LIKE MOST OF HIS FRIENDS at school, Angel had an older, mean brother who pushed him around and played dirty tricks on him. One time his brother, Javier, nicknamed “Little Weasel” because he had a long, skinny neck, stuck Angel’s bike up in the tree. With the help of his *vato loco* friends, all laughing and spitting sunflower seeds, Weasel hauled the bike to the top of the palm tree that stood in front of their pink stucco house.

“Get it down, Weasel!” Angel screamed, fists clenched and upper lip quivering from anger.

“You accusing me, *ese*?” his brother said, laughing. He spat on the ground and said, “Swim in it, *ese*.”

Javier did not take the bike down until their *papi* drove his squeaky truck into the driveway. Their father, a carpenter, didn’t like dealing with arguing kids when
he came home from work, tired from whacking nails for eight hours.

Another time, when Angel was real young, just out of the stroller, Little Weasel purposefully lost him at the Fresno Fair. Weasel snuck away on noiseless Air Jordans, and when Angel turned around, his face sticky with cotton candy, his brother was out of sight. Tears welled up in Angel’s eyes and his mouth pulled down like a fish’s. He wandered through hordes of people, crying, “Weasel, where are you?”, a torrent of tears sprinkling his cotton candy. When Angel stopped a woman and asked if she had seen Weasel, she pointed to a tall white building and said, “Check the farm animals.”

There had been other tricks. Early one summer morning, Angel had gone out to get the newspaper, and when he returned, shooting the rubber band at their cat, Pleitos, the front door clicked shut and Weasel’s laughing cara appeared at the window. Angel was locked out, with only his pajama bottoms on.

“Let me in!” Angel screamed at the smirking Weasel, who cupped a hand around an ear and mouthed, “What? I can’t hear you, carnal.”

Angel spent the day hiding in the garage until his parents came home from work.

Weasel was sneaky. One day he had tiptoed into the bathroom. Angel was in the shower, a bigote of soapsuds under each arm. Weasel yanked back the shower curtain, said, “Cheese, ese,” and took a Polaroid picture before Angel could cover himself with a washcloth. He just stood there, naked as the day he was born, his mouth hanging open in shock.

Weasel threatened his brother, waving the picture in front of him. “Twenty bucks by tomorrow or the rucas, the girls at school, are gonna get to see that you look like a plucked chicken.”

Weasel laughed as he hurried out of the bathroom, leaving Angel with soap under each arm and some in his eyes.

“You punk!” Angel screamed. “I’m gonna get you!”

Angel rinsed off and climbed out of the shower, pink as a crab. He dressed quickly, pulling up his pants as he ran into the living room. “Where are you?” Angel screamed. He zipped his zipper and pulled his arms through a T-shirt splashed with a picture of Los Lobos.

He checked their bedroom, the kitchen, their parents’ bedroom, and every crammed closet. Weasel had disappeared like smoke. Angel mumbled a litany of threats and cuss words and stomped outside to the front yard, where Pleitos was sleeping in a puddle of sunlight.

“Where are you, Weasel?” Angel called from their lawn while he scanned the neighborhood. There was no one in sight along the street except their neighbor, Mr. Mendoza, who was sprinkling fertilizer on his dead lawn.

“Have you seen Weasel?” Angel asked Mr. Mendoza, who shook his head. Angel sighed, returned to the front porch, stroked his cat, and asked, “Where did Weasel go?”

Pleitos looked up, a snaggle tooth jutting from the
corner of his mouth, and took a swat at Angel’s hand.

“Aye!” Angel screamed, sucking his scratched hand. He rapped Pleitos’s head with a knuckle. “You’re a bad gato! No wonder the other cats don’t like you.”

Just then Weasel rode by on his bike. He waved the snapshot at Angel and yelled, “Twenty bucks, dude. I know you got it.”

Angel jumped off the porch and started after his brother, who rode just fast enough so Angel couldn’t catch him.

“Come on, man,” Angel begged, sneakers slapping against the asphalt. “Let me have it!”

“Twenty bucks, man.”

“I don’t got it,” panted Angel.

“You do, too. Your nina sent you something for your birthday.”

“It was only five dollars,” Angel said as he slowed down, out of breath.

Weasel circled on the bike and said, “That’s too bad. It’s gonna be show-and-tell, ese.”

“Come on, Weasel, I’m your brother.”

“That’s why I’m doing it to you. I can’t do this to my friends.”

Weasel popped a wheelie and rode away. Angel returned to the house, sweaty as a horse. But he didn’t dare get back into the shower. There was no telling when Weasel might return, next time with a video camera, maybe.

“I could have at least had on my chones,” Angel lamented. But no, he’d been naked, and now it seemed he would have to leave town or die from embarrassment. Weasel always followed through with his threats.

After a moment of deep thought, Angel snapped his fingers and shouted, “I got it!” He ran inside the house and brought out the photo albums, recalling a baby photograph of Weasel standing in the buff by a blow-up pool. He flipped through the plastic pages. When he finally spotted the snapshot, creased and dirty, he cried, “Bingo! I’m saved!” He took it from the plastic sleeve and laughed at the photograph of a two-year-old baby with arms fat as water balloons. It was Weasel, all right. Both fists were clenched and raised, ready to fight, and a candy cigarette was hanging from the corner of his mouth.

“I’ll get that punk now!” Angel said, slipping the picture into his back pocket. It’s my turn to blackmail, he thought, nursing a glass of soda while he waited on the couch for his brother.

When Weasel returned home, hot and tired from popping wheelies, he ripped the soda from Angel’s hand and took a long swig, spitting an ice cube back into the glass.

“Did Louie call?” Weasel asked as he handed the soda back to Angel.

“I don’t want the soda no more. You ruined it with your lips,” Angel scolded. “But I got you now, Weasel!”

Javier ignored his brother and went into the kitchen to help himself to a thick peanut-butter tortilla. He stopped chewing just long enough to clear his throat and ask Angel if he was sure that Louie hadn’t called.

“You’re not listening, Weasel.”
“I am,” he answered, taking another bite of tortilla. He leaned against the kitchen counter, savoring his snack.

“I have your baby picture, the one when you were naked,” Angel taunted, patting the pocket where he had stashed the photo. “You didn’t have your chones on.”

“So?”

“I’ll show it to your friends!” Angel’s eyes were lit with excitement. He thought he’d cornered his brother.

“Pues, it’s no big deal, carnal.”

“Yeah? Well, I’m gonna show it to Vicky!”

Weasel stopped chewing and thought for a moment, his eyes raised toward the ceiling. “Yeah,” he said, swallowing a lump of tortilla. “Do me a favor and show it to Vicky. She’s mad at me. It might perk her up to see me when I was un esquinó.”

Angel flopped his arms at his sides. It’s not working, he thought. He scolded his brother, “You’re bad, man. You’re gonna end up in juvie.”

Weasel laughed and went to the living room. He turned on the television, propped his feet on his father’s hassock, and watched the Giants thrash the Astros, 15–5.

Angel argued with him all afternoon.

“I’m gonna hurt you,” Angel said.

“You and the policía?”

“I’m gonna take your watch, Weasel!”

“It’s broken.”

“I know where you keep your money.”

“I spent it.”

“I’m gonna tell Grandpa!”

“He’s hard of hearing.”

“I’m gonna tell Raymond. He can beat you up.”

“Sorry, dude. He’s in juvie.”

Angel ran out of threats and Weasel was still hungry. He got up, hopped to the kitchen, and stuffed a handful of lunch meat into his mouth. He chewed, swallowed, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and began to reason with his brother.

“If you want this picture back,” he said, touching his shirt pocket, “you’re gonna have to work for me.”

“Like what?” Angel saw a crack of hope.

“Like dishes. Like washing Dad’s truck. I’m supposed to do it.” Weasel opened the refrigerator and took a swig from an opened half-liter of soda.

“You’re not supposed to drink from the bottle, Weasel,” Angel said. “You can spread germs.”

“My germs are cute, man. That’s what Vicky says.”

Weasel took a long swig, his Adam’s apple riding up and down. He smacked his lips and said, “¿Entiendes? You pick up the slack this week, and I’ll give you this photo in a jiffy.” He took out the snapshot and laughed. “You look like a worm, Homes.”

Angel thought for a moment. His brother had tricked him before. He could do it again. But Angel didn’t see any other way out. He couldn’t risk going to school and finding himself tacked on the fourth-grade bulletin board next to Current Affairs.

“OK, you’re the boss,” Angel agreed. “But you better give it to me. You promise?”

“Scout’s honor,” Weasel said, holding one hand up. They slapped palms, and Angel got busy right away.
cleaning their bedroom and scrubbing the toilet, Weasel's job that week. Then he ironed all of Weasel's white T-shirts and khakis. He polished Weasel's bike, working a sock through the spokes until they shone like knives.

Dinner that night was a clatter of happy noise. Their father was happy because he had been moved from right field to second base, a sign of respect, he thought. He played softball for Azteca Construction, but he had barely made the team. He had been helped into the infield by three misfortunes—a sprained ankle for "Spider," a pulled groin for Pedro, and for Leonard, "El Gordo," a drunken driving rap with no license, no insurance, and one headlight gone.

"You should have seen me snatch that pop-up the other night," their father said, beaming, his face fat with frijoles. Placing his fork on his plate, he raised his hands and looked toward the ceiling. He popped one fist into the flat of his other palm and shouted to his imaginary teammates, "I got it. Step back. I'm the hero, man."

"Pop-ups are easy," said Weasel.

"Not this one. It was so high it came down roasted."

"Dad, it was probably just a little dinky one like I used to catch with my plastic mitt."

"Macho, you talkin' trash to your papi?"

Then Weasel asked if there were any girls on the team.

"¿Qué?" their father snapped, his eyes angry.

"I'm just askin'. It's nothin' personal, Papi. You know some of these rucas are really good, better than us vatos."

He looked at their mother, who was reading a magazine. "Mom, did I say anything wrong?"

For his rudeness, Weasel was assigned to pull the weeds in the flower bed.

"I want them out by the time I get back!" their father said.

"Where you goin'?" Angel asked.

"To play ball."

After their father left, Weasel snapped his fingers at Angel and said, "You can start now."

"What?"

"Start weedin', Homes. I'm going to the playground to check out the girls."

"But Dad said for you to do it," Angel shouted. He stomped toward Weasel, who pushed him away and started combing his hair in front of the hall mirror. He bared his teeth at the mirror and scraped his front teeth with a fingernail.

"It's not fair, Weasel. Dad said for you to pull the weeds."

Weasel turned his head toward his brother, patted his shirt pocket, and smiled. "Be cool, dude."

So Angel spent the last hour of daylight pulling up tangles of yellowish weeds, while Pleitos sat on the lawn, blinking from sleepiness. Angel's arms ached, and a dime-sized blister rose on one palm. He was as bored as a convict and full of self-pity when he looked up to see his friends throwing dirt clods at each other nearby. It looked like fun.
Still, he kept pulling weeds. He couldn’t risk his brother passing the snapshot around at school.
Later that night, when their father returned home limping, Weasel was waiting on the front porch to greet him. He apologized for having spoken rudely at dinner.
“Papi, look how I fixed up the flower bed.”
The father looked at the finished work. He nodded, impressed, though he seemed more concerned about his pain.
“Did you hurt yourself?”
“Simón. I slid into second and burned my nalgas.”
“Were you safe or out?”
“I was out. And they moved me back to right field.”
“Qué lástima, Papi. I’ve felt that before. Rejection!” He spit a mouthful of sunflower seed shells into the flower bed. “It hurts right here,” he said, touching his heart.
The father told Weasel to be quiet, that he was breaking the camel’s back with his talk. He turned to Angel, who was standing between them. The boy’s face was flushed from the strain of weeding, and his T-shirt was as dirty as a dish rag.
“You been playin’ in the mud, Angel?” the father asked.
“He’s been scratchin’ around with the chickens, qué no?” Weasel said. “The dude’s got lice.”
Angel glared at his brother. He had had enough. “Dad, Weasel’s tryin’ to pull something on me. He’s got—”
“Callate, Homes,” Weasel warned, spraying another mouthful of shells into the flower bed.

“He’s got a picture of me—”
“Yeah, I got a picture of my little brother in my wallet. He means so much to me, the little piojo.”
Their father waved them off, calling them two chistosos, and limped inside the house to shower, get into bed, and hope that his burned nalgas would feel better in the morning.
After his father left, Weasel turned to Angel and said, “I thought we had a deal, Homes?”
“You’re mean,” Angel said under his breath.
“¿Yo?” Weasel said, feigning surprise and pointing a finger at his chest. “¿Yo? I’m a good bro’. I’m just teaching you about life, about la vida, Homes.”
“Look.” Weasel brought out his wallet and thrust a picture of Madonna in Angel’s face. “Es mi ruca.”
Angel took the wallet and gazed at Madonna, a picture cut from a magazine. Her image faced a picture of Weasel, with a real cigarette between his teeth.
Angel handed the wallet back. “She ain’t your girlfriend.”
“Hey, Homes, use good grammar when you talk about my baby.”
“She don’t know you.”
“Pues, sí. She likes to kiss me.” Gigling, Weasel closed the wallet so that Madonna’s face pressed against his face. He opened and closed it nine times and said, “OK, Madonna, no more. I’m tired of kissin’.”
Angel had to laugh. Qué loco, he thought. What a crazy brother.
“And she likes you, too,” Weasel told Angel. “She’s got a crush on you. She told me to tell you that you’re the real thing.” He removed his picture from the wallet and replaced it with the Polaroid snapshot of Angel in the shower.

Angel and Weasel laughed as Weasel opened and closed the wallet, Madonna’s face falling against Angel’s snapshot.

“Oh, you’re so cute,” Weasel said, imitating Madonna’s voice. “Don’t kiss so hard, little Angel. You’re hurtin’ me.”

The two brothers laughed, and Angel tried it himself, flapping the wallet open and closed. “Angel, you’re so handsome, pero your brother es tan feo.”

They laughed and punched each other playfully. The game was over. Weasel flicked the snapshot at Angel; it brushed his forehead and landed on the porch. Pleitos, who had sauntered around the corner, sniffed at the snapshot. Angel pushed the cat away and picked the photo up.

“It’s yours, dude,” Weasel said, boxing with Pleitos.

“Thanks, Weasel.”

“Simón,” he called, disappearing into the house.

Under the orange glare of the porch light, Angel studied the snapshot closely. He couldn’t believe that that naked boy in the shower was him. The figure was dark, blurry, with hair plastered down and ears big as baseball mitts. Was his brother tricking him again? he wondered.

He showed it to Pleitos, who was rubbing his hard head against Angel’s leg. “Does that look like me?”

Pleitos seemed to look intently at the snapshot. He looked and then, mean as ever, shot a quick jab at the snapshot. So Pleitos had recognized him. Only then did Angel know that it was really him—dripping water and shame, naked as a plucked chicken.