UHS...but who did he say they were playing again? Oh yeah...the Calistoga Cubs..."

It wasn't too hard finding some information on the opposition and Dina believed in doing her homework...