

“I talked to Rocio today...” Dee Dee paused in what Evie believed was hope to create an air of anticipation.

“And?” Evie asked. No such air was created. Dee Dee talked to Rocio everyday. Their conversations were far from being “the most exciting news.”

“So guess what?” Dee Dee asked.

“*What* already?!” Evie asked.

“He’s thinking of going to college out here,” Dee Dee announced. Evie could sense a smile about to **explode** on the other end of the line.

“Wow, really?” Evie asked. “You mean, here in the U.S. or in Cali?”

“Here,” Dee Dee said. “In California. *Que chido*, no?”

“Uh, no,” Evie answered. “I mean, right, it’s cool.” She was always unsure how to answer questions that ended in ‘no.’ Were you to say ‘No’ as in ‘I agree with you,’ Or ‘Yes, I agree to your no’?

“Is he coming out here because of you?” Evie asked.

“*Claro*, of course,” Dee Dee said. “He hasn’t had any desire to ever leave *La Condesa*. That is, until he met me.”

“That is so sweet.” Evie said. She wondered if Alex would ever do anything like that for her. Making an abalone shell necklace was one thing, but moving to entirely different country was another. He did, however, suggest they go to Baja sometime soon and that was another country, sorta.

“So anyway,” Dee Dee continued. “Rocio’s coming out to research some schools and I asked him if he could stay a bit longer and make it to your Sixteenera.”

“Really” Evie asked. “He’s coming that soon?”

“Uh, huh,” Dee Dee said. “He knows all about you. He can’t wait for your party.”

“Wow.” Evie felt flattered. She was getting used to the idea that people whom she never even met, from Rocio to all her Myspace friends (up to 220 friends!), knew all about Evie, aka RioChica805. At least her party, anyway.

“God, Evie, your party is going to be so great,” Dee Dee continued to make Evie’s head swell. “I already know what I’m wearing *and* what I’m going to buy you.”

“Really? What?” *are you getting me?*

“I’m not telling you, *tonta*, but you are going to love them.”

“*Them?* So it’s a plural present?” This would be the first birthday, after four years, that Evie would get to share with Dee Dee. As a kid, Dee Dee, or at least her mother, were known for doing it up with over the top lavish gifts. Not that gifts were what a birthday celebration was all about, but *still*.

“Oh,” Dee Dee voice broke up over another call waiting beep. “That’s Rocio.”

“Of *course*,” Evie said. It was always Rocio calling.

“*Andale pues*,” Dee Dee said.

“Lates,” Evie clicked off.

After Evie hung up with Dee Dee, she realized that the pressure was on. She *had* to bring her GPA up so she can have her Sixteenera. She *had* to. She set the cycle to high. The jets blasted hot water and soon soothed her muscles. She stunk like a **horse saddle**, her arms ached and she had yet to practice her driving with her father later that evening. She also ~~still~~ had to check in with Raquel, but when she finally got out of her bath, she

was so tired that she fell asleep shortly before dinner time and didn't wake up until early the very next morning.

Chapter 6

The rest of the week at the SCHR continued to be ridiculously laborious for Evie. Wednesday through Friday she'd leave directly from school with Alex so he could drop her off at the main entrance of the reserve to work a four hour shift, which was followed by an evening of homework, a few phone calls, approval of new Myspace friend requests, IMs, and a few episodes of *Laguna Beach* before finally, the final good night texting with Alex before going to bed.

Alex: Nite QT.

Evie: Nite ☺

One afternoon at the reserve, Evie noticed that the palms of her hands were getting callused. Now that she was in a relationship, she had become a card carrying hand holder. Rough ^{callused} hands would not do.

She rolled the barrow towards the supply shed to get a pair of work gloves, but when she entered the structure, she was overpowered by the smell of peppermint. She then noticed a girl in the shed. She was reclining quite casually, on the very top of three stacked plastic feed bins, ^{her legs were} with her legs dangling, as if the supply shed was her very own sitting parlor. A lot visitors and volunteers of the reserve often escaped the sharp rays of

the winter sun by **taking a break** in the cool shade of the supply shed, so the girl's presence wasn't that **alarming to Evie**. She glanced over at the girl who was about her own height but with **shorter, brown** hair. She wore very tight, high waist beige riding pants with black leather riding boots that looked like they had just come right out of the box. She also wore a black satin camisole, styled like a corset, ~~closed~~ ^{fastened} with seemingly hundreds of miniature black satin covered buttons. A single thick gold chain with a **cross pendant** ^{jeweled} hung around her long brown neck. The pendant rested right into her ~~cup~~ ^{her} of her cleavage. And Arturo thought that *she* had dressed inappropriately on her first day!

"Hey," Evie said as she entered the shed.

The girl offered a slight smile, but nothing else. It was ~~the~~ ^{her} cigarette, positioned between her thin, delicate fingers, that caused the strong smell of peppermint. Arturo would *flip* if he caught this girl smoking on the grounds, especially in the shed. Evie didn't necessarily like playing supply shed monitor, but she figured she'd clue in a new volunteer.

"Oh, hey," Evie started. "You're not supposed to smoke, especially in here. The guy in charge is a complete control freak and will totally get on your case about it."

The girl looked right into Evie's eyes and took another slow drag from her scented cigarette. "The guy in charge?"

"Yeah," Evie pulled out a small plastic storage bin that was under a pile of wool blankets. She found a pair of suede work gloves and tried them on. Size Sasquatch compared to her small hands, but they would have to do. "Ar-turdo," she smiled. "That's what we call him."

Who's 'we'?" The girl continued to have a vacant look on her face.

^{a I} “Me and the other volunteer,” Evie laughed to herself. “You haven’t met him?” ^{Arturo?}

“Me?” The girl took an even a slower pull from her cigarette and smirked. “Oh, yes. I’ve met *him*.”

Just then, Arturo entered the shed.

“Josephina,” he took the cigarette from out of the girl’s fingers and held it above her head. “You know better than that. *No smoking*.” He then put his arms around the girl’s waist, making sure to keep the cigarette high, away from both of them as he leaned in to kiss her.

No. *Way*. This girl had obviously met Arturo and knew him well. Quite well. *Sheeyat*.

“I know,” the girl looked towards Evie. “I was just reprimanded? By this helper?”

Reprimanded? This helper?

The girl ended her sentences with as if ~~they~~ ^{each} were ~~each~~ a question. This was typical San Fernando Valley speak, that somehow made it down the Conejo Grade and into Ventura Country. This girl, the girl named Josephina, had obviously been infected with the inflection.

Arturo looked over towards Evie. He hadn’t noticed that she was crouched down, beside the extra saddles and blankets, trying on work gloves.

“What do you need, Evie?” He demanded to know. His embrace around Josephina relaxed as she took back her cigarette from him.

“Just some gloves,” Evie held them up to prove she wasn’t just goofing off from work or, worse, trying to snoop on his personal affairs. “I was just on my way to dump the daily load.”

The girl's body stiffened as she slithered out of Arturo's embrace. "Arturo, stop it. You're gonna wrinkle ^{Camie} my top."

Arturo pulled back and then the girl looked blankly at Evie, which prompted him to introduce her to Evie.

"This is Evie," he told the girl. "She's one of the volunteers, from Villanueva."

"Villanueva?" Josephina asked.

"Yeah," Evie said.

The girl studied Evie. "I just met a girl? Who goes to Villanueva?"

"Oh, really?" Evie asked. "Who?" Villanueva had about 300 students, including the resident students, and everyone knew ^{just about} everyone else. Or at least, their second hand drama.

"You probably don't know her?" Josephina guessed. "Dela? Dela de LaFuentes?"

"Dela?" Evie said. "You mean Dee Dee? She's like my best friend. How do you know her?"

"You're *Dela's* bestfriend?" The girl's dark eyes widened.

"Yeah, we've been best friends since we were little kids, even when she lived in Mexico City, we were tight."

Not quite the truth, but Evie felt as though she had to prove to this girl, who she now deemed snooty and spoke in question marks, that Dee Dee was, indeed, a very, very dear friend to her. Her *best* friend.

"I just met Dela," she said as she held out her hand. "I'm Josephina? From Las Patronas Senior Committee?"

Dee Dee had mentioned the Las Patronas Senior committee, who were made up of the past year's recipients. Senior Patronas had a small say of who was to be selected as new Patronas for the incoming year

High School Seniors

"Oh, right," Evie nodded and shook Josephina's hand. She had forgotten to remove the oversized work glove and felt like a clumsy bear mauling a delicate fawn. She wasn't used to an introduction followed with a handshake, unless it was with adults.

Sweaty

"Are you a volunteer, too?" Evie asked.

"Hardly?" Josephina frowned. "I keep my horse here?" She lifted her chin in the direction of one of the back stables. "Princesa? She's mine."

"Oh," Evie looked over in the same direction. "I know Princesa, or at least what comes out of her." Evie laughed, but Josephina's face didn't crack a crease.

"No, but really, Princesa is sweet," Evie felt stupid saying such a thing. Was a pet poop comment just as bad as telling a parent that their child was ugly?

Just then, Ana poked her head in the supply shed.

"Evie," she muffled sighed in annoyance. "The wheelbarrow is still out here. You haven't dumped it yet?"

"I was just about to," Evie slid past Arturo and Josephina towards the wheelbarrow.

"Ana," Arturo started. "Why don't both you and Evie do it so we can all get out of here quicker?"

"But Evie was gonna do it," Ana protested.

"Just help her," Arturo said. "It's getting late and I promised to take Josephina to the pier, before sunset."

for the

Ana took a hold of the wheelbarrow. "Come on, *Evie*."

Evie and Ana headed towards the gulley.

"Who *was* that?" Ana asked.

"I guess Arturo's girlfriend."

"Oh, I thought it was one of your fancy ass friends from your fancy ass school."

"*None* of my friends look, act, or dress like that." Evie **insisted**.

"She looks like she was about to go hunting with the hounds... but forgot to change out of her ~~Victoria Secret nightie~~." Ana laughed. "What's her name?"

"**Josephina**," Evie said. "**Josephin-a**."

accentuate the A

Chapter 7

Despite an evening fundraiser for the SCHR later that evening, Saturday was Evie's first free day from the reserve in **over two weeks**. She had worked a total of forty hours at the reserve and, of course, the inner flojo in her just wanted an afternoon devoted to complete chill. It was nearly ^{11am}noon and she lay in her bed blissfully devoid of duties or obligation. Nothing would get her out of bed. Nothing, unless maybe the call of Sea Street. And sure enough Alex's text beckoned her.

C st?

To which she texted back.

Rdy in 20.

It had been too long since she had Alex had ^{gone} ~~went~~ surfing at Sea Street and there was no way she was going to miss out on some choice waves this Saturday. She got out of bed, slipped on her Sanuk flojos and looked for her bathing suit. No doubt she'd need to wear her full length winter ^{wet} ~~dry~~ suit as well, but once she was out of the water, she liked to peel her suit down to her waist so she could tan her shoulders ^{back} and belly.

"Lindsay," she called out as she dug to the bottom of her wicker hamper. "Have you seen my bikini top? The light blue Roxy?"

"I can't hear you when you yell like that," Lindsay ^{called} ~~yelled~~ from the kitchen.

"My bathing suit?" Evie called out from her bedroom's doorway. "The blue one. Have you seen it?"

"No, Evie," Lindsay answered back from the kitchen. "Are you going for a swim? Because maybe you should wait, the pool man was here this morning **and it's still filtering.**"

"No, I'm gonna go surfing with Alex," Evie yelled out, ^{again} "He's gonna pick me up in a bit."

"Evie, you can't go to the beach," Lindsay was now coming up the stairs. She was drying her hands with a ~~checked~~ kitchen towel. "Sabrina ^{'s} coming home today."

"I know," Evie went back into her room. She gave up on her hamper and looked around her bathroom floor. Where there used to be ^{bikini tops} ~~bathing suits~~ and towels covered with sand were now jeans and tennis shoes embedded with mud, straw and bits of hay. "But not until later today, right?"

"Si," Lindsay said, "But your mother wanted you stick around. Just in case."

“Just in case of what?” Evie didn’t want to waste time looking for her blue suit. Alex was on his way. She grabbed ^{the} her lime green one from the top drawer of her dresser.

“I don’t know, Evie,” Lindsay said. “You should ask her.”

“Are you serious?” Evie looked at Lindsay in disbelief. “She wants me to stay home *all day*?”

“I think so,” Lindsay said. “But you should really ask her.”

Which is what Evie immediately did. She marched down stairs and found her mother out on the deck with her father.

“Mom,” Evie started. “Lindsay just told me that I have to stick around home today. Is that true?”

Her mother looked up from the deck chair to which she was tying a green seat cushion. “What was all that yelling going on inside the house?” she asked.

“Nothing,” Evie said. *Don’t try to change the subject.* “So do I have to stay home today?”

“Yes,” her mother answered. “I’m going to pick your sister up at the airport and I need you to be here when we get back. Your father is barbequing.”

“Right,” Evie still didn’t see the necessity to stay home *all day*. “So, I’m gonna leave with Alex right now and I can make sure I’m home by... three? Is that a good time?”

“Evie, no,” her mother started to tie another cushion to the next chair. “I need you to be here. Besides, you won’t be here tonight, right? You have that fundraiser.”

“Yeah, but that’s not until later, like at seven,” Evie pointed out. “I could be here a whole four hours, just for Sabrina.” She looked at her cell phone. T minus 10 minutes until Alex arrived.

“Evie, stop it,” her mother said sternly. “Sabrina isn’t feeling well and I don’t want her coming home to an empty house. You are her sister. You need to be here.”

Was it just Evie or was her whole family getting a little too *sentida* over Sabrina’s break up with what’s-his-name?

“Mom,” Evie whined. “I’ve had to work for the last two weeks and I have to go to the work thing night. This is my only one day off and I haven’t gone to the beach in, like, forever.”

“Evie,” Her father threw her a stern look. “You are not going anywhere today and you shouldn’t be making plans without asking me or your mother. You need to consult us if you plan a whole day at the beach.”

Consult? When did her father start talking like that? He has obviously been spending way too much time with her mother.

“So, you’re basically saying I can’t go with Alex,” Evie started, “even though he’s already on his way over here?”

Evie’s mother threw her a deep, hard look that clearly didn’t need a vocal ^{12cl} answer.

“Well,” Evie grumbled as opened up her cell phone. “I *guess* I better text him. Hopefully he hasn’t left yet.”

“I have a better idea,” her mother suggested. “Why don’t you call him? Have you ever tried *that*?”

Evie: Cnt go. Mom OTR. Cll me l8r?

Alex: Bmr. Ttyl.

Evie stomped up to her room, tossed her cell phone on a pile of dirty horse reserve clothes and fell onto her bed. Grrr! Sabrina was a family member, not some VIP that deserved a U.N. welcoming committee. She sat up, grabbed her remote on the bed stand and pointed it to the stereo. She cranked up Moz and called Raquel.

“Ee-yes?” Raquel answered.

“I hate my mother,” Evie announced.

“Are you calling me for sympathy or to plot her demise? Because if it’s the latter, you best take a number. I still gotta take care of my own mom.”

“Don’t tempt me,” Evie said. “My mom is totally on my case.”

“When is she not?”

“I have to stay home all day,” Evie complained. “This is like my one free day in, like, forever and now I have to stick around just to wait for Sabrina. I totally wanted to go surfing with Alex.”

✓ “Maybe you should have gotten up earlier,” Raquel teased. “If you so badly wanted to go surfing/Isn’t that what real surfers do?” *Dawn Yawn Patrol?*

DK Dawn Patrol — “Oh, you are *so* not advising me,” Evie said. She clicked off Moz, who was depressing her even more, and switched to Go Betty Go. “If I wasn’t working at the reserve all week, it wouldn’t be such a big deal.”

“Why are you working at that horse place so much?” Raquel asked.

“Vasquez.” Evie sighed, referring to her Civics teacher. “He wants me to put in at least fifteen hours a week. **He says that the monthly amount of volunteerism in the U.S. is usually one weekend ^{every few} a month and that the average American volunteer usually donates half that time and that I, being the ‘able bodied teen’ should do triple the amount.**”

“Where the hell does he get those figures?” Raquel asked. “That’s rickulous!”

“Who knows,” Evie said. “What rickulous?”

“It’s like ridiculous, but more hardcore.”

Evie laughed. “But seriously, I don’t know why everyone is making it so difficult for me to do better. And speaking of rickulous, that guy, Arturdo, the one I was telling you about? He’s still treating me like such a doormat at the reserve. He makes fun of me in front of all the other volunteers and has me do all the dirty work.”

“Sounds like sexual tension to me,” Raquel mused.

“*Please*, the thought of Arturdo in any form of intimacy is so repulsive.” Evie clicked off her stereo. She realized that she was not in the mood for any music. “So you do wanna stop by and say hi to Sabrina later?”

“Nah,” Raquel said. “I mean I’d like to, but Davey’s gonna pick me up.”

“Weren’t you just with him last night?” Evie asked.

“Si, *tia*,” Raquel stretched. “But Los Olvidados are playing the street fair.”

“The street fair?” Evie asked. “At Sea Street? I thought that was next weekend.”

“Nuh, uh,” Raquel said. “It’s today. Didn’t Alex tell you?”

“Nuh, uh, ~~he~~ he didn’t tell me.” Evie instantly felt left out. “Not yet.” How could her

own boyfriend not tell her that one of her favorite bands was playing a local street fair? A street fair near Sea Street, ⁹practically *their* place?

“Well, when was he gonna tell you?” Raquel asked. “It starts at two. In fact, I better get going. Davey’s gonna be here any minute and I’ve still gotta shower, shampoo and wax.” She yawned. “Oh, man, we totally got lit last night. You know, I think I’m getting my tolerance up. I was able to able to pound a six pack away last night.”

“And that’s something to be proud of?” Evie asked.

“Uh, *yeah*,” Raquel said as if Evie should know better. “So, how long is Suprema gonna visit?”

“You know, I have no idea,” Evie said. “Everyone keeps saying ‘for a while’ and I have no idea what ‘a while’ means.”

“Well, I hope she’s still here by the time you have your party,” Raquel said. “She can totally swing us ad-bevs at Duke’s.”

“God, Raquel, you have such a one track mind lately,” Evie frowned. “My party is still over a month away and she’ll be back at school by then. Besides, Sabrina’s nineteen, not twenty one and she’s ^{so}really not the party type. You know that.”

“Are you kidding me?” Raquel **said**. “All those sorority girls play it off like they’re all these good little school girls, but not even. One time, I was with Jose and we went to some frat party over at ^{UCSB}Northridge and there were all these sorority girls there. They all had fake IDs and, oh my God, they were, like the total slutty boozers of the whole party.”

“Are you saying my sister is a boozing slut?”

No,” Raquel said, “I said she *might* be a slutty *boozer*. Big difference.”

“Evelina!”

It was Lindsay calling down the hall, from Sabrina’s bedroom.

“Hold on,” Evie put her bedroom landline to her chest. “*Que quieres, Lindsay?*”

“Can you help me?” Lindsay called out. “Your mother and sister are coming back soon and I’m trying to get Sabrina’s room ready.”

“My mother already left?” Evie asked.

“Yes, to the airport, to get Sabrina.”

“Then she won’t be back for a few hours,” Evie called back. LAX, the Los Angeles International Airport, was a good three hour roundtrip journey between Rio Estates and Los Angeles.

“No,” Lindsay said. “She’s picking her up at Santa Barbara airport.”

“Santa Barbara?” Evie questioned. It was unusual that Sabrina would fly into Santa Barbara, which was a small commuter airport, ^{used} patronized primarily by jet setting UCSB students, Silicon Valley businessmen, or maybe Oprah, who evidently had a house in nearby Montecito. Santa Barbara airport was only twenty five, more or less, minutes away from their home. “Why is she picking her up there?”

Her mother and Sabrina would be here some

“Hel-looo?” Evie could hear Raquel on the other end of the landline.

Evie brought the receiver back to her ear. “Oops, sorry.”

“Did you call to talk to me or to Lindsay?” Raquel asked.

“Hey, I better call to you later,” Evie told Raquel. “I gotta go.”

“Uh, I figured that,” Raquel said before clicking off.

“Hey, Linds,’ Evie started.

“Si,?” Lindsay tacked the photo of Sabrina and Robert back up. *on the boards*

“I just wanna say I am really sorry about the car accident. I mean, the fender bender. I know you went out of your way to protect me and everything and I hope I didn’t get you in too much trouble.”

“No, no,” Lindsay said. “Your mother was okay. But what you did Evelina was very wrong and I am very disappointed with you.”

Evie’s heart sunk.

“You *shouldn’t* lie to me, or to anyone. And you cannot break the law. I hope these are not habits that you are picking up and thinking of keeping.”

“No, no,” Evie tried to assure *her* you. “I was just being stupid. It will not happen again. Promise.”

“Okay,” Lindsay said. “I want to believe you. Do not make me out to be a fool.”

“I won’t,” Evie said. “Promise.”

Lindsay put her hands on her hips and looked over Sabrina’s room one more time.

The carpet was vacuumed, the stuffed panda bears were propped against the overstuffed pillows and the TV remote, as well as Sabrina’s silk peach eye mask, were politely poised on the night table – cozy *cositas* ready for Sabrina when she returned home.

“Well, I think we’re done here,” Lindsay concluded. “Let’s go see if your father needs any help.”

Evie followed Lindsay to outside to the deck where her father should have been in the midst of barbecuing tri-tip on his new Viking Grange grill.

But when they got to the outside deck, Evie's ^{he} father had yet to even fire up his new Ultra-Premium. He did, however, look the part of Grill Master Ruben with his 'fly-gear' of a Q-tip white chef's hat, practically two feet in height, and a stiff red and white apron striped apron that ~~Dee Dee's father had bought for him in D.F.~~

with the Spanglish saying: 'El Jefe de D.F.' which and needed to be pronounced in correct Spanish, 'El Heh-feh De Deh-Efeh' to get the too cute point across.

"You are *so* not wearing that," Evie looked over her father disapprovingly as Molesto came ^{towards} trotting up to her.

"Why not?" her father frowned and positioned his hat to peak higher.

Is it even possible to explain the **etiquette of cool** to a middle aged parent?

"Because," Evie leaned over to scratch under Molesto's collar. "It looks lame."

"Lame?" Her father asked.

"Silly."

"I know what lame means." Her father looked at Molesto. "I think he knows Sabrina is coming back today. He's had this energy, excitement, all morning."

At least someone was excited about Sabrina's return.

Evie watched her father take a wire scrub brush to the encrusted grill of his old One Touch Weber. The legs of the grill were rusty and the grill was tar black, charcoal ghosts of BBQs past.

“I haven’t seen that clown in weeks,” Alex chewed lazily on the end of his plastic straw. “What’s he been up to?”

“Maintaining,” Mondo started to pull out a cigarette. “So he says.”

“Alex,” Evie tilted her head. “Can’t we just go for a walk tonight? Like on the pier? It’s so nice out.”

There was no way she wanted to see Jose, even it was some mellow, kick back party. Not only had Jose cheated on Raquel, he had practically molested Evie at a Sangro party and almost decked her in the school’s parking lot. Why would Alex, her own boyfriend, even want to be at the same room with Jose?

Both Evie and Mondo waited for an answer from Alex as he continued to chew on the end of his straw.

“Dude,” Mondo lit up his cigarette and stretched his arm around the back of his stool. “You know, I’ll do whatever you want. I’m easy.”

At about half past 11PM, Evie returned home. Her so-called date with Alex was officially over and Evie was dropped off one full hour before her 12:30 am curfew. No such thing had ever, ever, **happened** in the history of Evie Gomez’s so-called **best** years of her life.

“The whole evening sounds **completely wretched**,” Dee Dee sympathized. She called Evie as soon as she got her text. “And Alejandro? Did nada?”

“Nothing,” Evie was embarrassed to admit. She knew that Dee Dee was already comparing Alex unfavorably to Rocio. “Once he was with Mondo, it was like I didn’t even exist. They were too busy yucking it up and checking out girls.”

“That is so disgusting,” Dee Dee said. “What the hell is wrong with Alejandro?”

“I have no idea.” Evie was already in bed, nibbling on pan dulce, a **flakey hornito**, that her father had brought home. “So, what are you doing home on a Saturday night?” she asked. “No Patrona Pow wow?”

“I actually have a brunch tomorrow,” Dee Dee said. “With some of the senior Patronas. I should be in bed already, but I’ve got this **avocado** mask on and I wanted to give it another 20 minutes.”

“Another brunch?” Evie asked.

“No, it’s the first one,” Dee Dee said. “The last Patrona get together was an informal ‘meet and greet’ and after that, the second get together was more of mixer.” Dee Dee took a breath. “Oye, have you seen Josephina? Has she said anything about me?”

Ever since Evie had told Dee Dee that she had met Josephina, Arturo’s girlfriend and senior Patrona member, Dee Dee was always **trying to** dig up bits and pieces about her possible future as a Patrona debutante.

“No, *Dee Dee*,” Evie said. “I told you, she ^{says} never talks about anything. She just ^{“asks”} orders and complains.” *things.*

“Mande?”

“She ^{never mind} orders Arturo around and then ~~complains~~ when he doesn’t follow her orders correctly.”

“From what you tell me, it sounds like they make a perfect couple.”

“Maybe, I guess.” Evie felt a little awkward hearing Dee Dee’s comment. She ^{After the charreada} was beginning to think that Arturo was really an okay kind of guy.

“Sounds like ^{both} the Devils Wear Wrangler,” Dee Dee teased

“He wears Wrangler, she’s more **L.A.M.E.**”

“You mean L.A.M.B.?” Dee Dee asked.

“L.A.M.B., L.A.M.E., same thing,” Evie sniffed with ~~aspiring~~ indie snobbery.

“So, have you talked to Raquel?” she asked. “I texted her, but didn’t hear back.”

“I talked to her a few hours ago,” Dee Dee said. “She was on her way to some house party. A house *arrest* party.”

“Huh?”

“Exactly,” Dee Dee said. “One of Davey Mitchell’s little friends got in trouble for **breaking his** probation, so he’s tied to home with his mother and an ankle bracelet. All the Bard Boys took the party to him,”

“Are you serious?” Evie laughed.

“Yeah, he isn’t allowed to go anywhere past 500 feet without checking in with his P.O.”

It was funny to hear Dee Dee talk so T.V. cop show. “So where was this party?” Evie asked.

“Some place on **Hemlock,**” Dee Dee said.

“On Hemlock?” Evie **repeated.**

“Yeah,” Dee Dee said. “Why?”

Evie **suddenly felt empty.** “No reason.”

Chapter 14

Cool prty @ Hemlck. Srry u mssd it.

The following week was challenging, to the say the least, for Evie. She was still tender from her ^{horrendous} Saturday date night with Alex and to make matters worse, he didn't even apologize. Officially, ^{that's} unless you counted the text message she received the next morning on Sunday. So it was a 'cool party' and he was 'sorry she missed it'. It was less of an apology and more of a ^{clarification. Observation}

As Alex drove them to school with the following Monday, ^{later} she ~~found~~ ^{Evie} herself still tender ~~from the weekend~~ ^{was silent} fiasco.

'Evie,' Alex threw her a sideways glance. "How long you gonna be beefing with me?"

"I'm not mad," Evie tried to answer casually. Why would he think she was mad? Was it because she kept her arms crossed over her chest during the whole twenty minute ride to school? That she didn't add anything to their conversation except a low energy "uh, huh" to any topic he introduced?

"Saturday night was so not my fault," Alex **continued**. "I can't control Mondo."

"But you can control whether or not he comes with us on a date" Evie refused to look Alex in the eye and rather concentrated on the fascinating scenery of oil derricks and **lemon groves** that lined Highway 33 into Ojai.

"How was I supposed to know we were on a *date*?" Alex **was perplexed**. "You told me that you wanted to go out, *out* and that you want to do something 'different.' To me, hanging out with you and Mondo is different. You're my two favorite buds."

“Feel *bad* about it?” Evie asked. It now seemed apparent that Dee Dee was serious. “Dee Dee, are you saying you don’t want to be a Patrona anymore? I can’t believe this.”

“No, I’m not saying that. I definitely want to be a Patrona, I’m just saying that I don’t think I can be one at this time. I’m going to ~~have~~ —”

“*At this time?*” Evie couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “So when do you think you can *become* one? When you’re like thirty years old or something?”

“You didn’t let me finish,” Dee Dee interjected. “Evie, I need to make a decision and right now ~~and~~ my decision is ~~that I want~~ to be closer to Rocio.”

“**But Las Patronas is all you’ve been talking about forever. What about the first dance, with your dad? And your mom? She *wanted* you to be a Patrona.**”

“Evie,” Dee Dee. “I don’t know what to tell you except that it’s really my own decision and for you to bring up my mom like that...” Dee Dee’s voice got soft. “I, I just don’t want to get into it right now.”

Dee Dee practically hung up on Evie ~~and~~ ^{she} she was left with her mouth hanging open. ~~She couldn’t believe how things were so rapidly changing in her life. She called~~ Dee Dee back but her call went straight to voice mail. ~~Evie then~~ ^{she} Evie then texted Raquel with the emergency code of ER/RE! but, as usual, she didn’t hear back from her all night.

This chapter she goes to a party with Raquel.

Chapter 18

“Hello?” Arturo waved his hand in front of Evie’s face. “Anyone there?”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Evie looked up from space. She was at the reserve, ~~absentmindedly~~ watering down the ground, to keep dust from kicking up. “I wasn’t paying attention.”

after the party
It was the next day and Evie had no idea that Arturo was talking to her. ~~Her~~ mind was still on Dee Dee and the argument they had the night before. While they both went through the motions of a typical school day: sharing the drive to school, eating lunch at O-hi Frostie, etc., neither brought up the possibility of Dee Dee moving back to Mexico. Both stayed quiet as Raquel went on about)

“So, do you want to?” Arturo asked.

“Want to what?” Evie asked.

Arturo ~~tilted~~ ^{shook} his head in confusion. “Take the horses out. We’re pretty much done here and I know your housekeeper ~~doesn’t~~ ^{won’t} come for another hour and I was thinking we couldn’t take them out.”

“You mean to *ride*?” Evie asked.

“No,” Arturo smirked. “Take them out of their stalls so they can stand around and we can look at them.”

Evie laughed. ~~Actually~~ what Arturo had said wasn’t that funny, but somehow his **mild** sense of humor was rubbing off on her. “I totally want to go riding. But wait, I thought ~~the~~ ^{me} volunteers weren’t allowed to ride the horses?”

“They can’t unless they have seniority, Seniority in *experience*, not age,” he smiled. “And I know from your file that you used to spend time with horses up here, when you were a kid, right?”

“Uh, right,” Evie ^{said} ~~to~~ Arturo. She wasn’t about to admit that she had basically gone horseback riding one time, and one time only, when she was, like, ten years old. ^{to Arturo}

“Cool,” Arturo said. “We can take Spinkles and Panchito out ^R for a quick spin. They could use the exercise.”

“Quick ~~spin?~~” Evie made a face. “Ugh. The last time I went for a quick spin I got stuck with twelve hundred dollar car bill.”

“What?” Arturo asked. “What happened?”

“Nothing.”

“Okay, I won’t,” Arturo took off his work gloves and went over to Panchito’s stall. “~~If anything, we~~ ^{they} could both use a nice relaxing ride near the river. You can take Sprinkles. He’s just about the most gentle horse we have.”

✓ “Let me go get my pullover,” Evie ~~said~~ as she turned off the hose.

“Hurry up,” Arturo prompted her. “I’ll get the horses ready.”

Evie sprinted to the supply shed. Just as she grabbed her Senor Lopez pullover from her backpack, she noticed the light on her cell phone was blinking. She couldn’t resist. She opened up her phone and yes, it was a text from Alex. ^{but}

Can we talk?

Evie heart dropped. *Oh*. She wanted to text him back, right away.

“Evie!” Arturo called out. “Come on, we’re losing the sunset. There’s this great ridge to see it.”

Sunset? Arturo hadn’t said anything about a sunset.

Evie ^{read} looked over Alex’s text. What to do, what to do? She closed her phone shut and tossed it back into her backpack. She would text Alex as *soon* as she returned from her ride on Sprinkles.

Evie couldn’t help but feel slightly flattered by Arturo’s invitation. Like ~~he said~~, only volunteers with ~~equine~~ ^{equine} experience were allowed to ride ~~or take out~~ the horses off the ~~reserve~~. Arturo was really an okay kind of guy.

When Evie came out of the shed, she was a bit taken aback by Arturo’s appearance. He was already saddled up on Panchito and ready to go. He looked great, ^{sitting up high} just so in control.

Evie, on the other hand, felt a little clumsy as she hoisted herself up onto Sprinkles. While she didn’t have the most delicate ^{mount} approach, she ^{did} manage to get on top of him and not fall over to his other side.

Arturo looked her over and nodded. “You look good. He agrees with you.”

“Come on!” Evie nudged **Sprinkles** with the inside of her sneaker. He did not move.

“I wanted a gentle horse,” Evie told Arturo. “Not a *dead* one.”

Arturo smiled. “Give him a stronger nudge on his side.”

“I don’t want to hurt him,” Evie said.

“He can take it,” Arturo said. “You’re foot is gonna feel just like a little pat to him.”

Evie nudged Sprinkles a bit harder and he suddenly got himself (and Evie) into gear.

“Whoa!” Evie wasn’t quite prepared for his *geddy up* to just get up and go so quickly. ~~But~~ fifteen minutes later, the four of them, Evie, Arturo, Sprinkles and Panchito, were already deep in the chapparral of the riverbank, among fauna and animal life that Evie, shamefully, never knew existed.

“Wow, this is so beautiful,” Evie marveled over all the towering yucca plants, and cacti and little jack rabbits scurrying across ~~the~~ dirt path. “I can’t believe I’ve lived so close to the river, all my life, and I’ve never come up here. Not once.”

“Yeah,” Arturo nodded and took it all in himself. “A lot of people forget what’s in their own backyard. Especially,” he looked at Evie and smirked. “If you live in *Higher Gates*,”

“Hey,” Evie teased back. “I can’t help where my parents ~~buy~~ a house.”

And it’s not like I’m going to be living there the rest of my life. Who knows, maybe I’ll move to Pico Rivera.”

“Have you ever *been* to Pico Rivera?” Arturo asked.

No,” Evie admitted. “But had *you* ever been to this part of Cali before moving here?”

“No, but I did do ~~some~~ research.” Arturo looked around “I think because I’m not from around here, I make it a point to explore more than the average person. Sometimes, after my shift, I come up here on Princesa and take a sunset ride.”

"Princesa?" Evie asked. "And ^{is} who does Josephina ride?"

"Oh, Josephina won't go horseback riding. She's never ^{even} been out here."

"What?" Evie asked. "You are not serious."

"Yeah, I am," Arturo ^{replied} said casually. "I'm the one who takes Princesa out for exercise. Sometimes Josephina's father or brother will ~~come and they~~ take her out, but that's about it." He looked ^{over} ~~away~~ and then ^{to} pointed out a grassy field they were just coming upon. "Hey, see where it's all matted down over there, in the middle of the field?"

"Uh huh," Evie looked over.

"That's where coyotes sleep. From the size of the impression, you can tell it's a large pack of them."

"*What?*" Evie looked around nervously. "Coyotes? You're kidding, right?"

There was nothing ^{SCHR tiger} in the brochure of wild packs of river coyotes. "Man, something is ^{on} *always* out to get you!"

"What do you mean?" Arturo asked.

"I mean, when I'm surfing, I have to worry about sharks and now that I'm horseback riding, I have to worry about coyotes!"

"You don't have to worry," Arturo laughed. "They only come out at night. We have a *little* bit of time before we'd have to worry and besides, I'll ~~protect you.~~ ^{keep.}"

"I can protect myself thank you," Evie teased proudly.

"So," Arturo pulled his rein to the left leading Panchito, as well as Evie and Sprinkles down a smaller trail. "I didn't know you surfed."

“Uh huh,” Evie said. “Well, I haven’t actually for a while. I used to surf a lot with my boyfriend. I mean, the boyfriend I’m taking a break from. That’s something we both love to do.”

“That’s cool,” Arturo said. “I wish Josephina and I had shared something like that. ~~Sometimes I wonder if we’re really the right people for each other. We just don’t share the same passion for things.~~”

“Uh, huh.” Evie didn’t really know what to say. She and Alex shared the same passion, surfing, but now it seemed that it was surfing that was pulling them apart. He was always following their passion, without her.

“Josephina and I just aren’t on the same level sometimes,” Arturo continued. “I mean, I really care about her and everything, but she can be a really insecure person. Sometimes it can be so suffocating.”

“Suffocating?” Evie asked. “In what way?”

“You know,” Arturo caught himself. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be going into this with you. I shouldn’t be disrespectful, to you or to Josephina.”

“Oh no, that’s okay,” Evie said. **She couldn’t help but feel the little Evilina ^{coming} ~~in~~ _{out} herself. She would have loved some dish on Horsaphina.**

“It’s just she just gave me back her bracelet,” Arturo said. “Again.”

I thought you didn’t want to go on about it.

“Oh, no,” Evie said. “I’m sorry.”

“And you know what? If she asks for it back. I’m not going to give it back to her. I’m fed up. I’m ~~over~~ it.”

comment
more
After that, neither Evie or Arturo said anything. There was a short silence between them as a melody of crickets and blue jays composed what seemed the idyllic soundtrack for their ride.

Sunset
Having fun?
"Are you liking the ride?" Arturo asked.

"Oh, yeah," Evie said. "I love this. This has been one of the best days I've had in a long time. Can we do this again?"

"What's gonna happen to Chamuco?"

Well, we got one more adoption day coming up. Hopefully someone will take him.

"Why isn't someone buying him? Is he that expensive?"

that's not the prob.
"Oh, no. The adoption fees for our horses are pretty low end. But people always want younger, healthier horses. Chamuco has already passed his prime."

Evie felt discouraged. "Really? I didn't know that. Wow, too bad I can't take care of him."

well,
"And to be honest," Arturo looked over at Sprinkles. "The first thing you need to learn is how to ride a horse properly."

"Right." Evie didn't understand his point. "That's a given."

"Yeah, for one thing," Arturo said. "You can't have your feet dangling like you have them, you need to keep them *in* the saddle's foot holster."

A half hour later Evie and Arturo returned to the reserve.

off
"Do you have to get going?" Arturo asked as he took the reins from both horses.

“Yeah,” Evie regretted slowly. “My housekeeper is probably already on her way.” She was having fun with Arturo. He had been so sweet and friendly during their ride. Plus, it didn’t hurt that he *was* fine or had she mentioned that before?

“~~cause~~ I was thinking,” he started. “That maybe we can go get coffees or something and if you want, I can give you a ride home.”

“~~Oh~~, all the way back to *Higher Gates*?” Evie teased.

“I was just messing with you,” Arturo ribbed her with his elbow.

“No ~~worries~~,” Evie said. “I get stuff like that all the time.”

Arturo looked at her and smiled, an almost shy smile. “You’re really cute.”

“Yeah, for someone from *Higher Gates*,” Evie joked. She felt the oddest sensation in her stomach (*No, this could not be happening.*)

“I’m going to be direct...” Arturo started.

God, why did Evie’s stomach feel so weird?

“Would someone like me even have a chance with you?”

“What? What are you even talking about?” Evie tried to play it off and kept her head down. She was feeling so nervous, but to be honest, she ~~died upon~~ ^{loved} hearing Arturo ask such a direct question. Unlike Alex, who had shyly come up from behind her to offer affection, Arturo was front and center, ^{now} looking right into Evie’s eyes

“You know what I mean,” Arturo placed his fingers under her chin.

Now it wasn’t just her stomach. Evie’s whole body tingled. Her mouth was dry.

“I don’t’ know Arturo,” she said softly. She tried hard not to look into his eyes for fear that could read what she was thinking. “I guess you’d have to find out.”

Did she really just say that?

“Oh, I do, ~~do I?~~” Arturo pursed his lips and then smiled. “Is that a challenge? Well, I *live* for challenges.” ~~And~~ before Evie knew it ^{Arturo} he lifted her chin towards his mouth and kissed her on the lips.

Evie couldn't resist. She placed her hands on Arturo's shoulders and reached up for more. Arturo's kisses were deep and long, different than Alex's, who gave short, but gentle, kisses. Evie instantly felt that familiar light headed feeling. ~~As soon as she felt it,~~ she realized it had been a while since she had experienced the sensation.

“Evie?”

Both Evie and Arturo looked up.

It was Alex. He was at the entrance of Panchito's stall.

“Alex,” Evie immediately pulled back from Arturo. She wiped her mouth.

“I...you didn't answer my text so I just came by,” Alex started. “Lindsay said you were still here and I thought you'd need a ride home.” He was speaking to Evie, but his eyes were on Arturo.

“Oh, yeah.” Evie nervously ^{fixed} pulled her hair forward and started towards him.

“No, *don't*.” Alex held his ^{hand} palms out towards Evie, making it very clear that he didn't want to be touched. ^{talk}

“Alex, wait,” Evie started.

But it was too late. He is already heading back to his truck ~~where~~ he got in and drove away.

Chapter 19: Text Mex and Other Southwest Catastrophes

~~Never Mind~~
NUR Mind

Excuse me? Did Evie read the message right? It was nearly 1 AM, and Evie had finally gotten word from Alex. She read and re-read the text on her cell's screen. Did Alex actually just text her Never mind? What did it mean? She went through the complete log of message history between her and Alex. How did their relationship shift from "Nite, QT. Thinkin of u" to "Never Mind" in just a matter of days?

After she had been picked up from the reserve, Evie asked Lindsay to drive her by Alex's house, but his truck wasn't parked in the drive way. Later that evening, he didn't return any of her phone calls or texts and his cell phone went straight to voice mail. It was clear to Evie, very clear, that he didn't want to talk to her. Perhaps ever.

Evie was already in bed when she got the 1 AM 'Never Mind' text message and, she was fully awake. Her mind had been racing with thoughts on Alex, then on Arturo, then on her driving test and then back to Alex. She practically burned a hole in the exposed beams on her bedroom ceiling from staring into them mindlessly all night. She tucked her cell phone under her pillow and turned over. She closed her eyes in determination. She *had* to sleep.

Get to sleep. Sleep. Don't think about the test. Don't think about him or him, the other one. Driving test, tomorrow. The first thing you do is check your mirrors. No, you put on your seat belt. Stop it! You need rest. Fall asleep already!

Arturo, Alex... Arturo. Argh! - *italics*

Evie turned to her other side and hugged her pillow when she heard what sounded like Davey Mitchell's truck. She pulled out her cell phone. Could it really be Davey *from under* rumbling down Camino del Rio at 1:15 in the morning? She pushed away the sheets and got up from her bed. Yes, she saw through the shutters, it was Davey *her that* and he was bringing Raquel home. *from God knows where.* She saw Raquel step down from the passenger seat of his high lifted truck *Evie watches* and watched as she *sneak* snuck around the side of her house.

Evie immediately texted her:

Cn I cme ovr?

To which Raquel replied:

Now?

Evie:

ER

Raquel:

K. Ktch dr. Shh!

Evie *slipped* threw on on some sweat pants, a hoodie and slipped *on* her Juicy Couture flojos. She crept downstairs and *went* exited through the side door of the kitchen where she then cut across to the Diaz's backyard. When she entered the Diaz's house, through the kitchen, she found Raquel tearing through the refrigerator's freezer.

"I totally have the munchies," Raquel announced. *as if it was already obvious* She pulled out two green chili and cheese tamales *(from Trader Joe's)* and popped them in the microwave.

“Raquel,” Evie moaned as she pulled up a stool. “You won’t believe it. Alex just ^{think} texted me. He broke up with me.”

“I thought you guys had already had broken up,” Raquel said nonchalantly. She timed her tamales for five minutes.

“Not officially,” Evie said. **She felt her eyes start to water up. Her stomach felt empty.** ^{body} *whmb.*

“But I thought you gave him back his necklace,” Raquel said. She took a soda from out of the fridge. “You want one?”

“No,” Evie shook her head and wiped her eyes. Was Raquel not listening? “I mean, we never really talked about it. We just said we were going to take a break.”

Raquel sipped her soda and frowned. “But what was there to talk about? You gave him back the necklace. Isn’t that how people ‘going steady’ do it?” Her fingers gestured quotation marks to emphasize “going steady.”

“What ^x is that supposed to mean?” Evie asked. *Was Raquel ever on her side?*

“I mean, you get into all these rules and regulations, the ‘decorum’ of relationships and please, why can’t people just do whatever the hell they want?”

The microwave’s timer went off and Raquel pulled out her tamales.

“Raquel, are you even listening to me?” Evie asked. “It’s like you’re more interested in your food.”

“*Sorry*, Evie.” ^R She unwrapped the corn husks from her tamales and slid them onto a salad plate. “~~But~~ I’m starving. Do you mind that I eat ~~something~~? It *is* my house.”

Evie hated that she was being so *sentida*. Raquel wasn’t known for being the ^{most} compassionate ~~type~~, but tonight she was being downright **in-sentida**.

“Raquel, why are you being so mean to me? I’m telling you that Alex just broke up with me and it’s like you don’t even care.”

“Evie, I’m *not* being mean. And of course, I care. I’m just hungry. Go on, please. I’m listening.”

Evie exhaled. ^{so} “Alex caught me ~~and~~—.”

“Caught you?” Raquel asked. “Caught you doing what?”

“I was with Arturo,” Evie started. “At the reserve, and Alex came by and caught us --”

“Wait, doing *what*?”

Evie pulled her stool closer to the counter. The jack cheese oozing out of the corn masa looked **good**, but she ^{had far from} had **no** appetite. “Nothing really. I mean, we were just kissing, sorta.”

“*Just* kissing?” Raquel’s mouth dropped. Evie could see the mouthful of corn masa ^{spread} on her teeth and tongue. “Did he have his hands down your pants?”

“No! We were just—”

“Up your shirt?”

“Raquel, *no!* Quit interrupting!”

“But you *were* making out with him?” Raquel took another bite of her tamale. ^{Shit!} “Fuck!” She spat under her breath as she dropped ^{a wad of} the steaming *masa* from her mouth to her plate. “It’s fucking hot!” She took a quick swig of soda and **waved** her hand over her opened mouth.

“Are you alright?” Evie asked.

opened her mouth and let a wad of steaming

"No," Raquel complained. "I friggin' burned my tongue. Sheeyat, that was hot. But whatever, go on."

"We had just started to kiss," Evie said. "It didn't seem like we were making out. It was more of a first kiss that got some ^{I dunno,} extended play."

"Wow." Raquel cut a small piece of her tamale with a fork ^{one of the} and this time ^{she} blew on it before putting it into her mouth. "When did this happen?"

"Today, I mean, at the end of my shift at the reserve. I've been texting you all night but you ~~you~~ never texted me back," Evie complained. "I even texted the emergency code."

"Evie," Raquel rolled her eyes to the side. "Lately all your texts are so called emergencies. And besides, I was with Davey. It's not like I was just gonna take off and have him drive me all the way back to Rio Estates."

"Where were you?"

"We were kicking it, at the Hamilton."

"The Hamilton Hotel?"

"Uh, yeah. Do you know another?"

The Hamilton Hotel was a downtown hotel known for its high transitory turnover. It was a weekly hotel on the poorer stretch of downtown's Main Street. The Hamilton's guest list was a mix of druggies, ex cons and, now, apparently, Raquel.

Evie looked at Raquel as she scarved down the rest of her tamales and it was then that Evie noticed how bad she looked. Not a 'It's one AM in the morning and I've been partying all night' bad, but rather a 'It's one AM in the morning and I've been partying hard for the last four semesters' bad. Raquel's skin was flakey and she had two small

scabs on the right side of her face. She looked oddly puffy, her face, her fingers. Not necessarily fat, just bloated.

“Raquel,” Evie started. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, why wouldn’t I be?” Raquel drank more soda. She didn’t look Evie in the eyes.

“I don’t know,” Evie didn’t know how to say that she thought Raquel looked ^{bad} sick without sounding insulting. “You just look, I don’t know, tired.”

“Well, it’s almost two in the morning, Evie. And ^{you know what?} to be honest, so do you. You don’t look so hot, either.” Raquel bit back.

“That’s because I haven’t slept,” Evie got up from her stool. “And I have ^{my} this driving test tomorrow, I mean, today, and I just know I’m gonna fail. And it’s like ~~And~~ everthing is turning to crap.”

“Well, things can’t always go the way we want them in life.”

“Raquel,” Evie raised her voice. “Why are you so negative all the time?”

“I’m not negative,” Raquel insisted. “I’m just being realistic, honest. And if you ask me, people should be more honest.” She got up to shut the kitchen door. “And *you* need to keep your voice down. You’re gonna wake up my mom.”

“Okay,” Evie crossed her arms. “I’ll be honest.” She somehow found the courage to say what had been on her mind for some time. “I think you have a problem. I think you party too much and to be honest, you’re not looking really good.”

“Excuse me?” Raquel looked at Evie, ^{almost} amused.

“And I’m not the only one who thinks that,” Evie started. “Dee Dee and I think you drink too much, way too much.”

“Dee Dee and *you*?” Raquel repeated in a sarcastic tone. “Oh, and when did you *guys* ~~two~~ get together and decide this? That’s a pretty bold observation coming from the two of you.”

“It’s a *realistic* observation, Raquel,” Evie said. “An observation that’s making me worried, to ~~be honest.~~”

“You know, Evie,” Raquel ~~tilted her head and~~ crossed her arms. “*Maybe you* ~~should~~ have a drink once in awhile. You run around worrying about everyone, trying to get them to be or act a certain way and maybe you should just let people be. Quit being so judgmental.”

“Judgmental?” Evie snapped. “I’m not judgmental. I’m concerned *just* Raquel, about people I care about.”

“Yeah, you sure showed it with Alex.” Raquel scraped the remaining melted jack cheese from her plate and **crammed** it into her mouth. “Okay, you want to be so honest?” she asked, her mouth still full. “All things in the clear? Well, I wanna know something, the ~~honest truth.~~”

“What?” Evie asked.

“What *really* happened between you and Jose in the photo booth, at that Sangro party?”

“*What?*” Evie balked. “You gotta be kidding me!”

“Well, I’m not. Do you have a problem with me asking *that?*”

“*Yeah, I have a problem*” Evie said. “You know what happened. I told you.”

“But why *exactly* were you even in the booth with *him?*”

"I *told* you," Evie's voice started to ^{rise} rise again. "I saw his flojos and I saw ^{then} Alejandra's flojos and I thought they belonged to you. I thought it was the both of you, ^{together} but it wasn't and then when Jose saw me, he pulled me in."

"Pulled you in, huh? And you just couldn't say no?" Raquel asked suspiciously

"Raquel, *no!*" Evie was ~~now~~ shouting the most she could within a whisper. "I didn't have *time* to say no! He just pulled me in, like, grabbed me!" She couldn't believe what Raquel was insinuating!

"The thing is," Raquel remarked calmly, "is that Alejandra de los Santos doesn't wear flojos."

^{Evie said} "I *know* she doesn't but that night she... Jose had bought her some. These red Roxys and —"

^{did he buy her.} "He bought her flojos?" Raquel ~~asked~~.

Just then the kitchen light went on.

^{she was her} "What *is* going on here?!" It was Kitty Diaz, Raquel's mother, in a terry robe and ^{was} an eye mask pushed up to her forehead. She was furious as hell. "Evie, what are you doing here? At this hour?!"

"I was just..." Evie started. She hadn't seen Kitty look so mad in such a long time, like a long time, ^{like maybe as long ago} like when first discovered that Raquel and Evie had **stolen chips** ✓ from the supermarket.

"Raquel!" Kitty Diaz looked over at Raquel and sniffed. "You stink like booze! What the hell is going on?!"

Raquel propped her hand against the kitchen counter and leaned back. She looked at Evie and dryly said, "Thanks a fucking lot, *Evie*."

Chapter 20/

The next afternoon, Evie was given her walking papers. Literally.

"I'm sorry," her driving instructor wrote a big fat ^{gotn} 02 in blue ink on score sheet.

"But you need to be in the (0) percentile in order for you to get your license. Your biggest drop was your (0). You need to work on that."

Evie didn't say anything as she took the paperwork from ^{her} the instructor and headed back into the DMV to where her mother and Lindsay were waiting. ~~As~~ she swung open the glass door, ~~they were~~ ^{she} both stood up from their plastic chairs, smiling, as if they were anticipating good news. But once they saw Evie's face, they both knew.

"How did it go, *mi'ja*?" her mother asked anyway.

"I didn't pass," Evie held out her score sheet. She felt like she was on the verge of tears. She looked around the DMV and realized that there was no happy medium in the whole place. Either people slouched over the counters, complaining about the high cost of registration fees or other newbie drivers, coming in from outside after taking their own driving test and were just estastic to have passed.

"Blah," her mother took the score sheet and looked it over. "So you take it again. No problem."

"Well, you did you're best, Evelina." Lindsay pulled out her car keys to drive them home. Evie couldn't help but look down at the keyring. Did Lindsay have to flaunt them *so* soon after her failure?

Evie had gotten only,

drove out parking
As they left the DMV, Evie sat in the back of her mother's Mercedes and looked out the window. **How could she have flunked her test?** Her parents paid the California Driving School *(i)* to teach her the basics of the road and *practiced* then she followed *for the require' recommended* up with hours and hours of practice with her father and Lindsay. She ~~figured that~~ *she* ~~she must have failed~~ simply because she had had only two hours of sleep and was in a semi daze with a headache and sleep debt, *(*having left Raquel's house at nearly two am and not falling asleep until nearly five in the morning.) *)* How could she even be expected to remember every rule of the road in such a condition? Every car *she was not had waste she?* downtown seemed to just be whizzing along, a procession of independence and Evie wondered if she would ever be allowed to participate in such a grand parade. And now she would have to go to school and be comforted by who? Not Raquel, who was definitely still pissed off at her. *Not who* Dee Dee wasn't probably not even in school, but rather off with Rocio, picking out China patterns. And Alex? Yeah, right. Mr. Never Mind. Evie's eyes started to well up.

"Mom," she asked from the back seat. "Do you think I could just go home?"

"You want to skip school?" her mother turned around from *to face her* the front seat.

"I don't feel good," Evie leaned *held her side +* her side into the upholstery.

"Evie, you can't miss school just because you didn't pass your driving test."

"It's not just that," Evie's eyes started to water up more. "I just really, really don't feel good. I didn't sleep all night and I feel ill."

Oh... her mother looked at Lindsay.

Lindsay Sedon

When they pulled up to the drive way, Lindsay kept the Mercedes running as Evie got out.

"I already had two appointments," her mother said. "One with () and (). Are you sure you're going to be okay?"

to pick up more oil
for the
car
& the
other w/
a

"Yeah, I'll be okay." Evie wiped her eyes. "I really just need to sleep."

"Okay, *mi'ja*." Her mother looked worried. "I have my cell and you know your sister is home, if you need anything."

Suprema, Evie thought, would be the last person she'd ever go to for anything.

yeah right

When Evie got inside the house, her plan was just to go to the den, grab the warm, comfy homemade afghan, a' la Lindsay, and snuggle in front of the television. Maybe People's Court was on. Yes, that would be great. The way Judge Milian lashed out Cuban dichos and costly ^{vibrings} sentences to defendants always made Evie feel better about her own predicaments situations in life.

But when she got to the den, Evie was surprised to find Sabrina. She was spread out on the den's brown leather couch *and* covered with Lindsay's homemade afghan.

"What are you doing here?" Evie asked. She didn't mean to come across as accusatory as she might have sounded. It was just that Sabrina *never* left her room. Also, Evie still had some residual resentment over what she had overheard Sabrina say about her on the phone.

couldn't help but have
gudge

"Last I checked," Sabrina didn't bother to look up. "This *was* my house, as well."

"No, I mean, you're usually in your room," Evie flopped down on the matching leather loveseat and kicked her feet up on the coffee table. The den's furniture was

expensive mid century California Mission that their mother had scored at an estate sale.

Flopping and kicking up was a no-no. But their mother, nor Lindsay, was around.

Sabrina kept her eyes on **Leonardo Phillippe** who was now **pursing a another** woman, a woman married to his stepson, who is really his biological son, but who actually used to be a woman, but got a sex change in Brazil. Suddenly Sabrina laughed along to the laugh track.

Evie looked around for the remote. "Where the remote?" she asked. "I wanna watch People's Court."

"Evie, don't," Sabrina reached for the channel changer on the coffee table. "I'm watching this."

"Like you can really understand what's going on," Evie said.

"Of course, I can understand or else I wouldn't be watching it," Sabrina replied.

"Oh, that's right. You're president of the Spanish Club."

"Yeah," Sabrina said.

"Then why don't you just go up to your room and practice your Spanish there?"

Evie asked.

"Because I wanna be in the den," Sabrina said. "I've been in my room all morning and I want to take advantage that no one is home. Or I *thought* no one was gonna be home. Why aren't you in school?"

"I'm sick," Evie said. She cleared her throat for effect.

"You don't seem sick," Sabrina finally looked over Evie. "And if you are, shouldn't you be in bed?"

“Well, you don’t seem sick either,” Evie snapped back. “~~So~~, shouldn’t *you* be back at Stanford? ^{Then} ~~So~~ you don’t have to be here? Surrounded by idiots?”
wouldnt

“What is that supposed to mean?” Sabrina asked.

“You know what I mean,” Evie said. “I heard you.”

“Heard me, what?” Sabrina asked.

“I heard you, last week,” Evie continued. “You were on the phone and you basically talked smack about me, how much you hate being here and that you thought I was a spoiled brat.”

Sabrina turned from Evie and looked back at the T.V. She said nothing.

One thousand, two thousand...

“Evie,” Sabrina sighed. “You just wouldn’t understand.”

“Oh, and that’s because I’m such an idiot?”

“No. Evie. It’s just,” her sister started. “I’ve been having a really, really hard time and...”

“And what?” Evie wasn’t ^e so convinced that Suprema could ever have ~~such~~ a hard time at anything.

“Evie, I don’t want to get into it. ^{she stated} For the last month I’ve had to have an answer for everything. ^{+ everyone} Why was I breaking up with Robert? Why was I going back home? When was I going to go back to school? It’s like everyone wanted a tidy little answer in a perfect little bow and you know what? I don’t *have* the answer. I’m tired. I just want to, I don’t know...chill?”

Chill? Was such a word actually coming out of Sabrina’s mouth?

“You don’t know, maybe you don’t understand. I mean, you’ve always been the baby of the family, the favorite.”

“The favorite?” Evie gawked. How could Sabrina think that? “Me?” She asked. “You’re the one everyone just idolizes. Mom, dad, Lindsay, Dee Dee’s dad... A through H.”

“A through H?” Sabrina cracked a slow smile. “I haven’t heard that name in years. He’s still at Nueva? You call him that, too?”

“Yeah,” Evie said. It had been a long time since she had see her sister smile. “I mean, everyone does.”

“Does he still clean his glasses, over and over again? Like obsessive compulsive?”

Evie laughed. “Oh, my God. Yeah. I don’t think he’s ever paying attention to what I’m saying.”

“Oh, he’s paying attention alright, but in a different way. He’s the biggest perv.”

“What?” Evie balked. “A Through H? Gross! That is *so* not true! He’s like ~~a~~ ³⁰⁰ hundred years old.” + 300 pounds!”

“It is true!” Sabrina slapped her hands together and laughed. “We used to say that A through H stood for Ass and Hiney. That was his speciality. [”] **One time**...”

Sabrina had a high pitched laugh, almost like a seal, gasping for air. If you had to name the most unattractive thing about Sabrina, which could be hard, considering she was La ^{Supremacy} Sabrina, Evie guessed it would be her laugh. As a kid, Evie was always ^{Even} embarrassed of her big sister’s laugh. She could remember some grade school classmates ^{of her} making fun of it, but now it sounded wonderful to her ears.

“Oh, my God,” Sabrina turned down the sound on the TV. “Those were some fun times, back at Nueva. I wish I was back there, when life was much more simple.”

“Simple?” Evie asked. “Are you sure we went to the same school?”

“Well, you just have a different circle of friends than I had,” Sabrina said. “I was always with the ⁹good, square kids. The future CPAs of the world. I don’t know, I think maybe because I am the oldest, mom and dad were tougher on me. Mom was so strict with me when I was at Villanueva. There was no way I could be allowed to date, or hang out at Sea Street or with someone like Raquel when I was fifteen.

“Fifteen and a ^{1/2}half,” Evie corrected her.

“Almost sixteen,” her sister added. “Evie, I’m sorry what you heard, that day on the phone. I’ve just been out of my mind. I don’t like being here, but it really doesn’t have to do with anything with you. Mom and Dad are really getting on my case. Mom especially. She can be so stifling.”

“Tell me about it.” Evie was surprised that her sister shared the same sentiment with her. *She thought*

“And I just feel like I am letting everyone down. I don’t need to be reminded how much Stanford is costing mom and dad or how I didn’t support Robert enough.”

“Is that why you broke up?” Evie asked.

“It was a big part of it,” Sabrina sighed and curled her legs onto the couch. “He was going to start grad school this spring, in Massachusetts and he wanted me to transfer schools so I could be closer to him. But ^{it}he was just consuming me. I was losing a part, a big part, of myself. And before I knew it, I couldn’t find myself. I wasn’t Sabrina Gomez anymore. I was Robert **Ramirez’s** girlfriend.

"I can't believe he wanted you to leave Stanford," Evie said. Sabrina had always wanted to go Stanford. **Mascot...School cheer**

"Yeah, and I was like, no way," Sabrina shook her head. "I wasn't about to leave my school, my sorority sisters, friends, ~~my~~ family... California."

"In that order, right?" Evie smirked. It sort of bothered her.

"No, I didn't mean it like that. But God, Evie, he was ^{so} personally insulted and he would go on and on, as if I didn't love him enough or something. But I grew up wanting to be a Stanford sorority girl, not somebody's girlfriend in friggin' freezing Massachusetts."

"Right," Evie nodded. It made sense to her.

"So anyway, I really just want to rest," Sabrina pulled the Aghan to her chin. "At least for one quarter. Until all this blows over and then I can go back to school and get a fresh start. Fresh starts are always good." *And then I'll go back to school & then who know?*

"Yeah," Evie agreed. "Everybody needs a fresh start once in a while."

"So what do you wanna watch?"

"Uh, I don't ^{care} care, really."

And without realizing, ^{she} she and Sabrina were, in fact, were starting fresh themselves.

"

Chapter 20

By the time their mother and Lindsay got back, Evie and Sabrina were still in the den. They created a feast of onion dip, pita chips and ~~mini quiches~~ and were engrossed by TiVo'd episodes of Laguna Beach.

"One of my sister's went out with Justin," Sabrina told Evie. "Just one date, but she said he was really cheap."

"No way," Evie dunked her chip into the dip. "Serio?"

"Yes," Sabrina said. "He practically wanted her to order from the kid's menu and then he asked for a doggie bag for the bread."

Oh. My. God," Evie laughed. "No class."

"It is so nice to see you out of your room, Sabrina and to see you two together," their mother joined them in the den. "You know, I'll call your father. Maybe we could barbeque tonight."

"It's okay, mom," Sabrina patted her belly. "I am so full."

"Me too," Evie said.

"No," their mother. "I think we should. We could barbeque some tri-tip."

Sabrina looked at Evie and held her neck with her hand, in a choking position. "What about your so So Cal diet?" Sabrina asked.

Their mother waved her hand aside. "Oh, I'm not concerned with that anymore."

Evie knew. Her party must be off.

Just then the phone rang and Vicki Gomez got up from the couch to get the cordless from the kitchen counter.

“Hi, Kitty!” their mother sang into the receiver. “You know, I was going to call you, I was at –.”

Evie immediately sunk into the loveseat. Uh, oh. Here it comes. She was wondering when Kitty was going to call to complain about her being over at the Diazes so late, or rather, so early, in the morning.

What?” Vicky Gomez responded ^{on the phone} in complete astonishment. “Kitty, *no*. I am so sorry.”

Evie figured she should get up from the den and make an ^{quick} exit to her bedroom. Her mother was obviously hearing about last night’s activities.

“Kitty, no, of course, not,” Vicky Gomez continued. “I won’t say a word. You have my promise. No, she’s right here.” She looked over at Evie just as she was getting up.

Evie was confused. What was going on? What *was* Kitty telling her?

After a few more ‘oh nos’ and “of course, not” Vicki Gomez hung up the phone.

“What happened?” Evie asked her mother. “What did Kitty say?”

Sabrina looked over as well

“Raquel hasn’t been feeling well,” her mother said slowly. “So, Kitty’s going,” she paused. “Kitty’s going to check her into Isla del Mar.”

“Isla *del Mar*?” Evie was taken aback.

Sabrina looked up. “What? Why?”

Isla del Mar was a hospital on the north east hills of the county, a Spanish styled building that one might often confuse with an early California Mission or, like Villanueva, a five star hotel. ^{but in reality} Isla was *actually* a psychiatric center that treated people for addiction or depression. From afar, Isla was a beautiful, serene place with lots of oak and

palm trees ~~and~~ sometimes the Flojos, she, Raquel, Mondo, Alex and Jose would cram into Mondo's mauder and make their way up the winding road to Isla's faculty parking lot, just to hang out and chill. It had the perfect panoramic view of the city and if you went at night, which they often did, you could take in the offshore oil rigs twinkling far away in the distance. But Evie never dreamed that one of *their own* would be an in-patient at Isla.

"Kitty said Raquel got another MIP and -."

"What's an MIP?" Evie interrupted.

"She was drunk in public, again. And because she's underage, and because it's not her first time, she could very well do jail time."

"What? You are not serious?" Evie didn't quite believe her mother. "Jail time? Isn't that a little severe?"

- her mom said
"Evie, she could end up at the CYA, so it's better she get help. Raquel is in some serious trouble," her mother ~~said sternly~~. "Kitty and Charlie want to curb it before it gets out of control, but frankly, I think they should have curbed it a lot earlier."

"Mom, how could you say that?" Sabrina *frowned* asked. "You just said that Raquel's in serious trouble and now all you can be is ~~all~~ judgemental towards her ~~and~~ Kitty and Charlie?"

"I'm just saying it might be too late," **their mother** tried to explain. "Raquel has had problems long before this and you'd think, with Kitty being the head of Las Madrinass and everything, that she would have been a little more pro-active about this."

Evie felt her mother was being extremely *fake* hypocritical.

"You don't think people think the same way about us. About me?" Sabrina asked.

"Sabrina," Her mother looked at her. "It's not the same thing." *you're natin trouble.*

"So, what is gonna happen to her?" Evie asked.

"Kitty is going to take her *to Isen* tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow?" Evie asked. "Already?"

"Yes, they wanted to take her in today, but they needed to get some things in order."

"Well, I'm gonna go over then," Evie *got up* **started for the kitchen door.**

"No, you *don't*," Her mother *don't* actually blocked her with her arm. "You need to leave her alone."

"What?" Evie balked. "My bestfriend is going away, to some ~~rehab~~ hospital and you're telling me I can't see her before she leaves?"

"Evie, *no*," her mother said. "You can't go over now. Give this time to Kitty and Charlie. That's all I'm saying."

Evie went up to her room and was about to text Dee Dee, but decided against it. What would Dee Dee even say anyway? How could she even help Evie possibly feel better?

Thoughts on Raquel

"E-vie!" It was her mother calling out from downstairs. "Visitor!"

God, what now?

~~Visitor? Shite.~~ When her mother got cutesy like that, it only meant one person --
~~Alex.~~ Evie looked at herself in her closet mirrors. She definitely could use a touch up. *Raguel?*
She brushed on some bronzer and pulled her hair out of its pony tail.

“E-vie!” Her mother called out again.

“Coming!” Evie called out as she rushed downstairs. But instead, to her shock,
she didn’t find ~~Alex~~, *Raguel* she found Arturo.

“Hey Evie,” Arturo said nervously as she came down into the foyer.

“Oh, hey, Arturo,” Evie said. “Um, how did you know where I lived?”

hello, ?
Stalker.

“Your address was on the file card,” Arturo explained. “I’m sorry to just pop by
~~like this~~, but you forgot your backpack.” He lifted Evie’s ~~nylon~~ and suede blue bag off
the foyer’s *sitting* **padded bench**. “You took off so fast yesterday.”

“Oh, yeah. Sorry about that.” Evie took her backpack from him. Okay, so he
wasn’t a stalker, just a conscientious student. “I hadn’t even noticed it was missing.”

Arturo laughed. “Oh, so I can see why you need the extra credit for school.”

“No,” Evie felt embarrassed. “It’s just been a rough two days.”

“Oh, ~~I’m~~ *hey,* sorry,” Arturo started. “I didn’t want to make things complicated. I hope
I wasn’t disrespectful, you know, about...”

“No, it was okay,” Evie said.

“Just *okay?*” Arturo winced jokingly.

“No, I mean, it was nice.” Evie lowered her voice and looked down the hall. She
didn’t want her mother overhearing.

“I meant all those things I said,” Arturo told her. “I don’t want you think that you were some kind of rebound or anything. And you’re not gonna believe it, but I have always been intrigued by you.”

“By *me?*” Evie couldn’t quite believe him.

“Yeah, why not?” he said. *looked confused* “From that first day I met you, I thought you were really cute and I just, I didn’t know what to do. I was still with Josephina and I knew you were with someone.”

“How did you know I was with someone?” Evie asked. “I never told you and I don’t think I ever mentioned it.”

“I could tell by that shell necklace you were always wearing,” he said.

“My necklace?” Evie asked.

“Yeah, I don’t know. It looked homemade and seemed sorta special to you. Girls usually don’t wear the same necklace, everyday.”

Evie said *Id* smiled. “Sure they do. But you’re right. Only if the necklace is special to them.”

“Are you gonna be at the reserve on Wednesday?” Arturo asked.

“I don’t know,” Evie said. “I mean, I’ve already got my hours and –.”

“So it *was* just about the hours,” Arturo interrupted. “I thought you had this newfound love for horses and –.”

“No,” Evie tried to explain. “I’m just saying that I have to focus putting together my essay about working at the reserve and then, I don’t know, my bestfriend is going away –.”

“Back to Mexico?”

“No. I mean, yes. Dee Dee might be going away too. I don’t know Arturo. I just got a lot of things on my mind and my birthday is coming up and I don’t think I’m gonna be getting the party I wanted.” *Everything a mess.*

“Your birthday?” he asked. “When is your birthday?”

Was Arturo the only person in Ventura County who didn’t know about Evie’s birthday and possible party at Dukes?

“In about a week and a half,” she said. “But it looks like it’s not gonna happen. ~~My dad is really upset with me.~~ *I’ve got so much work to do. It’s crazy.*”

“Well, if you’re not gonna be at this reserve this week, can I at least get your cell number?” He pulled out his cell from his front pocket. “I mean, at the very least let me take you out for your birthday.”

“Okay,” Evie took his phone and punched in her number. “That would be nice. You can text me,”

“I don’t do text,” he said. “I’d rather hear your voice.”

After Arturo left, Evie’s mother joined her in the great room.

“Is that your boss? From the reserve?” her mother asked. “He’s very handsome. I like his cowboy boots!”

“No, I mean, he’s not really my boss,” Evie said. “He’s just in charge of things.”

Unlike Alex. She missed him

Chapter 21

The next morning, at a little before 8 am, Dee Dee showed up at Evie's house.

They talk about Raquel.

"*Lo siento*, girls," Kitty told them at the front door. "But Raquel's still sleeping."

~~"What time is she leaving?" Evie asked~~

~~"We're gonna leave around ten," Kitty said. She looked tired. Her eyes were~~
puffy with dark circles.

Keep - "Could we wait until she gets up?" Evie asked. "Or could you wake her up and tell her that we're here?"

"No, Evie, I can't," Kitty said. "You girls get to school. Just go to school. You'll be able to see Raquel soon enough."

Raquel's father came to the door.

"Ay, Kitty," ~~he~~ *charlie* said. "Let the girls see Raquel. These are her bestfriends, her **amuegitas.**"

"But Charlie..." Kitty looked ~~back~~ *up* at him.

"Just let them see her," Charlie Diaz widened the door. "Come in girls. Go see Raquel."

When Evie and Dee Dee got to Raquel's bed room, her door was slightly open. Her window shades were pulled down and the entire room was dark.

"Raquel?" Evie whispered.

Dee Dee pushed the door open a bit and both girls peered in. Raquel lay on her side, under the blankets ~~and~~ *X* in bed.

"She's asleep," Dee Dee whispered to Evie. "We should go."

Wait,” Raquel moved under the blankets. “Don’t go.”

Evie and Dee Dee went into her room and to the side of the bed that Raquel was facing.

“Hey, Raquel,” Evie sat down on the foot of the bed. “How are you doing?”

“My parents are trying to get rid of me,” Raquel answered.

Evie looked at Dee Dee, not sure what to say.

your parents
“No, they aren’t,” Dee Dee said. “They just want you to get better. We all want you to get better.”

some
“And the best place to do that at a hospital? Why don’t they just send me to Hawaii for a few months?”

“Raquel...”

“Evie, I’m sorry I can’t be a part of the Hula ~~Lau~~. I was thinking we can do it for your next birthday. I know it won’t be on the 29th, but we can still do our dance, right?”

“Right,” Evie said. “Of course.” *- Party last thing*

“I know I haven’t been the best friend lately,”

“No,” Evie said. “That’s not true.” Okay, she had to admit, there were times that Raquel could have been a little bit more ‘best.’”

“I guess I have been in my own zone,” Raquel confessed. “I didn’t think I was drinking that much and the lady I was talking to, at Isla, she said maybe I should stop making boys the priority in my life.”

“You know,” Evie said. “That’s the same thing Sabrina was telling me.”

“Suprema?” Raquel slowly sat up and leaned against her pillows. “What, she’s talking now?”

“Yeah,” Evie said. “I didn’t know that Robert had wanted her to move to **Massachusetts** with him. He was going to go to grad school out there.”

“Really?” Dee Dee looked over at Evie.

“Yeah, but she didn’t want go with him and he got all mad at her. And now she’s just taking a break from everything. She says she just needs to focus on who she is and what she wants.”

“I didn’t know that,” Dee Dee said.

Raquel, “Yeah, I couldn’t see Sabrina living in *Mass.*”

“Yeah,” Evie agreed. “She said that there was no way she was gonna move across the country for some boy. It’s funny,” Evie said to Raquel. “I never thought you and Suprema would have something in common, you two taking a break from boys.”

“Yeah,” Raquel said. “And I’d never thought you and I would change roles.”

“What do you mean?” Evie asked.

“You have two dudes and I have none.”

Evie laughed. “I wouldn’t say I have two guys. Alex isn’t talking to me and I don’t know where I stand with Arturo. He said he might take me out to dinner, for my birthday, though.”

“Will you guys some visit me?” *Raq asked*

“Of course,” Dee Dee said. “We’ll bake you a cake with a file in it!”

“

Dee Dee and Evie reluctantly left and headed to JUMILE.

“So why wouldn’t your sister move with Robert?” Dee Dee asked Evie. “I thought she loved him? I just always imagined they were like the college sweethearts that would get married.”

“Well, Sabrina said

“Hmmm...” Dee Dee said.

As they were driving out the gates of Rio Estates, the morning mail truck entered. Evie wondered if this would be the Monday she would receive her quality check. She hadn’t even started her essay or turned in her hours to Vasquez (She calculated the calendar days in her head and then checked her day runner. Yes, if all was on schedule, and if the inept student intern in the ad building was on top of things, ~~yes~~, today she would be getting her quality check. With ~~Raquel going to Isla and Sabrina being so depressed, Evie felt selfish that she was so concerned about a birthday party.~~

“Hey listen,” Dee Dee started, again as if she was reading Evie’s thoughts. “What ever happened to me writing that essay for you?”

“It’s okay,” Evie sighed. “It’s not that important now.”

Chapter 22

“Happy Birthday, *mi'ja!*”

Evie couldn’t believe that it was Grandma Pama coming up to her when she entered the doors at Duke’s.

“Grandma!” Evie exclaimed. “What are you doing here?!”

Her grandmother frowned. "That's no way to greet your *abuelita!*" She gave Evie a tight hug. "Ay, *mi'ja*, you look so beautiful. A regular *charrita bonita!*"

Really?" Evie asked.

She had her mother take her to Los Angeles where she found the most beautiful light pink *adelita*, a wide ruffled dress, that the female riders of the *charreada* wore. She also had her hair in French braid with a darker pink ribbon woven through.

Her mother wasn't sure if she should buy her the dress or not.

"But Evie," she had said. "Your whole party is a Mexican Luau and you're going to wear *this?*"

"Yes," Evie insisted.

"Did my mother tell you?" Evie yelled over the music that D.J. Chancla was already bumping the speakers. "I'm going to become an *escaramuza!* I mean, I have to take lessons and learn how to ride a horse and everything."

"*Si, si!*" Grandma Pama nodded. "And here's a little something to get you started. To buy more *adelitas!*" She snuck a small envelope into Evie's hand.

"Thanks Grandma Pama!"

More and more guests came up to Evie -- Tight Across the Ass, Ana, myspace friends who looked nothing like their photos, the older volunteers from the SCHR --

MORE

When Dee Dee presented Evie with her very own surf racks, she was embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Evie" she said. It was evident that Evie wasn't going to get LADY BUG, just yet. "I was really thinking you would be getting your Beetle.

Evie stepped out to the balcony that overlooked the Pacific to get some air. She reflected on everything that had happened in the past two months and felt, somewhat, melancholy. She had expected to be on the balcony with Alex and now, he was no where near the party. She had called him after receiving his last text, but there was only so much she could, or wanted, to do. He was just not going to talk to her, at least for a while. She also thought that Raquel as well, as her own sister, would be at her party. Evie sighed a heavy sigh.

Then out of nowhere she heard a long slow whistle. Oh God, Evie thought *not* Mondo.

Evie turned around and, to her surprise, found Alex at the entrance way of the balcony. She couldn't believe how incredible he looked. He was dressed up in a suede charro jacket and pants. Evie heart skipped. Oh my god. He *was* so handsome!

He was also carrying a big wrapped birthday gift.

"Arturo!" Evie went over to hug him. "Oh, I'm so happy you came!"

Well, I'm so happy you invited me. Open your gift," he urged her.

"Now?" she asked.

"Yes, now," he was just as excited. "I picked it out myself."

Evie ripped off the paper and found, under mounds and mounds of tissue, a saddle, a beautiful leather saddle, intricate in design and detail. She had never seen anything like it.

"It's a charro saddle," Arturo pointed out. "And look, I had the leather embossed with your initials right here."

"Oh, Arturo," Evie said. "This is so beautiful."

Dee Dee come out onto the balcony and reminded Evie of the time.

“It’s almost eight o’clock and visiting hours at Isla del Mar ends at nine,” she told Evie

“Oh,” Evie looked at Arturo. “I have to leave just for like an hour or so.”

“You’re going to leave? Your own party?” he asked.

“Uh, Yeah. Just really quick. It’s really important.”

“Can I go with you?” he asked.

“No, I mean. You can’t,” Evie said. “It’s sorta just a girl thing. Please, can you wait?”

“Yes, no problem.” Arturo smiled. “I’ll go talk to Ana.”

“And you can talk to my boyfriend,” Dee Dee suggested. “Talk him into getting a suit like yours!”

Evie and Dee Dee snuck out of Duke’s visit to Raquel.

“Oh, wait,” Evie stopped. “I want to take some cake to Raquel.”

“Cake?” Dee Dee asked “But you haven’t even cut it yet.”

“I can’t go without taking Raquel any cake,” Evie insisted.

Evie led Dee Dee into the commotion of Duke’s kitchen, past all of the servers and cooks. The two girls definitely didn’t belong in such chaos, but no seemed to pay them attention.

“Get a knife and a small plate,” Evie asked Dee Dee as she shifted the enormous sheet cake from the box.

“This is not cool,” Dee Dee looked around nervously. “Your mom spent a lot of money on this. It’s from Buttercake, huh?”

“Hey, it’s *my* cake,” Evie said.

She cut the smallest sliver possible figuring no one would notice, but then thought what the hell, it *was* her cake and Raquel was her best friend, tied for first place. She cut even a bigger slice.

“What are you doing?!” Dee Dee practically shrieked. Some of the restaurant servers looked over.

“I know what Raquel wants,” Evie bragged as she put the slab of cake on a larger plate and put the rest back in the box.

“Hurry,” Dee Dee looked at the kitchens’ clock. “We have less than an hour.”

They got into JUMILE and sped down Pacific Coast Highway. “I hope we make it.” Dee Dee said.

“We will,” Evie said.

“Are you bummed you didn’t get a car?” Dee Dee asked.

“Yeah, sorta,” Evie confessed. “But it’s not like I could drive right away. I still have to take my test.”

“Maybe your dad will get you one as soon as you pass your test.”

“Maybe. She looked out the window and read the signs for all the nearby beaches. She read one sign and it suddenly hit her.

“Hey, Dee Dee,” Evie slowly started.

“What?”

“Can you stop?” she asked. “Up ahead?”

“*What?*” Dee Dee asked again. “You mean JUMILE? *No.*”

“No, I’m serious,” Evie read the next sign, that repeated the last. “Pull over at this next exit.”

“Why ?” Dee Dee asked. “Evie, there’s nothing out here and we are gonna be late.”

“Dee Dee, seriously,” Evie said. “Pull over at this next exit. *Please!*”

“Okay, okay.” Dee Dee pulled off unto the next exit, which led to a beach. “What, you gotta take a leak?”

“This is Leo Carrillo,” Evie said. “Do you know I used to come here? As a kid? My family used to go camping here.”

“Okay, so why are we here now?” Dee Dee asked. “We’re gonna miss seeing Raquel.”

“Just, drive over there,” Evie pointed.

“Where?”

“Where the road goes under the highway,” Evie directed her. “Towards the campgrounds.”

“*The campgrounds?*” Dee Dee asked. “Evie, we don’t have time for a little memory trip.”

“Please, it’ll just take a second.”

Dee Dee sped JUMILE under the highway and towards the campgrounds and Evie got out of the car.

“Where are you going?” Dee Dee asked after her. “What are you doing?”

Evie pulled up her ruffled dress and walked over, in her pink jeweled Havaianas, to where there were two posts, one on each side of the dirt road that led into