

THE CLIQUE

SUMMER COLLECTION



ALICIA

A CLIQUE NOVEL BY
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poppy

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
New York Boston

BARCELONA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

CUSTOMS GATE

Monday, June 8

1:45 P.M.

Alicia Rivera stuffed her purple and turquoise vintage Pucci silk wrap in the side pocket of her Louis Vuitton monogrammed carry-on and wheeled it toward the baggage claim. She could practically *hear* her mother scolding her for treating the delicate, wrinkle-prone fabric with such reckless abandon. But she opposite of cared. Nadia was back in Westchester, and Alicia had just arrived in Spain. Thanks to an all-consuming lipo-gone-wrong trial, her attorney father and supportive mother had to stay home. And that meant *she* was parent-free for the first summer of her entire life.

The rules were about to change.

Barcelona International Airport (or *Bar-theh-lona*, as the locals called it) was another reminder that Alicia was a world away from New York. Women whizzed past her, smelling like musky cologne and wearing brightly colored pumps. Men wore hair gel that shined like MAC Lipglass, and loafers without socks. College kids with bulging neon backpacks that had been sloppily stitched with American or Canadian flags shuffled by in Texas, their expressions a mix of airplane-groggy and let-the-games-begin psyched.

If Massie had been in the overly air-conditioned terminal,

she'd have been rolling her eyes at the "poor-taste parade." But Alicia had a secret appreciation for the variety. Light denim washes and sneakers that looked like bowling shoes weren't exactly her thing, but they were different—a welcome change from the usual Rock & Republic five-pockets and Havaianas. And isn't that what summer's all about?

A loud, girly squeal, the kind perfected by *High School Musical* fans, forced Alicia's attention to the orange wall of billboards to her left. Between the faded ads for a Goya exhibit at El Prado and some sugary cereal made of red marshmallow-shaped bulls were five Euro-tweens giggle-posing next to a poster of an overly Photoshopped, deeply bronzed, black-haired, hazel-eyed boy.

After their picture had been taken, they each kissed his bleached, bathroom-tile-like teeth, leaving behind cherry red lip prints and a citrus-floral medley of the different perfumes they must have been sampling in the duty-free shop.

Alicia stopped in front of the billboard and tried to decipher the yellow, all-caps font that shouted: SI ERES UNA VERDADERA BELLEZA ESPAÑOLA TE QUIERO PARA MI PROXIMO VIDEO MUSICAL. EL BAILE RECREADO PARA LA CANCIÓN "RAIN IN SPAIN." LAS AUDICIONES SERAN EN EL HOTEL LINDO. ¡i! TE HARE UNA ESTRELLA.

Alicia had learned enough Spanish from her mother and their six previous visits to know that the pop star on the poster was looking for "a real Spanish beauty" to be in his "new music video." And—from what she could gather—his name was ¡i!.

Instantly, a vision of herself in a swiveling makeup chair being blushed, blow-dried, then whisked off to wardrobe made Alicia's travel-chapped hands slick with excitement-sweat. After the Spanish paparazzi had made her a household name, she'd return to U.S. soil, ready to claim her seat on the alpha throne. She'd hold a private viewing party in her father's screening room, where the Pretty Committee and their new crushes (TBD) would admire her on the big screen as she played her international music video for them over and over and over. Every time she'd turn it off, they'd beg her to run it again so they could admire her beauty and study her advanced dance moves one more time. It would be the perfect way to start the eighth grade. Massie would envy her times ten. And *that* would give her a surplus of confidence that would fuel her until Thanksgiving, if not a week or two longer.

So what if she wasn't a *real* Spanish beauty. Her mother was, and that made her half. And *half* of Alicia was better than anyone else's whole—at least from what she could see in the Barcelona International Airport: Her slick dark hair was the shiniest, her white Diors were the roundest, her navy Ralph Lauren shirtdress and wide gold metallic belt were the most stylish, and her wood-soled Miu Miu wedges were the highest. Besides, she trained at Westchester's prestigious Body Alive Dance Studio. And there wasn't a purebred in all of Spain who could claim that.

She might not have been an alpha yet, but becoming a Spalpha—a Spanish alpha—was totally doable. And once

she ruled Spain for a summer, she'd have enough experience to dominate Octavian Country Day School back home. From the moment Alicia stepped off the plane, twenty-seven people—wait, make that twenty-eight—had checked her out. And she hadn't even arrived at baggage claim yet.

When she did, she spotted her sixteen-year-old twin cousins, Celia and Isobel Callas. They were sitting in one of those long golf carts used to transport luggage and old people, teasing the driver by repeatedly knocking off his black patent-leather cap. They threw their long, tanned necks back and cackled as he feigned frustration. It probably wasn't every day—or every decade, even—that the pint-size porter had two leggy, raven-haired socialites ravage him for free. The scene made Alicia's exfoliated feet tingle with joy.

"Yippee!" Celia—or was it Isobel?—hollered as she tossed the driver's cap like a Frisbee. It landed on the moving luggage conveyor belt and began making its circular journey. He rolled his eyes playfully and hopped off the cart to chase after it. Isobel—or was it Celia?—jumped in the front seat, gripped the wheel, slammed her metallic gold espadrille on the gas, and began doing donuts across the shiny beige marble floor.

Alicia couldn't have been more proud to call them family.

"A-lee-cia! A-lee-cia!" they shouted, speeding toward her.

"Hola!" Alicia beam-waved, then jumped out of the way. They screech-stopped in front of her, leaped out, and

planted a series of double-cheek welcome kisses on her blushing face.

“So great to see you, Cousin,” said Celia, tugging the massive gold C on her massive gold chain. It hung below her barely-there cleavage and knocked against the stiff edges of her fuchsia denim vest. She wore it with a burnt orange taffeta bubble skirt and lace-up gold sandals. Her hair was slicked into a tight bun that reflected more light than the porter’s patent-leather cap. “Don’t you look very stylish.”

“Grassy,” Alicia chirped, putting her new abbreviation for *gracias* straight to work.

“I love how you say *grassy*! May I borrow?” asked Isabel, who was wearing a Mediterranean blue tube top, white short shorts, and oversize Ray-Bans with bright blue plastic frames.

They made those?

“You can borrow ‘grassy,’ Iso—I want to borrow that gold belt.” Celia reached out and poked Alicia’s braided Ralph Lauren.

“Given.” Alicia smiled, thinking of her new summer wardrobe and how much her cousins were going to worship it. “My closet is your closet, but . . .” Her voice trailed off as she remembered their thirteen-year-old sister, Nina, and her passion for stealing designer clothes.

The Spanish Loser Beyond Repair had spent a couple weeks at OCD last semester and had not only tried to steal the Pretty Committee’s boyfriends but also half the girls’

wardrobes. So far there was no sign of her. Alicia crossed her French-mani'd fingers and prayed it would stay that way for the entire summer. With any luck, Nina had been shipped off to a reform school for kleptomaniacs, because there was nothing less Spalpa than a SLBR tagalong with theft issues.

A loud, New York Stock Exchange-type bell rang; then bags started to appear on the conveyor belt. One by one they floated by like pageant contestants, sporting pink bows, plaid scarves, and neon tags to ensure they'd be safely reunited with their loving owners. But no one turned to claim them. Instead, the weary travelers could not take their eyes off the three dark beauties and their bright summer clothes. Already Alicia could feel her Spalpa stock rising.

Isobel lifted her blue Ray-Bans, narrowed her almond-shaped brown eyes, and turned to Celia. She said something quickly in Spanish to her sister. Alicia only managed to pick up the words *borrow*, *cousin*, and *audition*. Determined to make this a no-secrets summer, she spoke up:

"Are you talking about the video audition?" she asked, proud that she was already in the know.

"Sí." Isobel lowered her voice and her glasses.

"Your American clothes will be perfect." Celia poked the Ralph Lauren belt again.

"I heart that." Alicia rocked back and forth on the wooden heels of her Miu Mius. She felt beautiful and bouncy, like

her entire body was made of Pantene-commercial hair. “And maybe I can try out in some of your—”

“You can’t!” Celia snapped, her gold necklace swinging back and forth. “You are not true Spanish.”

“Puh-lease!” Alicia rolled her tired brown eyes. It was bad enough when Massie called her Fannish (fake Spanish) just because her father, Len, was American. But it was quite another thing to hear it from her own flesh and blood. And no self-respecting alpha would stand for it. The old Alicia would have admitted defeat and resigned herself to a summer of cheering on her cousins while she envy-watched from the sidelines. But the new Alicia was going to fight for her rightful place in the Spalpha kingdom. And she was going to win.

“They asked for a true Spanish beauty, right?” Alicia pressed.

The twins nodded, barely noticing as the porter sneaked up behind them, reclaimed his cart, and sped off.

“Well, what I don’t have in *Spanish*, I make up for in *beauty*.” Alicia tossed her hair. She was acting the part now—soon she would become it.

“Point,” Isobel nodded, still using Alicia’s expression from last summer.

“I say we sneak out of the house tonight and go to the Hotel Lindo. We will party there and search for ii! and his entourage and—”

Sluuuurpppppp. Sluuurrrpppppp.

The sound of someone straw-draining the last drops of liquid from a glass bottle put an instant hold on their scheme session. Alicia turned to see why and came face-to-face with Nina, who had been lurking behind her, an empty Orangina in hand. She was still tall and thin. Her boobs were still massive. But she no longer posed a physical threat, thanks to her new hair-*don't*. She sported thick platinum bangs, and a Dora the Explorer bob grazed her rounded jaw. On a supermodel in New York who only wore skinny jeans, tight black turtlenecks, and matte red lipstick, this look would have been hawt. But on someone wearing a ketchup-stained turquoise racer-back tank with yellow linen pants, it came off more like a dare.

“*Hola*,” Nina hissed, offering no embrace. She was obviously still bitter that the Pretty Committee had publicly busted her at the OCD Valentine’s Day dance for stealing their stuff and asked the police to escort her directly to the airport.

“*Hola*,” Alicia responded coldly. In the split second since Nina had appeared, it seemed like everyone who had been watching them turned away. She was terrible for business.

“I know what you were talking about.” Nina rubbed her heavily lined brown eyes like she’d just woken up, smudging blue kohl under her bottom lashes. “No one has ever seen ii! in person. What makes you think—”

“Go get Cousin’s bags.” Celia stomped her gold sandal. “¡*Vamos!* Papa is waiting in the car.”

Nina chucked her bottle in a metal trash can and stormed off to retrieve the only set of Louis Vuitton suitcases in the mix.

Isobel leaned in toward Alicia, surrounding her in the unmistakably sunny scent of Bobbi Brown's Beach. "We must not let her know what we are up to. She is a—how you say . . . uh, tagalong! And will make us look bad in front of ii!. If you want to have fun with us this summer, you must avoid Little Sister."

"Done!" Alicia beamed, relieved that they were all thinking the same thing.

"Ready?" Nina asked, wheeling two brown and gold suitcases, one in each hand. She led the way through the sliding glass door outside to the pickup area.

The day was humid and bright. The foreign smell of cigarette smoke and exhaust fumes wafted around them, reminding Alicia that she was entering an alternate universe where anything was possible. Smoking in public was acceptable. Betas could become alphas. Fannish could become Spanish. And Nina and her "rob hobby" could be easily avoided.

Suddenly, Nina stopped walking. She turned around and smiled her toothy Emma Roberts grin at Alicia. "Did my sisters tell you we're sharing a room this summer?"

Celia and Isobel quickly turned to face each other, as if they were deeply involved in a telepathic conversation that couldn't be interrupted.

Alicia's heart thumped to the beat of the salsa music blaring from a blue Mini Cooper that had just whizzed past them. "What do you mean? I always get my own—"

"Mama is renovating the guest wing." Nina licked her puffy lips with delight. "So we will all be together. You, me, my graphic novel collection, and your precious American clothes." She cracked her knuckles as if loosening her fingers for an *Ocean's 11*-size heist.

"Wait! *What?*" Alicia checked her pink, crocodile-strap Gucci watch, wondering if there was time to catch the last flight back to JFK.

Just then, Nina rolled one of the suitcases through a steaming brown clump of . . . "Uh-oh, *perro* poo!"

Everyone stopped to examine the stinky wheel.

Celia and Isobel gasped while Alicia buried her face in her hands, knowing exactly how her poor Louis felt.

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Poppy

Little, Brown and Company

Hachette Book Group USA

237 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10017

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First Edition: June 2008

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Cover design by Andrea C. Uva

Cover and author photos by Roger Moenks



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Produced by Alloy Entertainment

151 West 26th Street, New York, NY 10001

ISBN: 978-0-316-02753-3

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Printed in the United States of America