

“Hi Sabrina!” Evie called out as she walked towards her sister. She suddenly felt guilty about all the earlier resents she felt against her. Sabrina suddenly looked frail, and so alone.

“Hey, Eves,” Sabrina’s face was emotionless. She clung to the strap of her shoulder bag **as if it was a life preserver** and paid no attention to Molesto, who eagerly vied for her attention, clumsily trotting around her.

Evie noticed that their mother didn’t pop open the trunk and that there was no luggage in the backseat of the Saab.

“Where’s all your stuff?” Evie asked Sabrina.

“I only have my carry-on,” Sabrina tugged at her large green suede shoulder bag. “I didn’t pack a lot,”

“Why not?” Evie asked. “How long are you staying?”

“*Evie*, ” Her mother came around the Saab. “Enough with the questions.”

“Senorita Sabrina!” Lindsay extended her tanned, wrinkled arms to embrace Sabrina. “Oh, look at you!” She gave her a long, hard embrace. “All skin and bones. Oh, I’ll take care of that!”

Sabrina didn’t say anything, resembling a limp, lifeless rag doll as Lindsay hugged her.

“I’m going to make you my special *fideo*,” Lindsay chatted excitedly as she took Sabrina’s bag and slung it across her own shoulder. “I make it with fresh tomatoes, from the garden.”

“It’s really okay,” Sabrina muttered softly.

"Oh, but it won't be a bother."

"I'm not hungry, Lindsay" Sabrina replied, this time more curtly.

"That's because you haven't had ^{any} good food," Lindsay said. "Up there at school they don't know everything. But let me—"

"Lindsay!" Sabrina snapped. She rubbed the right side of her temple, then harder ^{as if she had a migraine the hard} as if she was trying to **extinguish a () or something..** "Stop it!" she snapped again. "Just stop it!"

And indeed everything just stopped. Everything and everyone.

"Oh," Lindsay pulled back from Sabrina. "Lo siento..." She turned to Evie's mother **for guidance**. "I didn't, I..."

Evie looked over at her mother, who immediately ^{went} came to Lindsay's aid.

"Oh, it's okay," Vicki Gomez tried to assure Lindsay that she was not the cause of Sabrina's upset, but she appeared to be just as shaken. "No worries." **(She went over to Sabrina and tried to smooth the crease in her face that were forming. She held her to her side and caressed her hair.)**

It was unsettling to say the least. Sabrina disposition was always as sunny as, well her name and Evie couldn't recall when she ever raised her voice to anyone at all, especially to Lindsay.

Sabrina bowed her head into her mother's chest. Her mouth creased downward at the sides and soon small tears percolated from the corners of her eyes. Her whole body began to tremble.

"Oh, oh..." Evie's mother but she seemed at a loss of what to do. "Lindsay, here," she quickly handed her own handbag and car keys to her. "I'm going to take Sabrina up

"No, *don't*." Alex held his palms out towards Evie, making it very clear that he didn't want to be touched.

"Alex, wait," Evie started.

But it was too late. He ~~is~~ (was) already heading back to his truck ~~(.)~~ where ~~[delete~~
~~where]~~ (H) he got in and drove away. [Q: so how does she get home?]

Chapter 19: Text Mex and Other Southwest Catastrophes

Never Mind

Excuse me? Did (Had) Evie read Alex's text correctly? It was nearly 1 AM, and maybe her eyelids were heavy (.) She read and re-read his ~~message~~ ~~[delete message]~~ text on her cell's screen. 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" ~~[delete period]~~ to "Never Mind" in just a matter of days? Of course, she knew. One word. Arturo.

After she had been picked up from the reserve, Evie asked Lindsay to drive her by Alex's house ~~[delete comma]~~ but found that his truck wasn't parked in the ~~drive way~~ (driveway) 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.

Evie was already in bed ~~and~~ ~~[use but]~~ wide awake when she got his text message. Her mind had been crazy ~~[delete crazy]~~ racing with worry, fear ~~[,]~~ and concern, in that order, on Alex, Arturo, and her driving test, also in that order. She tucked her cell phone under her pillow and turned over. She closed her eyes in determination. She *had* to sleep. Her driving test was in less than six hours.

Get to sleep. Sleep! Don't think about him or Arturo. [Your] ~~[d]~~ driving test is the most important thing right now. 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!*

Evie turned to [on] her other side and hugged her pillow when she heard what sounded like Davey Mitchell's truck. ~~[Q: how would she know the sound?]~~ *italics* ~~she knew that truck~~ She pulled out her cell phone. Could it really be Davey 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 her bedroom shutters that it was Davey. He was bringing Raquel home from God knows where. Evie watched as Raquel stepped down from the passenger seat of his high, lifted truck and 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 threw on on some ~~[delete some]~~ sweat pants, a hoodie ~~(.)~~ and her Juicy Couture flojos. She crept downstairs and went through the side door of the kitchen ~~[and]~~ ~~[delete where she then]~~ where she then cut across to the Diaz's backyard. When she entered the Diaz's ~~[kitchen door]~~ ~~[delete house through the kitchen]~~ house through the ~~kitchen~~, she found Raquel tearing through the refrigerator's freezer.

"I totally have the munchies," Raquel announced, as if it wasn't already obvious. She pulled out two Trader Joe's green chili and cheese tamales and popped them in the microwave.

"Raquel," Evie moaned as she pulled up a stool. "You won't believe it. Alex just texted me. I think ~~(he)~~ broke up with me."

"I thought you guys had already had ~~[delete had]~~ broken up," Raquel said nonchalantly. She timed her tamales for five minutes.

"Not officially," Evie said. ~~She felt [delete She felt]~~ ~~(H)~~ her eyes star~~(ed)~~ to water up. Her body felt numb.

"But I thought you gave him back his necklace," Raquel said. She took a soda from out of ~~[delete out of]~~ the fridge. "You ~~[delete You]~~ ^{Capital} 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's that supposed to mean?" Evie asked.

"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." Raquel unwrapped the corn husks from her tamales and slid them onto a salad plate. "But I'm starving. Do you mind that ~~use if~~ I eat? 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, I was at the reserve and Alex caught me-."

"Caught you?" Raquel asked. "Caught you doing what?"

"I was with Arturo," Evie started. "And Alex came by and caught us-."

"Wait, [delete Wait,] doing *what*?"

Evie pulled her stool closer to the counter. The jack cheese oozing out of the corn masa looked **good**, but she was far from hungry. “Nothing really. I mean, we were just kissing, sorta.”

“*Just* kissing?” Raquel’s mouth dropped. Evie could see the mouthful of corn masa spread across 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!” She spat under her breath as she opened her mouth and let a wad of *masa* drop unto 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.

“*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 from one of the tamales with a fork. This time [she] blew on it softly 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 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 ~~turn over~~ [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, [hookers,] ex[-]cons and, now, apparently, Raquel.

Evie looked at Raquel as she ~~scarfed~~ [scarfed] 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 [] [delete comma] [and] 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 without sounding insulting. "You just look, I don't know, tired."

“Well, it’s almost two in the morning, Evie. And 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 this driving test tomorrow, I mean, today, and I just know I’m gonna fail. Everthing is turning to crap.”

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

“God, Raquel,” Evie raised her voice. “Why do you have to be so negative all the time?”

“I’m not negative,” Raquel insisted. “I’m just being realistic, honest. [use realistic OR honest, but not both] [delete And] And [I]f 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 [use very] 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 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.”

222

"You know, Evie," Raquel 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 just concerned[,] Raquel. Excuse me if I get concerned about people I care about."

"Yeah, you sure showed concern 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 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," Evie said. "I have a problem with that, [delete comma] because you know what happened. I told you."

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

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

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

"Raquel, ~~no~~ ~~[delete Raquel, no]~~ I didn't have *time* to say no! He just pulled me in, ~~(and)~~ like, grabbed me!" She couldn't believe what Raquel was insinuating!

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

"I *know* she doesn't," Evie said. "But that night she... I mean, Jose had bought her some. These red Roxys and —."

"*He* bought her flojos?" Raquel asked.

Just then ~~[delete Just then]~~ ~~(T)~~ the kitchen light went on.

"What *is* going on here?!" It was Raquel's mother. She was in a terry robe and her eye mask was pushed up to her forehead. She was *mad*. "Evie, what are you doing here? At this hour?!"

"I was just..." Evie started. She hadn't seen Kitty look so angry in such a long time. ~~(I)~~ ~~[delete like a long time]~~ like a *Long* time. Maybe as far back ~~(as)~~ ~~when~~ she discovered that Raquel had forged her name on a check, which was ~~sometime~~ ~~[some time]~~ ago.

"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 ~~(said dryly,)~~ "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 72 in blue ink on ~~(the)~~ score sheet. "But ~~[delete But]~~ ~~[Y]~~ you need to be in the **ninetieth** percentile in order ~~for you~~ ~~[delete for you]~~ to get your license. Your biggest problem was ~~parallel parking and following the street signs~~ ~~[this is vague]~~. You need to work on that."

Michelle,
~~over~~
any?
ideas?

Evie didn't say anything as she took the paperwork from the instructor and headed back into the DMV ~~(.)~~ ~~[delete to]~~ where her mother and Lindsay were waiting. She swung open the glass door and they 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~~ ~~[delete like she was]~~ on the verge of tears.

She looked around the DMV and realized that there was no happy medium in the entire place. People were either slouched over the counters, complaining about the high cost of registration fees ~~(.)~~ or slouched over the counter and pulling their hair out as they struggled with the written part of a driving test. Yes. The DMV was an evil, ugly place.

"Blah," her mother took the score sheet and looked it over. "So you'll 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 key ring. Did Lindsay *have* to flaunt them so soon after her failure?

They left the DMV building and went around the side to ~~[delete get]~~ get Lindsay's car.

Evie took a seat in the back and looked out the window. **How could she have flunked her test? Her parents (had) paid the California Driving School to teach her the basics rules of the road (,) and then she practiced with her father and Lindsay. She must have failed simply because she had had only two hours of sleep, having left Raquel's house at nearly two am (,) and not falling asleep until nearly five [delete in the morning] in the morning. Of course, she was in a daze from sleep debt, [deprivation:]. How could anyone have expected her to pass a driving test in her condition?**

As Lindsay drove downtown, every car on the road seemed to be bragging [delete to Evie] to Evie. They were all just whizzing along, a procession of independence. Evie wondered if she would ever be allowed to participate in such a grand parade. [delete And] (N) And now she would have to go to school and be comforted[, not by Raquel, who] by who? Not Raquel, who was definitely still pissed off at her. No Dee Dee, who wasn't [delete wasn't] probably not [delete not] (wasn't) 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 to face her.

"I don't feel good," Evie held her side and leaned 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 [delete started to] water(ed) up [delete up] more. "I just really, really don't feel good. I didn't sleep all night (,) and I feel ill."

"Oh, I don't know," her mother looked at Lindsay. "What do you think, Linds?"

When they pulled ~~up to~~ th ~~use~~ ^{in to} the drive way [driveway], Lindsay kept ~~the~~ car running as Evie got out.

"I already had two appointments," ^{planned today} ~~[vague and a bit confusing]~~ her mother said. "I have to get more vegetable [oil or fuel] for the car ~~and~~ and then we're going back to California Closet. Are you sure you're going to be okay?" ✓

"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~~ and you know your sister is home ~~[delete comma]~~ if you need anything."

Suprema? Yeah, right. She would be the last person Evie would ~~ever~~ ~~[delete ever]~~ go to for anything.

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

But when she got to the den, Evie was surprised to find Sabrina ~~[there, spread out]~~ ~~on~~ 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, ~~Eve~~ (Evie) still held a grudge over what she had overheard Sabrina say about her on the phone.

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

"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. [Q: would Vickie G go to an estate sale?]~~ Flopping and kicking up was a no-no. [this sentence is vague and confusing] But (neither) their mother, nor Lindsay, was around.

Sabrina **kept her eyes on the televsion. She was watchin** a soap opera, a Korean soap opera with no subtitles. Suddenly Sabrina laughed along ~~use with~~ 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 ~~delete~~ (.) I can understand (.) or else I wouldn't be watching it," Sabrina replied.

"Oh, that's right. You're president of the Korean Language Club, right?"

"Evie, just ^{of} let me be. I've been in my room all morning ~~[,]~~ and I just wanted to take advantage ~~that [use of]~~ no one ~~[delete was gonna]~~ was gonna be ~~[ing]~~ home today. 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 ~~(at)~~ Evie. "And if you are, shouldn't you be in bed?"

"Well, you don't seem sick either," Evie snapped back. "Shouldn't *you* be back at Stanford? So you don't have to be here? Surrounded by idiots?"

"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 ~~[delete and you]~~ and you basically ~~talked~~ ~~(talking)~~ smack about me, how much you hate being here and that ~~[delete you thought]~~ ~~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 so convinced that Suprema could ever have such a hard time at anything.

"Evie, I don't want to get into it," her sister started. "For the last month, I've had to have an answer for everything and everyone. *Why* was I breaking up with Robert? *Why* was I ~~going~~ going back home? *When* was I going to go ~~back to school~~ back to school? It's like everyone wanted a tidy little answer in a perfect little bowl, 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 even think that? "Me?" Evie 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'd seen 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, 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 three hundred pounds and three hundred years old."

"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."

Sabrina had a high pitched laugh, almost like a seak ~~[delete comma]~~ gasping for air. If you had to name the most unattractive thing about Sabrina, which could be hard, considering she ^(sup) ~~was~~ ^{by} ~~suprema~~, Evie guessed it would be her laugh. As a kid, Evie was always embarrassed of ~~[use by]~~ her big sister's laugh. She could remember some of her grade school classmates making fun of it, but now it sound okay.

"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 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. ~~[delete There was no way]~~ ~~[I wasn't allowed]~~ There was no way I could be allowed to date, or hang out at Sea Street or ~~[delete hang out]~~ hang out with someone like Raquel when I was fifteen.

"Fifteen and three quarters," Evie corrected her.

"Almost sixteen," her sister added. "Evie, I'm sorry what you heard ~~X [delete comma]~~ 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 ~~[delete to do with]~~ to do with anything ~~(to do)~~ 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 ~~[delete with her]~~ with her. She had always thought that the two "Go-mez Girls" consisted of her mother and Sabrina and that she was the odd one out. *italics*

~~[delete And]~~ "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 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. She ~~[had]~~ memorized its school song when most kids were learning the pledge of allegiance.

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

"In that order, right?" Evie smirked.

"No, I didn't mean it like that. But God, Evie, he was was insulted[,] and he would go on and on, as if I didn't love him enough or something. ~~[delete But]~~ 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 afghan up to her chin.
~~Afghan to her chin.~~ "At least for one quarter[,] and then maybe I'll go back to school then
~~[delete then].~~ I want a fresh start. Fresh starts are always good."

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

Sabrina reached over and gave Evie the remote. "So what do you wanna watch?"

"Uh, I don't care, really."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah."

~~[delete And]~~ And [W] without realizing it, Evie and Sabrina were, in fact, sharing
a fresh start themselves.

Chapter 20

By the time ~~[use When]~~ their mother and Lindsay got back, Evie and Sabrina
were still in the den. They ~~[had]~~ created a feast of bean dip and bagel chips and were
engrossed by TiVo'd episodes of Laguna Beach. *Itzhak's*

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

"No way," Evie dunked her chip into the bean 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 their bread."

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

"No pass," Sabrina laughed with her.

"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'm already full."

"Me too," Evie said.

"Oh, I think we should," ~~their mother. [delete their mother]~~ "We could barbeque some tri-tip."

Sabrina looked at Evie and held her neck with her hand, in a choking position. "But what about your So SoCal diet?" she asked their mother.

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

Evie felt worried. Not a good sign that her mother was off her diet. She had started the diet because of the Sixteenera. Was her mother losing her enthusiasm?

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 ~~sunk~~ [sank] into the loveseat. Uh, oh. 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 looked over at Evie and responded [delete and responded] in complete astonishment. "Kitty, *no*. I am so sorry."

Evie figured she should get up from the den and make a run for her bedroom...window? 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 again, 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 ~~also~~ [delete also] looked up.

"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 on the north east ~~[northeast]~~ hills of the county, a Spanish ~~style~~ ~~[style]~~ building that one might ~~often~~ [delete often] confuse with an early California Mission or, like Villanueva, a five~~(-)~~star hotel. But in reality~~(.)~~ Isla was a center that treated people for addiction or depression. On the outside, Isla was a beautiful, serene place with lots of oak and palm trees. Sometimes~~(.)~~ the Flojos, she, Raquel, Mondo, Alex~~(.)~~ and Jose would cram into Mondo's maurader 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⁽¹⁾ and if you went at night, which they often did, you could take in the offshore oil rigs twinkling [~~delete far away~~] 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? [~~delete You are not serious?~~] You are not serious^{italics}," Evie didn't quite believe her mother. "Jail time? Isn't that a little severe?"

"Evie," her mother said sternly⁽¹⁾,⁽¹⁾ she could end up at the CYA, so it's better she get help. Raquel is in some serious trouble. 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 asked. "You just said that Raquel's in serious trouble⁽¹⁾ 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⁽¹⁾ and you'd think, with Kitty being the head of Las Madrinas and everything, that she would have been a little more pro-active ~~about this~~." [~~delete about this~~]

[~~delete So~~]"So, [What's] ^{what is} gonna [~~delete what is~~] happen to her?" Evie asked.

"Kitty is going to take her tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow?" Evie asked. "Already?"

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

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

"Evie, don't." Her mother blocked her with her arm. "You need to leave her alone."

"What?" Evie balked. "My ~~bestfriend~~ **[best friend]** is going away and you're telling me I can't see her before she leaves?"

"Evie," 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 ~~[delete comma]~~ but decided against it. What would Dee Dee even say anyway? How could she ~~[delete even]~~ *even* help *The situation?* ~~Evie possibly feel better?~~

Thoughts on Raquel

"E-vie!" Her mother called out from downstairs. "**[You have a visitor!]** ~~visitor!~~"

Visitor? Her mother sounded happy, almost singing out the announcement. It must be . . . Raquel!

Evie rushed downstairs, but instead, to her shock, she didn't find Raquel in the foyer. It was Arturo.

"Hey ~~[.]~~ Evie," Arturo started nervously as she came 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 [drop] ~~pop~~ by, but you forgot your backpack." He lifted Evie's suede blue bag off the foyer's 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 extra credit for school."

"No," Evie felt embarrassed. "It's just been a rough two days."

"Oh. Sorry," Arturo looked awkward. "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. ~~[delete And] And [Y]~~ 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 asked "From that first day I met you, I thought you were really cute ~~[delete and I just]~~ [but] and ~~I just~~ I didn't know what to do. I was still with Josephina ~~[delete]~~ and I knew you were with someone."

"How did you know I was with someone?" Evie asked. ~~[delete I never told you and]~~ "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, ~~[delete comma]~~ [every day.] ~~everyday.~~"

Evie ~~said~~ ~~[delete said]~~ smiled. "Sure they do, 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 -." ~~[Q: seems like she got her hours done pretty fast.]~~

"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 ~~[delete Arturo]~~ Arturo. I ~~[delete I've]~~ 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 is just 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. I have so much work to do [.] and I haven't started any of it."

"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. "[Besides,] 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, [~~delete~~ No, I mean,] (H)he's not really my boss," Evie said. "He's just in charge of things."

Unlike Alex, Evie thought. But with all that had been going on, she suddenly missed him more.

✓
(note to self - write more!!)

Chapter 21

The next morning, ~~at~~ [~~delete at~~] a little before 7 am [a.m.], Dee Dee showed up at Evie's house.

Evie had reached Dee Dee later that night. Dee Dee couldn't believe the news about Raquel. MORE.

The(y) decided to see Raquel first thing in the morning, [~~delete comma~~] before they left for school.

"*Lo siento*, girls," Kitty told them at the front door. "~~[delete But]~~ 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.

"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 just get ~~[use go]~~ to school. You'll be able to see Raquel soon enough."

Raquel's father came to the door.

"Ay, Kitty," Charlie Diaz said. "Let the girls see Raquel. These are her ~~bestfriends~~ best friends, her *amuegitas*."

"But Charlie..." Kitty looked 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~~, bedroom, her door was slightly open. ~~Her fuse~~ The window shades were pulled down and the entire room was dark.

"Raquel?" Evie whispered.

Dee Dee pushed open the door the door open ~~[delete a bit]~~ a bit and both girls peered in. Raquel lay on her side in bed.

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

"Wait," Raquel turned under the blankets. "Don't go."

Evie and Dee Dee went into ~~her~~ the room. ~~[delete towards Raquel]~~ towards Raquel.

"Hey, Raquel," Evie said softly as she sat down on the foot of the bed. "How you doing?"

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

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

"No, they aren't," Dee Dee said. "They just want you to get better. We all want you to get better."

"And the best place to do that is at a hospital? Why don't they just send me to Hawaii for a few months?"

"Raquel..." Evie started.

"Evie, I'm sorry I can't be a part of the Hula Auana. I was thinking we could do it for your next birthday. I know it won't be on the 29th, but we can still do something, right?"

"Right," Evie said. "Of course."

"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 when Raquel could have been a ~~little~~ ~~[delete 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~~ and the lady I was talking to, at Isla ~~[delete commas]~~ 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~~ [sat up slowly] and leaned against her pillows.

"~~What, [delete What]~~ [S]he'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 ~~[delete out] 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 ~~[delete just]~~ taking a break from everything. She says she just ~~[delete just]~~ needs to focus on who she is and what she wants.

"I didn't know that," Dee Dee said. ~~[delete this sentence]~~—

Raquel, "Yeah, I couldn't see Sabrina living in Massachusetts. Evie [,]" [said Raquel.]

"Yeah," Evie agreed. "She said ~~that [delete 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," ~~[delete Yeah]~~ Raquel said, "[And I never] ~~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, ~~[delete comma]~~ [,] for my birthday [,] ~~[delete though]~~ though.

"Will you guys [come] ~~some~~ visit me?" Raquel asked.

"Of course," Dee Dee said. "We'll bake you a cake with a file in it!"

Raquel's mother came in the room. "Girls, you better get going."

Dee Dee and Evie reluctantly left ~~() [delete and headed to Jumile] and headed to~~
Jumile.

"I hope Raquel is going to be okay," Dee Dee said. "She seems okay to me, I mean, making a ~~[delete a]~~ little jokes y mas." *italics*

"Yeah," Evie said. "I have no idea."

"So why wouldn't your sister move with Robert?" Dee Dee asked ~~() [delete Evie]~~
~~Evie~~. "I thought she loved him ~~()~~ I just ~~[delete just]~~ always imagined they were ~~[delete~~
~~like the]~~ like the college sweethearts that would [use who'd] get married."

"Well, Sabrina said it just really ~~[delete just really]~~ wasn't in her heart. She told me that ~~[delete that]~~ when she'd wake up in the morning and fall asleep at night that Robert wasn't the first thing she thought of. She thought about other things ~~[delete that]~~ ~~that~~ she wanted to do, for herself."

"Hmm... interesting," Dee Dee replied as ~~[delete replied as she]~~ she shifted gears.

As Dee Dee and Evie drove past ~~()~~ the gates of Rio Estates, the morning mail truck entered. Evie looked after it and 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. Yes, if all was on schedule, and if the inept student intern in the ad building would be on top of things, today she would be getting her quality check.

She was almost tempted to ask Dee Dee to wait for the mail truck to get to her house[, but she decided]. She decided against it. She was just too tired to care.

[Q: big skip here?]

Chapter 22

“Happy Birthday, *mi'ja!*”

245

Chapter 22

Evie had had only three birthday parties, her fourth, eighth and twelfth, that ~~were~~ [delete that were] celebrated on her actual birth date, February 29th. Her 16th birthday party would have been the fourth time that the calendar lined up in her favor. Thanks to Grandma Pama, Evie was allowed not [not just to have] to just have a party, but to have her grand Sixteenera.

Leave it to Grandma Pama to insist with a strong hand, a hand that basically lit some fire under Evie's father's ass, that he would really, *really* have regrets if he didn't give his ~~only~~ [delete only] baby daughter the Sweet Sixteenera that she so rightfully deserved. It didn't hurt that Grandma Pama reminded Ruben Gomez of his own academic troubles while he was a struggling business school student, and look how well he turned out. ~~(.)~~ Yes, [delete Yes] Grandma Pama agreed with her son that ~~(it)~~ was in the Gomez blood to succeed in life, but at each Gomez's [own] pace.

~~And [delete And]~~ ~~(S)~~so, at the 11th hour, Evie, her mother ~~(.)~~ and Dee Dee got the go ahead from Senor Ruben Gomez. The sixteenera [be consistent with capitalization—either always capitalize sixteenera, or never capitalize it] was *on*. It was a mad dash to send out evites and make last minute calls, but they did it. Evie and Dee Dee crossed their fingers as they checked and re-checked the RSVP list every day and just about every hour. As the ~~amount~~ use number of the guest list rose [delete higher] higher, so did Evie's spirits. It truly looked like she was going to have her party [and a ton of guests.] and that there ~~would be~~ a ton of guests. One person, regrettably, who didn't reply to Evie's invitation ~~(.)~~ was Alex. Evie had sent him an evite, as well as a personal text, ~~and~~

[use ~~but~~] he responded to neither. It hurt something awful to accept ~~that [us the fact]~~ ^{the} fact that it was truly over between them.

~~But [delete But]~~ ^{through} On Saturday, February 29th ^(,) as Evie walked ~~into [unclear]~~ ^{through} otherwise, it sounds like she is running into them] the grand wooden doors of Duke's with Dee Dee, she had yet to understand just how incredibly special her night was going to be.

The walls of Duke's were practically shaking from the fast, loud surf music [delete that] that DJ Chancla was already **bumping** ^(,) and Evie had to scream over **the** music just [delete just] to greet her guests. So many guests! She felt like a princess as she made her way down a receiving line of blurred, smiling faces that were [delete that were] sweaty and pink faced [delete faced] from the heat and excitement. She couldn't keep count of the throngs of friends, family ^(,) and even Mr. A through H (ew, how did ^{italics} he get in?), all wanting to hug or wish her happy birthday ^(,) **birthday**. Dee Dee actually had to push their way through the crowd just [delete just] to get to [delete to] Evie through.

Did she say Princess? How about rock star?

"Move aside, move aside!" Dee Dee ordered. "Birthday girl coming through!"

"Happy Birthday ^(,) Eves!"

"Mahalo!"

"Cool party, Evie!"

"Feliz Cumpleanos!"

"Nice party hats!"

Huh?

"Happy Birthday, *mi 'ja!*"

Evie looked over and couldn't believe it when she saw the ~~(use tiny)~~ little, white-haired lady in a ~~pant-suit~~ pantsuit among a mob of Hawaiian print shirts and dresses.

"Grandma?" Evie was caught off guard. [She was surprised that] ~~It was a surprise that~~ Grandma Pama would take a break from college lectures and her *quintana* lifestyle just to attend a mere birthday party. "What are *you* doing here?!"

Grandma Pama frowned. "That is no way to greet your *abuelita!*" She pushed past Big Bulge and Eyeliner Boy to give Evie a tight hug. "I'm so relieved those parents of yours listened to me. There was no way that my dear granddaughter wasn't going to have the quinceanera of her dreams."

"Uh, grandma," Evie suddenly felt worried. Did her grandmother really think she was turning 15, and that why ~~she was~~ [she had made] made the special trip from Davis? "This isn't my quinceanera. I never had one, remember? I'm turning sixteen. This is my Sixteenera."

"*What? You're sixteen?*" Grandma Pama looked around Duke's. "Then how old does that make me?" She glanced over at Eyeliner Boy. "Not *that* old."

"Oh, Grandma," Evie leaned in to hug her grandmother tighter. She knew she was joking.

Dee Dee made a loud, distinct cough. "Uh, hem!"

"Oh, Grandma, this is my best friend, Dee Dee," Evie introduced them to each other.

"*Estoy encantada,*" Dee Dee almost curtsied.

"Oh," Grandma Pama looked at Evie with approval. "Very nice. You have some very nice friends, Evelina. Both of you girls look absolutely glamorous!"

Evie felt glamorous. She was wearing a form fitting vintage halter gown, soft chocolate brown with a print of pink hibiscus flowers ~~[delete comma]~~ that she had found at Decades on Melrose. Underneath? A hot pink toe job from Michael Kelley and hot pink jeweled flojos from Barney's. *No* bronzer.

Evie felt a nudge and noticed that her grandmother had slipped a small, white envelope into her hand.

"Grandma..." Evie started. She knew what was in the envelope

"Take it," her grandmother insisted. "But do something *good* with it. You're sixteen now. You should learn how to make the right decisions."

The rest of the evening, Evie couldn't catch her breath as she was pulled from one friend to another and then from side of the dance floor to the other ~~[. [delete rest of sentence] side of the dance floor.~~ She couldn't remember having laughed, danced ~~[.]~~ and eaten so much. The buffet was a mad fusion of *lechon*, shrimp egg rolls, wonton nachos and pineapples filled with Mexican rice. The line of sexy Polynesian dancers that shook the stage made Evie instantly regret that she and Dee Dee had agreed to ~~still [delete still]~~ perform their Hula Auana. *Why* had they planned to perform after such **rhythmic greatness?**

While the party staff worked on getting the custom ~~made [delete made]~~ pineapple shaped piñata hoisted from the restaurant's rafters, Evie stepped out ~~[use onto]~~ onto the wooden balcony ~~that [delete that]~~ overlooked [overlooking] the Pacific. She needed to ~~get~~

~~[delete to get]~~ some air. She was already exhausted from ~~(the)~~ excitement ~~(,)~~ and her party was far from over. She still had to take the first whack at the piñata, cut her ~~two-foot-high~~ ~~[two-foot-high]~~ mango and cream birthday cake, unwrap a multitude of presents ~~(,)~~ and, of course, perform the Hula Auana with Dee Dee.

Evie noticed she wasn't the only one on the balcony. She looked over and saw that Y-von 52 ~~[what does 52 mean?]~~ was at the other end ~~and [delete and]~~ in an intimate embrace with her boyfriend, Gabriel. Evie's chest felt heavy. Alex wasn't at her party with her ~~(,)~~ and it was hitting her hard. When she had decided to have her Sixteenera at Duke's, she imagined being on the balcony with him, just like Y-von 52 was with Gabriel. Now Alex was nowhere near the balcony ~~(,)~~ and she was nowhere near his heart. What had gone so terribly wrong? He ~~(had)~~ never returned her calls and perhaps he never would. The idea of not speaking to Alex ever again ~~just [delete just]~~ about killed her.

She looked back at her party through the glass doors. Everyone was dancing and laughing. How could Raquel ~~also~~ ~~[delete commas]~~ not be around? Raquel was the last person to ever miss a good party ~~(,)~~ and this was most definitely a good party. Evie turned back to look out to the water ~~(,)~~ and ~~[delete and]~~ leaned against the balcony's ledge, ~~and~~ ~~folded her hands to rest her head in them~~. She folded her hands and rested her head in them. She took a deep breath. It was ~~a [delete a]~~ great, *awesome*, to have the Sixteenera of her dreams, but in a way, the party had two big, gaping holes.

italics
All of a sudden, Evie heard a long, slow whistle. Of course, she *knew* that whistle. Ugh, Mondo. She was so not in the mood for him at the moment. She pretended not to hear him and didn't turn around.

He whistled again.

Evie finally pushed up from (the) ledge. She was ready to throw him a smirk and a (smart) remark, but when she turned around, she couldn't believe who was standing in front of her. It was *Alex*. Evie's stomach flipped. And then it flopped.

"Hey, Evie," Alex smiled, hesitantly. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I haven't returned your calls and texts and everything." He looked around the balcony.

"No, no," Evie started. "*I'm* sorry!" She wanted to reach out and embrace him but wasn't sure if she should. He just stood there and she just stood there, as if they [use either both OR they] both really didn't know what to do. "Please, Alex," she continued. "You have to know that (it was nothing) with Arturo, ~~it was nothing~~. I know that sounds cliché, but really, I was just stupid (,) and maybe I was a little mad about that night with Mondo and the night-."

Alex held (held up his hand.) ~~his hand up~~. "I know, I know. I haven't been the best boyfriend. Really. And *I'm* sorry."

"No, *I'm* sorry," Evie practically cried.

"Okay," Alex laughed. "We're *both* sorry."

Alex reached for Evie and put his arms around her shoulders. He held her tight (,) and Evie was overwhelmed with how good he felt. His hair was slightly damp from a fresh shower (,) and he ~~had on~~ (OR she smelled the tiniest hint of cologne) ~~(the) tiniest hint of cologne~~ (fresh and sea breezy). He was wearing a sports jacket and dark slacks.

"Oh, Evie," he whispered into her ear. "I was so afraid I was gonna mess up your birthday by showing up here. I had no idea what to expect. I didn't know if that other guy was gonna be here or what. I was going crazy trying to find out if you were with him or not."

"Not," Evie insisted. "I am *not* with him. I'm technically not with anyone, *yet*."

Was that too desperate?

Alex pulled away.

Oh no, it *was* too desperate.

Alex, however, reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box. His neck turned pink. Evie knew that shade of nervous pink. "I think this would *really* go with your outfit." He looked over Evie [Evie over.] [~~delete~~ Wow] "Wow [X] you look so beautiful."

Evie smiled. Alex had never called her beautiful. He had called her cute and [~~sexy~~ that one time,] that one time, sexy, but never beautiful. She loved hearing it. She looked down at the box and [~~delete~~ and] [as he placed] he placed it in her hands. When she opened it, [she couldn't believe what she found, [~~she saw~~] placed on a blue velvet backing was a charm - two miniature gold flip flops, one slightly over the other, and each topped with a small pearl where the gold 'straps' connected. The flip flops were attached to a thin gold chain.

"Oh [G] my God, Alex," Evie's mouth dropped open. "This is *so* beautiful. I can't believe it. I've *never* seen anything like this."

["I was hoping you'd say that," he said proudly.] [~~I know, you probably haven't,~~ he said proudly. "I ordered [it] a while ago. That time I went to San Diego with Bien? That's when I finally picked it up in L.A."

"Are you serious?" Evie felt like such a loser. She had gotten on him for not calling her sooner from his trip with Bien.

258

"I wanna ~~[use want to]~~ be your boyfriend again," Alex told her as he removed the flip flop charm ~~[necklace]~~ from the box. "And I want to be the boyfriend you deserve. You're totally worth it."

"I would like that," Evie smiled at him. "No, I would *love* that." She looked at the charm. "Will you put it on me?"

"Of course." Alex ~~got~~ ~~[use moved]~~ behind Evie and fastened ~~(the)~~ chain around her neck.

"Evie?"

Dee Dee was peering out from the balcony's sliding glass door. "I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" ~~She had a big smile on her face as soon as she saw Alex.~~

[She grinned as soon as she saw Alex.]

"No, not anymore," Evie look up at Alex. "Look!" She held out the flip flop necklace for Dee Dee to see. "Look what Alex gave me!"

"I know," Dee Dee looked ~~over~~ ^{at} ~~[use at]~~ the charm. "It's ~~so~~ cute, huh?"

"What do you mean, you know?" Evie asked.

"I know because he kept asking me if he should get you the flojo earrings or the flojo necklace or the flojo bracelet. He drove me *crazy*."

"Yeah," Alex said. "I even asked Raquel ~~[.]~~ and she ~~had~~ ~~[delete had]~~ told me to get you a flip flop navel ring, but they didn't have one."

Raquel!

"Dee Dee, what time is it?" Evie asked.

253

"That's why I came out," Dee Dee said. "I wanted to remind you of the time. We should get going if we're gonna make in back in time to do our Hula Auana."

"Where are you going?" Alex asked. "You're gonna leave your own party?"

"We gotta go to Isla del Mar," Evie told him. "Raquel's there."

"What?" Alex's face dropped. "Are you serious? Since when?"

"Since last week," Evie said somberly. "We're gonna go visit her. I *have* to see her, tonight."

"Um, can I go with you?" he asked.

Evie looked at Dee Dee.

"Well, I don't know," Evie said. "It's sorta just a girl thing."

"Come on, Evie," Alex asked. "She's my friend too. We were all Flojos together."

Evie looked at him and then at Dee Dee again.

"I don't know, Alex..." Evie started.

"Why doesn't he just come with us?" Dee Dee asked. "I think it would make Raquel happy. Everyone likes visitors when they're feeling down, no?"

"No," Evie said. "No, I mean, yeah. Maybe you're right."

"We better hurry," Dee Dee looked at the time on her cell phone. "We have just about an hour."

"We are *so* not gonna make it," Alex shook his head.

"Yes, we will," Evie took his hand. "We gotta at least try."

Evie, Dee Dee ~~and~~ and Alex sped north in Jumile ~~[JUMILE]~~ on Pacific Coast Highway ~~and [delete and]~~ towards Isla del Mar.

"God, I hope we make it ~~[it]~~," Dee Dee said.

"We will, we will," Evie asserted.

"So, are you bummed that you didn't get Cherry Bomb?" Dee Dee asked.

"Yeah, sorta," Evie confessed. "But it's not like I could drive her anyway. I still gotta re-take my test."

"I feel sorta stupid with the surf racks I bought you," Dee Dee said. "I thought for sure you were ~~gonna~~ ^{for sure} get a car."

"Oh, she's gonna get Cherry Bomb," Alex said. "*And* she's definitely gonna put those surf racks to use, right, Evie?"

"Right," Evie smiled. She *hoped* he was right.

"Speaking of presents," Dee Dee started. "So what's the grand total from Grandma UC Davis?"

Oh, you know, I didn't even check." Evie opened her macramé bag and ripped open the envelope. She counted out sixteen hundred dollars.

"Wow, pretty nice!" She held up a fan of one hundred dollar bills. "Sixteen hundred buckaroos ~~[it]~~ ^{it takes}

~~[it]~~ ^{it takes} That's a lot of lana," Alex said. "What are you gonna do with it?"

Well, I gotta pay Lindsay back, like right away ~~[it]~~ and then," Evie paused.

"You're gonna find a private driving instructor?"

~~[it]~~ No, you know what? I'm gonna donate it to the reserve."

"What?" Alex exclaimed. "You gotta be kidding! I thought you hated that place."

"No, not really," Evie answered slowly. "I mean, I hate that there *has* [have] to be places, [delete comma] like horse rescues [horse havens] and stuff because there are [a lot] of people who don't [know] about animals and stuff, [don't use stuff twice] but there is this one horse, Chamuco, and, I don't know, five hundred dollars could really help him out."

"You are gonna give five hundred dollars, [delete comma] to a horse?" Dee Dee asked.

"Yeah," Evie said. "I mean, yes."

"Well, that's a pretty nice gift ..." Alex observed.

"Yes, it sure is," Evie agreed. No one was going to change her mind.

"Oh, I can't believe I forgot to tell you!" Dee Dee suddenly exclaimed.

"What?" Evie asked.

"Alejandra de Los Santos tried to get in [to] the party!"

"What?" Dee Dee was right. Evie couldn't believe it. "When?"

"I don't know where you were," Dee Dee said, "maybe dancing or something. But she showed up with her three little *a*-migas and, of course, she was denied access. In front of everyone, and was she so embarrassed [embarrassed]!"

"Ha!" Evie laughed. "Now *that's* the best birthday present ever!"

Evie couldn't feel more content about the evening. She looked out the window and looked [delete and looked] at [delete all] all the 'Beach Access' signs that [delete that] lined [lining] Pacific Coast Highway.

"Hey [1] Alex," She turned to faced him from the front seat. "Do you think we can go surfing out here sometime? You know, just for a change?"

"I dunno, Eves," he looked out toward the ocean. "It gets pretty territorial the farther south you get and-." He stopped himself. "No, you know what? If you wanna try another beach, why not?"

Evie smiled at him [1] and he winked back.

Evie read another sign for a different beach. "Hey, Dee Dee," she started. "Can you stop? Up ahead?"

"What?" Dee Dee looked at her. "Uh, *no*. We gotta get to Raquel."

"I'm serious," Evie said. "Pull over at this next exit."

"Evie, there's nothing out here [1] and we're gonna be late."

"Yeah, Eves," Alex said. "What's the big deal?"

"Dee Dee, come on," Evie asked. "Pull over at the next exit. *Please!*"

Dee Dee looked at Alex in the rearview mirror and shook her head. He shrugged his shoulders. "Okay, okay." She reluctantly pulled off from ~~from~~ [delete from] the highway and onto a sandy shoulder that ~~let~~ [use (ed)] to the exit. "What, you gotta take a leak?"

"This is Leo Carrillo," Evie said as Dee Dee drove [JUMPLE] Jumile onto the narrow two [-] lane road. "Do you know I used to come here ~~here~~ [join two into one sentence]

as ~~As~~ a kid? My family used to go camping here."

"O-kay," Dee Dee wasn't sure what Evie was getting at.

"Drive over there," Evie pointed to a kiosk that was already closed for the evening. "Go ~~[delete Go]~~ to where the road goes under the highway towards the campgrounds."

"*The campgrounds?*" Dee Dee asked. "Evie, we don't have time for a little memory trip."

"Yeah, we're gonna be late," Alex agreed.

"It'll just take a second." Evie assured them.

Dee Dee drove Jumile ~~[JUMBLE]~~ under the highway and towards the campgrounds. Once she pulled over, Evie got out of the car.

"Where are you going?" Dee Dee rolled down her window and called after her. "What are you doing?"

"Just wait," Evie called back.

Evie sprinted to where two wooden posts were put up on the opposite sides of the dirt road. Each post was about four feet high and had a row of circular, yellow reflective lights attached to one side. Evie checked one of the posts and saw that the bottom two lights were cracked. The same wooden post also had a small gash on the side.

The cracked lights and the gash had been created by Sabrina years ago, when she and Evie were still kids. Evie remembered sneaking out with Sabrina, who was all of fifteen, and she was eleven. Sabrina so desperately wanted to take their parents' car for a little spin around the campground and had convinced Evie to go with her. Just like Lindsay had said, Sabrina was a horrible driver, nervous and timid. They hadn't driven past ~~[more than]~~ a few campsites, ~~[delete comma]~~ away from their own, before Sabrina hit the post. She was horrified. She had placed her head on the steering wheel and cried. It took Evie's urging to finally get her to wipe her tears, get the car in gear ~~[,]~~ and get it back to their own campsite, ~~[delete comma]~~ before their parents found out. Fortunately, nothing had happened to the car ~~[,]~~ and their parents never found out.

Evie looked at the post and couldn't help but smile. She had promised never to tell anyone about her sister's accident~~[.]~~ and she never [use had] did.

Dee Dee honked [~~JUM~~LE'S] Jumile's horn.

"Evie, come on!" she called out. "We gotta go!"

"I'm coming!" Evie called out.

Evie chipped off a piece of the yellow reflective light ~~and stuck it in her pocket~~
[Q: the dress has a pocket?] Never mind that she struggled at the reserve, or had ignored Sabrina when she ~~first~~ (first) returned home. It wasn't that big of a deal that (she) didn't pass her driving test or that she took her mother's car out without (asking) asked. Evie *was a good* person. She was a good friend and a good sister and a good daughter. At times, she was a good student and (a) good girlfriend. Sure she had slip[-]ups, but who didn't? At the very least, she had it *in* her to be good~~[.]~~ and sometimes that counted for a lot. ~~And [delete And]~~ [N]now on the night of her sixteenth birthday, technically her fourth, this realization~~[delete comma]~~ that she had the *means* to be a good person, was the best gift ever.