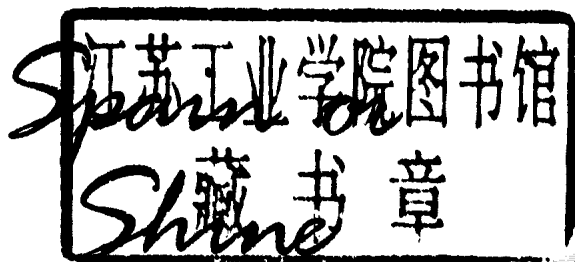




Spain or Shine



Michelle Jellen



Michelle Jellen

speak

An Imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

*To my parents, for their love and support. Thanks for encouraging me
to have an adventure in Europe and for helping me get there.*

SPEAK

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Group (USA) Inc.,
345 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.
Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3
(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Ireland, 25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland
(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)
Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)
Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park,
New Delhi - 110 017, India
Penguin Group (NZ), Cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland 1310,
New Zealand (a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196,
South Africa

Registered Offices: Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Published by Speak, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 2005

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Michelle Jellen, 2005

All rights reserved

Interior art and design by Jeanine Henderson. Text set in Imago Book.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Jellen, Michelle.

Spain or shine / by Michelle Jellen.

p. cm. - (S.A.S.S.: Students Across the Seven Seas)

Summary: Overshadowed at home by her over-achieving siblings, sixteen-year-old Elena Holloway spends a semester in Spain, where she explores her talents in a theater class and tries to attract the attention of a handsome boy.

ISBN 0-14-240368-7 (pbk.)

[1. Self-confidence—Fiction. 2. Foreign study—Fiction. 3. Theater—Fiction. 4. Schools—Fiction.
5. Spain—Fiction.] I. Title. II. Series.

PZ7.J392Spa 2005 [Fic]—dc22 2005043445

Printed in the United States of America

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party Web sites or their content.

Spanish Crush

Elena was a little embarrassed to be hunting Miguel down at work, but also secretly excited. She could picture him looking gorgeous in his bellhop uniform, his tan skin set against the crisp white cotton. She would be poised, striding up to him with the grace of a dancer. "Hello." He'd beam. "I didn't think I'd see you again so soon. What a wonderful surprise." *Elena, you're hopeless*, she thought.

Elena followed Jenna through the canopied front entrance and into the gleaming lobby. They stood beneath a crystal chandelier, its light bouncing off the rosy marble floor. The windows stretched up tall and arcing to graze the ceiling. The molding at the top of the ceiling looked like cake frosting. When Elena glanced over her shoulder, she felt the eyes of the concierge burning into them. She suddenly felt out of place and antsy to leave.

Elena grabbed Jenna's hand and steered her back to the front of the lobby.

"He's obviously not here," she whispered, turning her head to look at Jenna. "That guy behind the desk is giving me the creeps and—" Before she could finish her sentence she felt herself smack into someone. When she turned her head, she found herself staring directly into Miguel's eyes. They were inches from her own. For a split second she thought, *If this boy ever kissed me, this is what it would feel like the moment before our lips touched....*

**Application for the Students Across the Seven Seas
Study Abroad Program**

Name: Elena Holloway

Age: 16

High School: Mountain Vista High School

Hometown: San Jose, California

Preferred Study Abroad Destination: San Sebastián, Spain

1. Why are you interested in traveling abroad next year?

Answer: I'm interested in further developing my Spanish-speaking skills and I hope that exploring my grandparents' birth country will give me a better understanding of my heritage, as well as an appreciation for other cultures.

(Truth: Studying abroad is one of the only things the overachievers in my family haven't already laid claim to. This is my chance to do something exciting and different.)

2. How will studying abroad further develop your talents and interests?

Answer: The insights I gather while living in a foreign country will enrich the quality of characters and themes in my playwriting.

(Truth: I might actually meet people who don't already know me as "that other Holloway girl.")

3. Describe your extracurricular activities.

Answer: Staff writer for Theater Beat (my school paper), Social Service Club member, Junior Filmmakers Society member

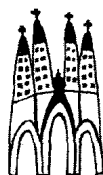
(Truth: I spend most of my time either hanging out with my best friend Claire or daydreaming about the boys I'm going to meet in Spain.)

4. Is there anything else you feel we should know about you?

Answer: My passion for theater and Spanish culture make me an asset to the academic program. My desire to meet new people makes me an ideal S.A.S.S. program participant.

(Truth: I plan on spending every spare moment lounging on the beach and taking in the Spanish nightlife.)

Chapter One



"Maybe I shouldn't go," Elena said, gawking at the clothes splayed out across her bed. She still hadn't decided what to pack, and she was leaving for Spain the next morning.

"Oh no, don't you dare chicken out now," her best friend, Claire, said, plunking down on the only corner of the bed not covered in tank tops and skirts. "You're going to have a blast. At least one of us should have a good time this fall."

"I still can't believe you're not coming."

"And all because of a C in history," Claire groaned. "How could I not qualify for the program? It's so embarrassing."

"Stop beating yourself up about it. You'll have other



chances to go to Europe." Elena began rooting in the closet for her pink flip-flops. "Besides, you're not the one who's going to miss homecoming and all the good summer gossip." She lobbed the flip-flops at the bed. One of them made it, but the other landed on her desk.

"I guess," Claire sulked. "I was really excited about the play production class. Your sister's friend said the teacher devotes entire classes to real method acting techniques."

"Claire, you've been in every school and community play for the last three years. Besides, you'll learn all those things in college."

"Which is, like, a million years from now." She threw her hands in the air. "Oh, don't listen to me. I'm just jealous that you're taking my ideal class without me. Acting, playwriting, and directing all in one class—it's perfect." She shook her head slowly. "You could never get all that here."

Elena wrapped an arm around her friend. "Someday when you're a famous actress and I'm a Tony-winning playwright, we'll laugh about all of this, okay?"

Elena waved at the mess on her bed. "Will you help me with this?" she asked as a way of distracting Claire. "You're better at putting outfits together than me."

Claire started picking through the pile, embracing her new role as fashion consultant. "Definitely bring this. I've heard they wear a ton of black in Europe," she said, handing Elena a black tank top.

As Elena tossed the shirt into her suitcase and tried to think of more ways to distract Claire, her sister, Gwen, walked into their shared bedroom.

"How's it going?" Gwen asked. She was wearing running shorts and a sweat-ringed T-shirt. Although her face was flushed and free of makeup, she still managed to look gorgeous, as always.

"It's going okay," Elena answered.

"Want me to help you organize?" Gwen leaned over Elena's shoulder and peered down at the heap of clothes.

"That'd probably be a good idea."

Gwen cleared out the pile inside the suitcase and began rolling shirts into tight tubes and lining the bottom of the suitcase with them.

"What are you doing?" Claire asked, motioning toward one of the rolled shirts.

"You can pack more this way," Gwen explained.

Elena and Claire took over rolling clothes after Gwen had demonstrated with a few T-shirts.

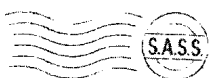
"So, how do you feel about all this, Lanie?" Gwen parked on the edge of her bed and began loosening the laces of her running shoes.

"Nervous," Elena said.

"Nervous and excited, though?"

"Yeah. But mostly nervous."

Gwen slipped her shoes off, kicking them toward her



closet. "Well, I think it's really cool that you're following through with this."

"Yeah, it is sort of unlike me, isn't it?" Elena said.

"I'm being serious," Gwen said. "It's just that you have all these great ideas and...like, remember the time you were going to run for class secretary and you made half the posters and then just dropped the whole thing because you were sure you couldn't beat Claudia Kauffman?"

"I know. I'm not great at follow-through."

"I'm just saying I think this trip is going to be amazing." Elena hadn't realized how much she valued Gwen's approval until she'd actually heard the words.

"Melanie met these two girls last year in Spain who were also in the S.A.S.S. program," Gwen continued, "and they're, like, two of her best friends now. You're going to meet so many cool people." Gwen's friend, Melanie, was the one who had introduced Elena and Claire to the whole idea of the S.A.S.S. program in San Sebastián.

"I hope so," Elena said as she rolled a shirt. The roll wasn't nearly as small and perfect as Gwen's had been.

They were interrupted by the sharp smack of the front door slamming shut, followed by a clatter in the hallway. Elena recognized the sounds of her fourteen-year-old-brother, Caleb, dumping his football equipment next to the door. Caleb's heavy footsteps thumped across the foyer.

Elena's mom's voice boomed from the kitchen. "Caleb, you are not allowed into the living room until you take off

your dirty cleats. And don't leave them in the hall—someone will trip over them and break their neck!" According to Elena's mom, they were all perpetually in danger of breaking their necks or poking their eyes out.

"Relax, Mom, I'm going to take a shower," Caleb called.

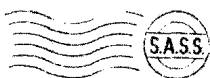
"Oh no, he isn't." Gwen leaped off the bed and flew toward the bathroom across the hall. Elena could hear Gwen and Caleb scrambling toward the bathroom door.

"I should go first. You never leave any hot water," Gwen hollered as she slipped inside the bathroom and swung the door shut before Caleb could pry his way in. Caleb pounded on the bathroom door.

"What a madhouse." Elena shut her door in an attempt to seal out some of the racket. "So, what am I forgetting? Do you think I need a raincoat?"

"Forget the raincoat. This is all you really need," Claire said, holding up a turquoise bikini splashed with tiny pink hearts. Elena laughed, snatching the dangling bikini from Claire's hand and dropping it into her suitcase. The bikini was Elena's secret weapon. Elena had seen it in a magazine in May and hunted it down through phone calls and Internet searches. She'd never wanted a single piece of clothing so much in her life. Even with limbs as skinny and pale as birch branches, Elena thought she looked pretty good in the bikini. She felt like the best version of herself.

Outside the bedroom window darkness painted the sky. That was Elena's cue to usher Claire toward the door. She



walked Claire out to the front porch, and they stood for a moment in the warm, late August air, listening to the silence.

"It's only three and a half months," Claire said finally, waving her hand as if that amount of time was so small she could shoo it away like a fly.

"That's nothin'" Elena hugged her friend. She couldn't remember a time when they hadn't started the school year together.

"See ya," Claire said over her shoulder as she stepped out toward the street.

"See ya," Elena echoed.

Over the years they'd perfected the art of saying good-bye without making it sound sad or significant. Elena watched Claire's silhouette melt into the shadows. Her heart sank into her chest, and self-doubt began to seep in. It felt impossible to do this thing on her own, but this was her opportunity to do something brave and cool that none of the overachievers in her family had already done. In Spain she would have the chance to be something other than another one of the Holloway kids or Claire's best friend. She could just be Elena, whoever that was.

As soon as Elena stepped through the front door she heard her mom calling everyone to dinner. Elena ambled through the door to the kitchen and found her mom, Carla, looking all businesslike in a skirt, a silk blouse, and ostrich-skin heels. Her hands, however, were incongruously sheathed in

oven mitts. She flew across the kitchen turning off buzzers, lifting plates, and filling glasses.

Gwen stood at the counter, making a salad. Elena grabbed a carrot slice and Gwen smacked her hand playfully.

"Mom, Elena stole a carrot," Gwen whined, but then stuck a carrot slice into her own mouth and winked at Elena.

"Better carrots than cupcakes," her mom answered in her weary half-listening voice.

Elena and Gwen giggled. "Whatever that means," Gwen muttered to Elena.

On her way toward the table Elena stepped over Caleb, who was sprawled out on the kitchen floor in his sweaty football clothes reading a comic book. This was apparently the compromise he and their mom had come to regarding her demand that he not go into the living room in his dirty practice jersey.

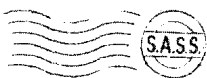
"All right, everyone take a seat," her mom said, carrying a piping dish of lasagna over to the counter.

Caleb clicked over to the table, leaving a trail of grass-threaded dirt clumps from his cleats. Elena joined him, followed by Gwen and their mom.

"So, I did an Internet search today on the top schools in the nation," Gwen said as soon as they began eating.

Caleb groaned. "God, can we for once not talk about colleges? That's all I ever hear about in this house." He speared a hunk of lasagna with his fork.

Elena silently agreed with Caleb. The pressure of college looming caused Elena's family to spend a lot of time lately



talking about how to be exceptional. Elena was just trying to get through her classes with good grades, let alone exceptional ones. But silently, she acknowledged that this trip to Spain was her chance to be exceptional in a different way. She was going to pursue this thing, playwriting and production, that she might possibly excel at in a way her other siblings never could. Or she could fall flat on her face.

Caleb and Gwen continued to argue while their mom tried several times to interrupt with a cheerful story about a recent home sale. She gave up when the phone rang. Moments later the front door slammed, and Elena's oldest sibling, Jeremy, who was home from college for the summer, sauntered into the kitchen.

"Hey, what's for dinner? I'm starving," he said.

Elena took another bite of lasagna. She was usually the quiet one at the table. In the Holloway house, whoever spoke loudest won, and unfortunately Elena had been born with a quiet set of pipes.

Gwen had finished her salad and was now eating tiny little nibbles of lasagna. She was constantly watching her weight, although Elena honestly had trouble finding any weight on her that needed watching.

"Want mine?" Elena whispered, offering her untouched salad to Gwen while her mom was talking on the phone. Gwen nodded and quickly swapped bowls with Elena.

Elena's mom hung up the phone and sighed. "I have to take some clients out to look at houses. This is the only time

they can go." She walked over and kissed the top of Elena's head. "I'm sorry your dad and I can't be with you more on your last night, kiddo."

"It's okay, Mom."

"Well, he'll be home soon. Do you need any help packing before I go?"

"Don't worry about it. Gwen's helping me."

Elena's mom scurried out the door, and Gwen and Caleb helped Elena carry the dishes to the sink. The dinner dishes were her designated daily chore.

Jeremy spooned lukewarm lasagna onto a plate as Caleb and Gwen left the kitchen.

"What's up, Lanie?" Jeremy asked, sitting at the breakfast bar to eat.

"Not much, just need to finish packing," she answered.

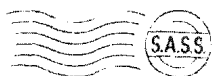
"Does it feel weird to be going without Claire?" he asked. Since Jeremy had left for college last year he had become much more interested in her life. Elena found it a bit disconcerting. She figured it was a combination of his growing up a little and actually missing his family.

"Yeah, I'm sort of nervous about going without her. But, to be honest, I also think it'll be good for me to branch out."

"Yeah, you guys *are* together a lot. It just seems funny that you're the one going since she's the drama nerd."

"She's not a nerd," Elena defended.

"I just meant she's the one interested in acting," he explained. She could tell by the lack of sarcasm in his voice



that he was being sincere. "I hadn't pegged you for the actress is all. You seem more like the backstage type."

"I'm definitely not an actress," she confirmed, scraping off the dinner plates. "The course is play production. It's a little bit of everything: acting, playwriting, directing."

"Playwriting." He eyed her. "The next best thing to screenwriting, huh?" Jeremy shared Elena's love of movies and was one of the few people, along with Claire, who knew about her secret dream of becoming a famous screenwriter/director.

Elena nodded.

"That's cool," Jeremy said. "I bet you'll be good at it."

"I don't know. We'll see," she said. But then she added, "I really hope so."

Elena heard the front door open. Moments later her dad came strolling into the kitchen.

"Hey, guys, what's for dinner?"

"Lasagna," Elena told him, pointing with a soapy finger.

"Elena, you shouldn't be doing dishes on your last night. Leave those. I'll get to them later. Or maybe Jeremy can offer his services." Her dad raised an eyebrow at Jeremy.

Jeremy set his empty plate next to the sink. "All right, I'll do them tomorrow morning," he sighed.

"Thanks, Dad." Elena smiled at him and turned the water off. She was already beginning to feel a little bit special.

As she was drying her hands she realized that tomorrow, while Jeremy was washing dishes, she would be thirty thousand feet up, soaring toward a foreign country.

• • •

Elena woke before dawn and tiptoed into the bathroom. She'd showered the night before so she could sleep as late as possible, which wasn't very late at all. After washing her face and drying it with a towel, she slid a comb through her hair. Elena's wavy hair was a warm shade of brown. She pulled it into a low ponytail, smeared her lips with strawberry gloss, and gave her colorless cheeks a pinch. That was about as good as it was going to get at four thirty in the morning.

Both of her parents had gotten up to take her to the airport. When they finished checking her in, Elena spotted a woman in her forties holding up a laminated sign for the International School, or I.S. She was sure this was the chaperone she'd been told would be accompanying the students from Northern California to San Sebastián. The chaperone wore too-high-waisted khaki shorts in a material that stretched tight and shiny across a pooch of belly. Elena watched as she greeted several of the students who had already managed to shake their parents. When the students approached her, she beamed, welcoming them in a voice that rose and fell like a song. She was entirely too perky for six A.M. Elena guessed she was the type of woman who went to Disneyland every year for her vacation—even though she was at least forty-five—and had a compilation of collector's plates ordered from TV infomercials.

Although Elena had pointed out the chaperone to her