

Chapter One

[For once] ~~First once~~ Evie Gomez finally felt free. (~~Free~~, not) ~~Not~~ that weak ass sense of freedom she ~~feels~~ [felt] when she's [she was done] done showering and ~~waltzes~~ [waltzed] around her bedroom with only her favorite hot pink terry towel wrapped around her ~~waist~~. [waist, and] ~~And~~ it certainly wasn't that pseudo sense of liberation she ~~experiences~~ [experienced] when the call of nature ~~decides~~ [decided] to give her [a] ring when she's [she was] surfing and she has [surfing and had] no other choice but to relieve herself, right there in the middle of [P]acific [O]cean in her wetsuit and all. On this particular Saturday afternoon in mid January, Evie felt free due to the simple metal ring that dangled from her fingers. It wasn't just any ol' ring she carried to Lindsay's, the Gomez's housekeeper, [and her ten-year-old sedan.] ten year old sedan. This ring had the car keys attached and Evie was more than ready for a little joy ride. Not that she actually stole the car keys. *Please*. If she ~~was~~ [were] truly going for a joy ride, she wouldn't be boosting Lindsay's rickety *ranfla* that's for sure, but Evie was desperate. She was just five weeks away from taking her California state [California driving test] driving test and she had yet to master the challenge of three point turns and the ins and outs of parallel parking. Thus, the [~~her~~] resilient begging to borrow Lindsay's ~~sedan~~ had ensued just minutes earlier.

"Oh, come on, Lindsay," Evie had begged. With her parents away on an afternoon mission -- the never ending search for the appropriate shade of forest green place mats to match the deck furniture's forest green cushions -- it was the perfect time to indulge in a little practice spin[.]

"I don't think so, Evelina. ..." Lindsay shook her head as she stepped down into the den. The latest installment of *La Cueva Sucia*, her favorite soap opera, was just starting. "Your mother said you have to be with a driver. A licensed driver."

"I know," Evie exhaled impatiently. "But that's only if I'm gonna be out driving ~~out~~ [delete out] on the street and everything[,] and I'm not. I'm gonna stay on the driveway, [driveway,] just in front of the house. Nothing's gonna happen."

"I dunno..." Lindsay was still hesitant.

"Lindsay," Evie followed her down the two steps that led into the den. "We live on a cul de sac. It's not like cars go speeding by all the time. I'll totally be safe." She **leaned** her head forward and to the side, fashioned after the infamous **tilt** learned from her best friend, Dee Dee de LaFuentes, who[,] usually ~~[delete comma]~~ having ~~letting~~ **[let]** the left side of her head go soft, got her way. "And the more I practice," Evie continued. "I'll be sure to get my license and then I can drive myself anywhere. You won't be having to cart me around anymore. Don't you want a break from being a chauffeur?"

The magic words for any housekeeper. *Don't you want a break?*

"Well, I guess... maybe... it would be okay." Lindsay pushed ~~[wouldn't this be Mijo?]~~ Meho, Evie's grey tabby, aside and made room for herself on the den's smooth leather sofa. She had now been lured into her habitual trance by *La Cueva*'s leading man, **Leonardo Phillipe**. "Get the spare key," she told Evie. "And promise me that'll you'll stay within the dead end. Do *not* leave Camino del Rio."

"I will, ~~N~~ promise!" Evie sprinted as fast as her Havaiana flojos could take her towards the kitchen. She didn't find the spare key, but no worries. She snatched a key

ring off the kitchen's metal key holder, grabbed her iTrip, (a boast of over 1100 downloads), her wallet (an even better boast -- a freshly issued drivers permit) and sprinted out of the house.

But once Evie got out to the ~~drive way~~ (driveway,) her **honest** plans of taking Lindsay's sedan immediately fell ~~to the~~ wayside. There, parked to the left of Lindsay's car was Evie's mother's brand new Mercedes. Actually, not *brand* new, but definitely new to her mother, Vicki Gomez. The Mercedes was a good thirty years old, a classic by anyone's standards especially with ~~its~~ (its) high gloss burgundy paint job, detailing by West Coast Designs, original leather interior, glistening chrome[,] and the cali de la cali, a **fuel** conversion by LoveCraft's BioFuel in Los Angeles. Yes, the Mercedes had been converted to run on vegetable oil rather than gasoline. It seemed to be *the* thing done to cars in South Cali[,] and now Vicki Gomez's Benz was the talk of Rio Estates and, of course, she just loved, *loved*, the attention.

Evie looked at the gleaming Mercedes and then at Lindsay's nondescript four[-] door sedan ~~car, [delete car]~~ which **suddenly** seemed dull and lifeless. Not to be superficial, but Evie wondered, what *kind* of car *was* Lindsay's? Was there even a question of which ride she should choose for such a sunny Saturday afternoon drive?

~~'nough said. [I would delete 'nough said. I think it is a distraction.]~~ Evie opened the driver's seat of her mother's Mercedes and got in. She inhaled the aroma of the vintage white leather. Her choice had clearly been made. She pulled out her cell from the front pocket of her Senor Lopez pullover and immediately called her boyfriend, Alex. How grand would that be, she thought as she ~~sped~~ (speed-dialed) dialed his number, to

swing by his house and, for once, be the one in control of such a cool, luxury automobile?
But alas, the dreaded voice mail.

Duuude... leave a brief. Not a bio.

She had remembered that Alex had gone to Sea Street with Mondo that morning and felt slightly disappointed. It was almost 1 ~~pm~~ (p.m.) and he *still* wasn't back from the beach? Ever since their old clique, the Flojos, which had consisted of herself, Alex, Mondo, Raquel, and her former boy, Jose, had pretty much disbanded last semester, Alex still surfed at Sea Street and Mondo still tagged along with him, sometimes. While Evie no longer considered herself a "Flojo", in the true sense of the definition that she strived to maintain the chill chica mindset and just hang at the beach all day, she did continue to wear flojos (aka flip flops) 24/7/365. Flojoism may not have been a way of life for Evie, but flojos were definitely a surviving style statement.

To be honest, Evie sometimes missed the days of Flojo past, the carefree afternoons of pot and plasmas -- before Jose became a two timing jerk, before Raquel started partying too much and before Mondo cared more about his business than friendship. But then again, those were pre- Dee Dee and Alex days and Evie really loved, as she had learned, having the double D and Alex, as a boyfriend, in her life. [I would delete "as she had learned."]

Evie sighed and decided to leave neither a brief message ~~or~~ [nor] her autobiography, thank you. She hung up and speed dialed best girl, tied for first place, Raquel Diaz.

After a few beeps, she was met with Raquel's infamous Bullwinkle yawn on the other end. "What up?" Raquel answered sleepily.

"Not you, obviously." Evie switched from, **her mother's favorite Oldies station** to Dios (Malos). Nothing like brown boy emo bumping the speakers to calm one's novice nerves. She was ready to go.

"Hey, I'm coming to pick you up," she announced to Raquel. "Let's cruise The Shores."

Raquel lived next door to Evie, a mere 800 yards away and really didn't need to be picked up to go anywhere. Raquel could just as easily walk over, but still, the thought of saying "I'm coming to pick you up" made Evie feel mature, adult-like. Unlike Raquel and their other bestfriend, Dee Dee de LaFuentes, Evie didn't have her own car and had to shotgun it everywhere. From parties in Spanish Hills to surfing at Sea Street, the high school production of Driving Miss Evie was outgrowing its rehearsal space. She needed to expand her wings.

"You ain't picking me up to go anywhere," Raquel's voice was throaty and harsh. "I ain't even awake."

"Well, get up. [,]" Evie ordered. "I got my mother's car."

"What do you mean, you got your mother's car?" Raquel asked. "How did you swing the g[-] ride? Ol' Vicki Gomez must be out of the country, 'cause there's no way you'd risk taking her precious veggie grease mobile out."

“She’s not out of the country, but it’s the next best thing,” Evie mused. “She’s at the factory outlets with my dad. They’ll be gone all day.”

“And where’s La Lindsay?” Raquel inquired.

“Oh, she’s so far away in novela-vela land.” Evie adjusted the seat closer to the gas pedal and positioned the rearview mirror so she could see all things slow and less important behind her. She turned the key in the ignition. “Come on, the day’s almost over.”

Actually, the day was far from being over. It was barely one o’clock in the afternoon, but to a party puta like Raquel, the day was just starting.

“And,” Evie explained. “You know I need a licensed driver to really go anywhere.”

“Nuh uh,” Raquel said quickly. “*No* way. Don’t you know that’s the number one leading cause of teen fatality? Teaching a newbie to drive? You best find yourself another tutor, Eves. I’m outs.”

“Raq, come on,” Evie pleaded. “We’ll have fun.”

“And who says I ain’t already having fun?” Raquel laughed, actually a low muffled giggle. Evie suddenly heard another voice in the background. A male voice. She suddenly felt the effects of third party damage.

“Who’s that?” she asked.

“I can tell you who it ain’t.” Raquel laughed softly again. “It’s ain’t Jose, that’s for sure.”

Ever since Raquel had caught Jose sneaking around with Alejandra de los Santos las[t] semester, her Buddy List of bad boys was being utilized to the max. It didn’t help

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Raquel's ego that Alejandra de los Santos headed the Sangros, a foursome of *fresas ricas* from Mexico City. There had always been a clash between the Flojos and the Sangros, so of course, Raquel felt completely humiliated and betrayed when she discovered that her boy had cross pollinated and had been with one of *them*. Evie and Dee Dee had actually been foolish enough to become sorta friends with Alejandra last semester. But that was when they didn't know better. Not only was Alejandra a *puta*, plain and simple, but she wore the scarlet letter P on her chest proudly.

Jose no longer went to Villanueva Prep, having got kicked out for his poor grades, but he still ran in a similar **party circuit as Raquel[,] and she** needed to teach him that she could be just as scandalous, if not more, than him. Whereas any cool girl at Villanueva (which Raquel ~~claims~~ [claimed] there ~~are~~ [were] only three – she, Evie and, of course, *la otra*, Dee Dee) would gain cred (say, a hottie shortboarder with major label sponsorship or a member of a local neo-nardcore band) to inspire jealousy in an ex, Raquel was hooking up in the polar region opposite of north. She was dating down, *way* down. Evie had no idea who the owner of the background voice was and she didn't bother asking. If she knew Raquel, the voice and the male attached to it wouldn't last more than a couple of weeks.

"Where are you?" Evie asked.

"I can tell you where I'm not," Raquel continued to play coy. "I ain't home, that's for sure."

As Evie started to back out of the drive way, [driveway,] she looked up towards the Diaz's house. Between the towering cypress trees that divided the properties, she saw that the window shades to Raquel's upstairs bedroom were pulled up. [up, a sign] A sign

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that Raquel was definitely not in her room. She kept her shades closed until she, and only she, decided it was time to finally start her day and make the grand decision [to] get out of bed and pull the blinds open. Evie wondered where Raquel had gone the night before that led her to still be away from home. Whenever Raquel took off somewhere **scandalous** for the evening, Evie would get a call to cover for her. However, last night Evie didn't get 'the call.'

"O-*kay*, Raquel." Evie struggled to shift from reverse to first gear. Damn, couldn't her father have had the stick shift coverted to manual? "I'll let you go do whatever, with whomever. Just call me later."

"Yeah, yeah. Definitely," Raquel said before hanging up and after playfully slapping "*stop it!*" to the unidentified ~~[or you could use the word~~ mystery] boy with her.

Evie looked at the clock on the dashboard of her mother's Benz. *La Cueva Sucia* was a one hour program, which meant she had only 52 minutes to roll. She quickly dialed Dee Dee.

"Hi Evie!" Dee Dee practically chirped on the other end.

Evie smiled to herself. Dee Dee was the ying to Raquel's yang. Little Miss Sunny Delight to Raquel's Little Miss Understood, Dark and... Delight-less. Dee Dee would definitely be up for a drive.

"You sound in a good mood," Evie observed.

"Oh, I just got off the phone with Rocio," Dee Dee's voice got light and dreamy.

"Oh, Evie, I love him *so* much."

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Rocio was Dee Dee's long lost boyfriend ~~who~~ [delete who] she ~~(had)~~ had to leave behind in Mexico City once she and her family returned to Rio Estates. She talked to him every day, (every day and every night.) every night.

"Hey, so I've got the Mercedes," Evie bragged as she slowly entered Camino del Rio and cautiously looked both ways down the street. "I thought I could come over and pick you up."

Dee Dee also lived in Rio Estates just a few blocks away on Camino Cortez.

"Right *now*?" Dee Dee asked. "I can't. I have a meeting with Eileen Cervantes."

"Eileen? Who's that?"

"She's connected with Las Patronas, [*italics?*]" Dee Dee explained. "And I'm meeting with her at four PM."

"At four?" Evie re-checked the time on the dashboard. "Dee Dee, it's barely one o'clock."

"I know. I'm totally running late. I'm just so nervous. I've already smoked three Caribbean Chills this morning."

"No," Evie started. "I mean, why are you getting ready now?"

"Evie, it's for *Las Patronas*," Dee Dee said as if Evie was crazy for even asking. "I have to make the right impression. This is my first meeting with the former director and she's going to give me some hints. This is the final year before I can be nominated so I can be a Patrona by junior year. And I need to make sure all my duckies are in row."

Duckies?

Ever since Dee Dee was a little girl she always talked about being a La Patrona debutante. Her mother was one, her grandmother was one and, of course, Dee Dee not

only wanted to be one, she *had* to be one. La Patronas was the oldest and most respected debutante society in the county. It was started by the wives of the early Southern Californian landowners, all of them wealthy and many of them Hispanic. Dee Dee's father didn't have such regal connections to early Ventura County, but Dee Dee's mother, the late Margaret de LaFuente, sure ~~[delete sure]~~ did. Her family had owned multiple ranches in the area long ago, when the area was still Mexico. You couldn't get more regally connected than that.

Between Dee Dee's ~~calculating~~ calculated pursuit[s] to obtain the key to the city, Raquel jonesing for a key to the nearest mini bar, and she, herself, most desirous of the keys to an available automobile, Evie sometimes wondered how all three girls could each be so unique and remain best friends. But then again, no matter what kind of keys they each longed for, the three of them had once been three little girls in tight *trenzas* with *respado* juice dripping down their chins. It was nostalgia (~~or~~ [was it] embarrassment?) that kept their bond strong. MORE

"You really don't need anyone to help you," Dee Dee flattered Evie. "You're a good driver already. Really."

~~"If I'm so good," Evie was not buying it. ["If I'm so good, Evie said, not buying it and struggling with the gears, "then why] - Again, she struggled with the gears. "Then - why don't you ever let me drive Jumile?"~~

Jumile was the name of Dee Dee's VW Beetle. Sailors christened boats, socialites attached pretenious tags on pet Chihuahuas, but in South Calif. [.] it was in proper order to conjure up a cutesy names for one's car. To own a nameless vehicle? *Unthinkable* [.]

Jumile was **also** the name of a particular tree beetle found in the hills of Taxco, Mexico. Dee Dee had informed Evie and Raquel that on the first Monday after *Dia de los Muertos*, it was a tradition to hike into the hills of Taxco and search for the little green beetles so the locals could roast and grind them up to make salsa **and celebrate the new season.**

“*sta loco, no?*” Dee Dee gloated to Evie and Raquel after she had shared that she had been adventurous enough to partake in the beetle ~~eats~~. ^{as if} ~~feats, as if~~ As if to prove, **under her styled hair and immaculately applied make up, that she could be *loca* in her own way.** So when Dee Dee got her lime green VW Beetle, she instantly **baptized** him Jumile, in honor (or remorse?) of the ~~green little~~ [little green] beetles she supposedly gobbled up in Taxco.

But now here was Dee Dee, again, ~~[delete comma]~~ ^I insisting that it was her father’s fault that Evie couldn’t drive Jumile.

“Evie,” Dee Dee started. “You know I’d let you drive Jumile if I could, but it’s all about my dad. He’s so uptight about my insurance and everything. Really.”

“Uh huh. I *love* that story.[,]” Evie **said**. “Well, I’ll be getting my own car soon enough[,] and then I won’t have to count on poor little ‘uninsured for additional drivers’ Jumile.”

Evie was now heading south, down the eucalyptus lined street of Calle Bonita and towards the main gate of Rio Estates. **She was ready to gun the engine and make a run for it. A cruise by The Shores was calling.**

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“Oh, Evie, please, there is *no* way your dad isn’t going to get you a Beetle for your birthday,” Dee Dee insisted. “He just *has* to come through. We have to have the complete set.”

It was Dee Dee’s plan that Evie and Raquel get a ~~delete a~~ VW Beetle[s] just like hers. She believed the three girls were a team, a dynamic trio, and not having ~~delete a~~ similar mode[s] of transportation would be like the three musketeers not having, well, identical moustaches.

The flower holder in Jumile held incense sticks[,] and a large sticker of Dee Dee’s favorite band/soap opera’s crest, RBD, was on the back window. Raquel’s parents had just bought her a Beetle a month ago ~~delete comma~~ for Christmas. Hers was black and named B.J., as in Beetle Juice, not the *other* thing. B.J.’s flower vase held cigarette butts[,] and adhered across the top of B.J.’s front window’s [window] visor was ‘So-Cal’ in white, old English script. Both Dee Dee and Raquel, of course, had vanity license plates that clearly stated their Beetles[‘] pet names, JUMILE for Dee Dee and BTLE JCE for Raquel.

Evie wanted her Beetle to be red, cherry bomb red with a sunroof, Bose speakers, fresh cut hibiscus flowers in the flower holder[,] and the quintessential decal that identified Evie totally –[a dash is 2 hyphens with no spaces—for example] a white outlined pair of flip flops, stuck smack center of her back window. She had already purchased the decal months ago at the Ventura Surf Shop[,] and now all she needed was a brand new car to attach it to. Simple enough, no? **But unlike JUMILE and BTLE JCE, Evie’s Beetle was going to be fabulously sexy and fun, CHRY BMB, and it was her dream to drive away from her birthday party at Duke’s in Cherry Bomb.** ✓

In about a month and a half, on February 29th to be exact, Evie was going to turn sixteen⁽¹⁶⁾ and this particular birthday was special for two reasons. ~~One is~~ [One was that] ~~that~~ there was actually going to be a February 29th on the year's calendar. Being a leap year baby, Evie had to celebrate her birthday either on the 28th of February or the first of March. Not to be all *sentida* about it, but it sorta sucked not to have your birthday party on your actual birth date. And two, this birthday celebration was going to be **extra special** because Evie's mother was going to throw her a Sixteenera, more Sweet Sixteen, way less *quinceanera*, which only meant one thing in Southern California -- A Mexican style luau. Evie was planning to have her bash thrown at Duke's in Malibu. Could she *even* keep count of all the *Seventeen* magazine ~~tear-outs~~ [tear-outs lining] ~~that lined~~ the inside of the locker door of all her favorite *Laguna Beach* and *O.C.* stars lunching and "canoodling" at Duke's? Duke's was ^(a) **super cool** restaurant that overlooked the Pacific and was named after the OG Hawaiian surfer himself, Duke Kahanumoku. It only made sense that Evie would celebrate her sixteenera in all of Duke's Polynesian atmospheric glory. Her reputation, ~~[delete comma]~~ as a surfer⁽¹⁷⁾ ~~no~~ ⁽¹⁸⁾ ~~o~~ wearing chick, depended on it.

As Dee Dee claimed, Evie's sixteenera party was the talk of Villanueva Prep⁽¹⁹⁾ and how could it not be? After all, ^{Evie's} ~~her~~ father had already secured DJ VHS (**state who**) to spin nothing but classic surf and power pop. ~~There was going to be~~ [There would be] ~~be~~ Polynesian dancers and *lechon*, roasted pork, but Hawaiian style with the pig's head intact and everything. Evie's mother had planned to make gift bags filled with disks of Mr. Zog's Sex Wax, Roxy Mariachi flip flops, sunblock⁽²⁰⁾ and ~~[delete a]~~ customized sun visors with the **words, 'Evening with Evie,' stitched on the front.** But the main

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attraction at Evie's sweet sixteen? She, Raquel[,] and Dee Dee were going to perform a *hula auana*, a slow Hawaiian dance complete with grass skirts and faux coconut shells that they somehow were going to secure over their chests. For weeks, all three girls had been practicing to learn, in sync, the graceful hand movements and hip swaying by following an instructional video and CD, *Honolulu Now*. Evie had to admit, the hours of practice did leave her to question her patience and rhythm, **but Dee Dee and Raquel's total dedication and support always made her feel more sure about herself. She had never performed for an audience in her life and now, here she was planning to do so with [delete with] at her birthday party, in front of hundreds of people. But who better to do it with than her two favorite APVs? Amigas Por Vida, that is.**

"God," Evie went on about her party, "I just hope my party doesn't turn into some mascara running drama straight outta *My Sweet Sixteen*."

"Oooh, I hope so or it wouldn't be good party, otherwise.[]" Dee Dee mused.

"So, why don't you take Alejandro or Raquel for your drive?"

"Alex is out at Sea [S]street," Evie said.

~~"Surfing."~~ ["Surfing, again?"] ~~Again?~~

"Uh, huh," Evie turned ^{up} ~~Dios. [I'm not sure what turned Dios means.]~~ "I'm gonna hook up with him tomorrow. We might take the boards to Santa Barbara."

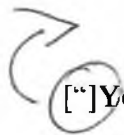
"Mmm-hmm," Dee Dee's voice suddenly turned ~~slo mo~~[,] leading Evie to believe that she was applying either eyeliner or mascara or channeling Anna Nicole Smith. "No offense," Dee Dee continued slowly, "but don't... you... ever... get tired that... all... you do with Alex is... surf?"

"What do you mean?" Evie asked as she shifted down to bring her mother's car to a stop. The whole thing stalled. Sheeyat. Evie started the Mercedes up again.

"Don't get me... wrong. I think .. it's cool that... you... two have something major in... common, but," Dee Dee finally **put her vocal cord on the right rpm**. "It's just, I mean, in Mexico, boys take girls out, on dates. You get to dress up and have a nice dinner, go dancing."

"Dee Dee," Evie rolled her eyes to the side. "I'm fine with the stuff we do. Alex is my bud and Sea Street is *our* place."

True, Sea Street had pretty much been deemed Evie and Alex's place. Last semester, Evie would kick back on the promenade's wall with Raquel, Jose[,] and **Mondo, while Alex surfed. Now that the Flojos were no longer a clique, she was an official surfer and Alex's official girlfriend. So yes, Sea Street was their place.**



[¹]Your *bud*?" Dee Dee asked. "Oh, I thought he was your *boyfriend*."

Evie could sense Dee Dee's blonde tinted eyebrows (Michael Kelley Salon, 60 dollars a pair) rise in surprise.

"He is," Evie felt she had to defend his title. "But he's also my buddy, my friend. And that's very important in a relationship."

"*Claro*, of course, it's important," Dee Dee agreed. "I was just asking, that's all. So, what about Raquel? Did you call her to go driving?"

"I already did, but she's totally out of it."

"~~Out of it~~ [~~delete~~ ''] or hung over?" Dee Dee asked.

Evie was reluctant to go into the minuscule dish she had on Raquel. While all three girls claimed to love each other unconditionally[,] and, granted, all of them indulged in ad bevs[,] and even Dee Dee, herself, lit up flavored smokes whenever she could, Dee Dee was still more judgmental towards Raquel's recreational behavior. But even Evie had to admit, ever since her break up with Jose, Raquel's party patterns ~~have~~ [had been] ~~been~~ off the chart.

"She was just tired.[]"

Evie lied. "I woke her up."

"Woke her up?" Dee Dee exclaimed. "It's after 1 o'clock! *Ay. That girl*["]

~~NEED DICHOS HE~~

"Yeah, well..." Evie found herself not in the mood for a dose, not matter how small, of Dee Dee dichos. "So listen, just stay on the line with me," she suggested. "You can be, like, my virtual licensed driver. I guess a Mexico City license is better than nothing."

"*Mande?*" Dee Dee did not find Evie's jab funny. She was very protective of Mexico City, her beloved home of four years.

"Nothing," Evie tried to soft pedal backwards. She knew better than to diss the all mighty D.F. Besides, she was now approaching Calle Aqua Caliente and had to focus. The transmission of her mother's Mercedes revved hard as she fumbled into second gear. Damn. Could it be that her father accidently filled the fuel tank with vinegar instead of vegetable oil? Evie's efforts made her sound like an amateur barista-in-training, grinding espresso beans to a pulp. She reached the intersection just as a silver sports car pulled up, but she could not remember who had the right away to go first.

"Hey, *maestro*," Evie started. "I'm at a four[-]way stop and I forgot, who has the right away?"

"The car on the right," Dee Dee said matter of factly.

"Uh," Evie looked over at the sports car. "She's not moving."

"So wave her to go," Dee Dee advised.

"I just did."

"Then just go, I guess," Dee Dee said.

A horn behind Evie honked. She looked in her rearview mirror and was completely unaware that there was even a car behind her. She shifted from neutral to first gear and lightly stepped on the gas, but for some reason, her mother's Mercedes screeched backward. *Sheeyat!* Evie had mistakenly put the Mercedes into reverse and smacked... right... into... the... car... behind her. She felt a solid thud from the back.

"Oh[,] my God!" Evie screamed as she dropped her phone to her lap. She felt her throat plummet to her gut. Her chest grew numb. She did *not* just hit another car.

"Wha-? --pened?" Dee Dee's phone connection cut in and out. "What -ong?"

Evie picked up her cell. "Dee Dee!" She yelled into the mouthpiece. "I just hit a car! Oh[,] my God, what do I do?"

"What? Oh *my* God. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I think so. I..." Evie looked over her shoulder and saw the driver swing open his car door. He looked *humoungous*.

He lifted his thick arms up in a thug-like '*what the?*' confrontation as he sauntered over to the front of his car to check [for] any possible damage. He was short, but stocky, with a shaved head and wearing a supersized football jersey throwback. He

was definitely someone you normally didn't see behind the cloistered gates of Rio Estates. "If you weren't so busy yakking on that damn cell phone," he ranted towards Evie. "Maybe you'd know how to drive. Pay attention, you pinche *idiot!*"

"Oh. My. God." Evie sunk into the leather upholstery of the car seat. She held her head and [the] "damn phone" down, away from the driver's view[,] and whispered into her cell. "Dee Dee," her voice started to crack. She thought she might cry. "He's *totally* raging at me."

"*Who?*"

"This guy. The guy whose car I hit!" *How* could she have hit a car? If this guy didn't kill her, her mother certainly would.

"Oh[,] my God[!]" Dee Dee was horrified. "Where are you?"

"Dee Dee," Evie pleaded. "You gotta come. *Now!*"

The guy was now at the driver's side of her mother's Mercedes. He tapped on the side of the door with the back of his hand and glared at Evie. "Hang up the damn phone, turn off the friggin' music[,] and get out here and deal. What, you want me to call the cops?["]

The cops? Oh[,] God, the situation was not getting any better.

"Dee Dee," Evie could still feel her throat in the pit of her stomach. "I... I have to go."

"Wait! Evie, where are--"

But it was too late. Evie had already snapped her phone shut. She somehow managed to **unplug** her iTrip, open the Mercedes's heavy car [~~delete car~~] door, and stepped [step] out.

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"I am *so* sorry!" She looked over at the guy's car. It ~~(looked)~~ like a ~~Hondo~~
[lowered Honda or a Toyota.] ~~or Toyota and lowered.~~ "Did I ding it?"

"Uh, yeah," the guy **said**. "You fucked it up all right."

He walked back to the front of his car and Evie followed him. He crouched down to show her.

"*Mira*," he said. "Right there." He pointed to his bumper.

Evie looked. And looked. And looked. She strained to find something out of the ordinary, something concave or indented, but couldn't detect anything. Then finally she saw it. A small dent, the size of a dime, okay, *maybe* a quarter. "You mean *that*?" She ran her finger ^{over} ~~across~~ it.

"Yeah, I mean *that*." The guy looked at her in amazement.

Evie looked over his car's bumper and then at mother's Mercedes. The Benz appeared flawless.

"I'm gonna need your license," the guy said. "And your insurance info."

"My license?" Evie's heart dropped.

"Yes." He looked at her as though she was some rookie driver, which, of course, she was. "Your *license*."

"Um... right," was all Evie could say. She went back to her mother's car and stretched across the front seat to get her cell phone off the floor[.][delete rest of sentence] which she had dropped in her **haste**. She speed dialed her home number.

One ring, two ring...

Come on, come on! Evie screamed in her head. Leave it to Lindsay to not answer the phone while she was watching her stupid soap. *Come on, Linds! Answer the phone!*

Three ring, four ring.

“*Bueno?* Gomez residence.”

Finally.

“Lindsay!” Evie sobbed into her cell. “I hit a car! I need help!”

“*Ay dios mios!*” Evie could hear the heels of Lindsay’s Aerosoles already sprinting across the ceramic tile of the den. “Are you okay? I’m coming out.”

“I’m not in front of the house. I’m—”

“*What?*”

“I’m over here,” Evie said. “On the corner of Calle Agua Caliente and Calle Soccoro.”

“*What?*” Lindsay repeated. “Why are you way over there? I told you —”

“Lindsay, I know, I know. Please, just come now.” She looked back at the driver to make sure he couldn’t hear her. “And, I’m in my mother’s car. [“]

[“]What?!”

“Lindsay, please, just come now. Just, [delete Just] I’ll explain later. Just come. *Now!*”

“Evie, this is not good,” Lindsay told Evie something she already knew. “Stay *right* there!”

Evie hung up and slowly got back out of her mother’s Mercedes.

“Um,” she started to tell the guy. “I forgot my wallet, so my housekeeper’s coming to bring it. Right now.”

“Right *now?*” He pulled out his cell phone and checked the time.

“Yeah, right now. She should be here in a few minutes.” Evie looked down the street. “We live just a few streets down, on Camino del Rio.”

Camino del Rio. Why? Why didn’t she just stay on her street like she was supposed to? Why didn’t she just practice with Lindsay’s car like she said she would.

Evie looked at the guy who was now rummaging through his glove compartment. What if the cops *did* come? **Would it delay her getting her license? Would she still be allowed to even apply for one? Evie had no idea. She was definitely out of her element, [element,] in a world full of road rules and, seemingly, road rage.**

Evie looked over at the driver, whose eyes where angry and impatient.

She then checked the time on her own cell phone. *Oh, Just hurry Lindsay.*

Chapter 2

It seemed like forever for Lindsay to finally show up at the scene of Evie’s **crime**. When she did, she was out of breath[,] and her dark wispy bangs [were] stuck to her forehead from [with] perspiration. Evie couldn’t understand why she showed up on foot.

“Lindsay,” Evie started. “Why didn’t you just drive your car?”

“Because,” Lindsay huffed between breaths, “You took my main set of keys.” She grabbed the key ring from Evie’s grasp. “I *told* you to take the spare. I didn’t have the keys to my own car!” She took a breath and looked Evie over. “Are you okay? What happened?”

“She slammed right back into me,” the guy answered for Evie. “Did you bring her license?”

"Her license?" Lindsay looked at Evie.

"I'm also gonna need to get the insurance info," the guy repeated to Lindsay. He had already gotten a pen from his glove compartment and clicked it open. He was ready and waiting.

Of course, Evie neither had a license ~~[nor]~~ or car insurance. But as any Californian driver knows, it's not about sweating fellow fender benders, but rather making sure that said fellow fender benders had good car insurance or, at the very least, a good connection to repair any damage they were liable for.

Lindsay had car insurance, but of course she wanted her good connection to just make the dent go away without her insurance company knowing. No one wanted their ~~[his or her]~~ insurance rates to be raised due to some teenager's appetite for adventure.

"My brother-in-law works at Williams Automotive," Lindsay informed the guy. She looked over the car's bumper. "He could fix this in a day. I'll call him tonight. I'd rather keep my insurance out of it."

Of course, that was enough for the guy. Everyone in the whole county knows about Williams Automotive. They fixed all kinds of cars ~~[,][delete was]~~ was [""] From Model-As to Orales ~~[Orales.]~~. *Orale* was Spanish for "cool," but at Williams Automotive, and pretty much in the whole 805, *Orale* meant lowriders, ~~[replace which with and]~~ ^{and} which as Evie had noticed earlier, the guy's car practically swept ~~[swept]~~ the street ~~[delete comma]~~ about an inch from the ground. It definitely fell under Williams' *Orale* category.

Finally, after an exchange of info, the guy and his dime ~~[size]~~ sized dent were on their way. It couldn't be soon enough for Evie.

“Oh, God,” she **caught her breath** as soon as he was gone. “Lindsay, thank you so much. I thought he was gonna kill me. God, talk about a rage-aholic.”

Lindsay pursed her lips and took a walk around the Mercedes to double check that there was no damage. Evie followed suit[,] and[,] fortunately, there was nothing. Nada. Vicki Gomez’ classic veggie mobile was spared.

Lindsay got into the driver’s seat. Evie opened the passenger door and ~~also~~ [delete also] got in.

“Evelina,” Lindsay started the Mercedes. “You told me you were taking my car[,] and you told me that you were going to stay in front of the house and – ”

“I know[,] Lindsay[,]” Evie felt badly and didn’t want to hear it. She hated letting Lindsay down. She was often her only ally[,] and now Evie had been purposely dishonest with her. “I’m sorry. I am so sorry. I was gonna ask you if I could take my mother’s car, but you were watching La Cueva[,] and I didn’t want to bother you. Then I got on the cell with Dee Dee and—.”

“You were *talking*?” Lindsay instinctly tapped the brake pedal and glared at Evie. “On the *phone*? While driving your mother’s car?”

Was that steam coming out of Lindsay’s nostrils?

“You are lucky you didn’t kill yourself!” Lindsay shook her head as she steered the **leather encased** steering wheel with one hand while she made the sign of the cross with the other. “Your parents going to be *very* unhappy about this. *Muy enojado*. ”

Evie was afraid of that.

“Lindsay, please,” she started. “You *can’t* tell my parents. It was an accident. I was in the drive-way [driveway,], just like you told me to be and then...” She really

didn't have anything else to add to her plea. "Please. They don't need to know[,] and the dent on that guy's car, I can totally pay for it. I will. All of it. I promise."

"How are you going to pay for his car?" Lindsay shook her head in disbelief.

"That dent isn't some little pop out. It could be a lot of money, Evelina/[A lot.]" ~~A lot."~~

"I can use my birthday money," Evie offered quickly.

Lindsay looked over at her again. "You got money for your birthday? Already?"

"Um, no," Evie confessed. "Not yet, really. But you know Grandma Pama always sends a check[,] and now that it's gonna be my 16th birthday, I'll probably get more money than usual."

Lindsay didn't say anything because she knew it was the truth. Evie's Grandma Pama, her father's mother, always sent Evie and her sister, Sabrina, grand checks with a substantial amount of zeros for their birthdays. Could it be guilt that she was the absentee abuela and rarely attended her own granddaughter's [granddaughters'] birthday parties? That she preferred studying viticulture at UC Davis with her fellow grad students than help fill some Bart Simpson shaped pinata or lead the traditional Mexican birthday chant of *Las Mananitas*? Whatever the case, neither Evie [nor] or Sabrina questioned Grandma Pama's motives or lack of attendance at their birthday parties. They've [They'd] been cashing her checks as soon as they [had] learned what the word endorsement meant.

"I don't like keeping secrets from your parents," Lindsay said.

"Lindsay, please," Evie continued to beg. "It's not like they have to know every single thing that goes on, good or bad, negative,[negative or positive.] positive. It would

just stress them out[,] and they don't need to be more stressed than they already are. You know how bummed out my dad has been, about the fat free *pan dulce* and everything."

Lindsay didn't say anything as she drove on Camino Pacifico and turned onto Camino del Rio. It was true that Evie's father, who owned four successful panaderias in the county, had invested a lot of money and time into his fat free sweet bread idea. He then lost a lot more money when it didn't do so well. [Since then, the] The subject of money had been a sensitive topic in the Gomez household.

Evie looked out the window. She was already on thin ice for breaking her curfew (*again*) with Raquel (*again*) over Christmas vacation[,] and all she needed was a third strike that could land her in interment [internment] (*again*). In California, [""]the three strikes and you're out[""] law was harsh, but Vicki Gomez could be just as severe. Would she cancel Evie's sixteenera? Not let her drive once she got her license? Or worse, would Evie's little fender bender keep her from getting Cherry Bomb? Dear precious CHRY BMB with her sun roof, the Bose speakers, and don't forget the single white outlined decal of flip flops on the back window!

When they finally pulled up to the house[,] Evie was horrified to find her father's Escalade parked in the drive way. [driveway.] What were her parents doing back so early?

"Your mother is going to wonder why we took her car," Lindsay said as she pulled up into the circular driveway. Evie noticed that Lindsay sounded just as uneasy about the whole situation.

Evie clenched her jaw. "Hey, Linds..."

"Si?" She parked alongside the Escalade and turned off the Mercedes' engine.

"Nothing," Evie sighed. She knew it was no use. She would have to face the consequences.

~~As soon as they were in~~ [As they entered] the house, Evie had to adjust her eyes from coming in from the outside afternoon sun. Lindsay stepped down into the den where the closing credits of *La Cueva* were rolling down the TV screen. She clicked her tongue as well as the television off, in annoyance. Obviously, **in her haste**, she had forgotten to TiVo her *novela favorita*.

"We were wondering where you two were," Evie's father looked up. He was sitting on a stool and going over the morning mail at the kitchen counter. "The front door was wide open and the TV was left on."

"Why did you take my car?" Evie's mother asked Lindsay as she entered the kitchen. She was sorting through a pile of place mats, **all [of] them** in different shades of ~~green.~~ [green, forest green.] ~~Forest green.~~ "Is there something wrong with your car, Linds?"

"We were just..." Evie started, not sure how she was going to finish.

"Molesto got out," Lindsay quickly interrupted. "And I could not find my spare key. *Ay*, we were driving up and down the street, looking for him." She clicked her tongue again and ran her fingers through her hair in pseudo exasperation. "*That* dog."

Evie looked over at her, in surprise.

"Oh, no," Evie's mother feigned concern. "Did you find him?"

Vicki Gomez actually despised Molesto, the black Labrador that had once been Sabrina's. It would be her ultimate dream come true to have him to run away and never

return to the Gomez residence. Last summer[,] Sabrina had been working for El Mision[,] and Molesto (then properly named Ernesto) was training to become a seeing-eye guide. Molesto flunked not just a few, but all of his obedience classes, and Sabrina, feeling empathy and concern[for] what would happen to dear old Ernesto, begged her parents to let her take him [~~delete in~~] in. Of course, they conceded[,] and at the time he was [a] cute ~~as a~~ [~~delete as a~~] blind school flunkie pup, [b] But now Sabrina was back at Stanford[,] and Molesto was displaying the true colors of his Spanish nickname– he *was* quite *bothersome*.

“Oh, yes. We found him,” Lindsay lied. “He was just out, chasing the Milne’s cats again.”

Evie looked up at Lindsay and got her eye. *Thank you*. She owed Lindsay big time.

“Well, I don’t want him in my car,” Evie[’s] mother said. “He’ll scratch up the leather and leave his hair all over. If that ever happens again, which I’m sure it will, just let him go. He’ll eventually come home.”

“*Si, si, claro*,” Lindsay said.

Evie suddenly couldn’t help but feel a twinge of guilt. She didn’t want Lindsay to get in trouble with her mother due to her **deliberate delinquency**.

“Well, once Sabrina comes home,” Evie’s mother held up two separate place mats to compare them. “Molesto won’t be bothering the neighbor[s] cats so much.”

“*Si, claro*,” Lindsay agreed again as she gathered old newspapers off the counter and took them to the recycling container outside. She was smart to make an early exit before **General** Gomez got too inquisitive.

Evie had forgotten that her sister was due home the following week. Sabrina had decided to take a short break from her studies at Stanford. Evie didn't know the whole story but she knew that Sabrina was really bummed about the break up with her boyfriend, Robert. Evie was apprehensive about Sabrina's return. In a way, she liked being the only child in the household. She got a lot of attention. Okay, sometimes maybe too much? [~~too much, but~~] But she definitely didn't like being constantly compared to her over-achieving sister. ^{as Evie often called her,} Suprema was nineteen years old, only four years older than Evie, but they were a world of merit badges apart[,] and now that she was going to be back home for a while, ~~the two~~ [the difference between the two worlds were] ~~different worlds~~ ~~were~~ going to be painfully apparent.

"When is Sabrina getting here?" Evie pulled up a stool next to her father. Considering what had just happened back on Calle Aqua Caliente[,] she felt more relaxed, at least for the time being. She helped herself to some nuts from the ceramic bowl that Lindsay always kept filled.

"Sometime late next week," her mother said. "She's flying down."

"Flying down?" Evie kept the cashews but put the dreadful Brazilians back in the bowl. "What happened to her car?"

"Nothing," her mother said. "One of her ~~girl friends~~ [girlfriends] will drive it down later."

It all seemed very odd to Evie. What was the urgency to have Sabrina home so soon? Was the whole drama of having her car driven down ~~really~~ [really necessary?] ~~needed~~? Stanford University was only five hours north of Rio Estates[,] and her sister, as

well as the whole family, relished the long scenic drive along the California gold coast.

Why wouldn't her sister just drive home, like she usually ~~does~~? **(did)**

"I could drive her car down," Evie volunteered. Sabrina had a brand new Mini Cooper, silver with a black stripe down the roof and hood. It was polished, petite^{chica}**(,)** and always filled with a tank of premium gas. **What girl wouldn't want to get to cruise a Mini?**

"No. You. Can't," her father emphasized each word with a slow nod of his head. "It'll be a while before you can go making trips like that." He opened another business envelope and started to read the contents. "Evie," his casual tone suddenly dropped to *seriouso*. "What's going on here?"

"What?" Evie grabbed more nuts and looked over towards the paperwork he was reading.

"Your quality check," he said.

Sheeyat! How could Evie be *so* careless? QCs came out every three weeks, more or less. This was her first quality check of the new semester. If only she had checked the mail instead of being in such a rush to go out driving, she could have retrieved the incriminating evidence addressed to "The parents or guardian of Evelina Maria ~~Gomez~~"

(Gomez.) It could have bought her some time.

"Evie," her mother pulled back her long blonde bangs and looked at the paperwork over her husband's shoulder. "You're getting two Cs, one in English." She underlined the two blaring letters with her clear polished fingernail, as if Evie couldn't see them for herself. "How can that be?"

"I have no idea," Evie said. Civics and English were not her favorite classes, but she didn't know ~~that [delete that]~~ she was doing that badly. If anything, ~~she thought she~~ [she thought she had a low B] ~~was at a low level B~~ in both classes.

"Well, you better get an idea," Her father's tone turned even more serious. ~~serious, [serious, a tone]~~ ~~A tone~~ Evie did not want to get used to any time soon. "An idea how to change these grades. We don't have you going to Villanueva for nothing. Do you know how much it costs us to send you there?"

Evie didn't say anything, and neither did her mother.

"And you're already a sophomore," her father added. "These grades count. You have to maintain a high GPA if you want to get into a good college. How do you think Sabrina got into Stanford? And you know our agreement," her father said. "No birthday party at Dukes if you can't keep your GPA up.

"And," her mother reminded her. "If you [r] average gets below a B, you can't drive, license or no license."

To be honest, Evie had overlooked that particular clause of the birthday and driving agreement between her and her parents. This semester, she had become so wrapped up in having Alex as a new boyfriend, getting her driver's license, and planning her big Sixteeners at Duke's in Malibu that she had forgotten about the fine print. She didn't think her parents could be *that* serious about possibly canceling the party. Her mother, wanting to look VC style worthy for the 200 or so planned guests, had already started a new diet[,] and her father had paid the hefty non[-]refundable deposit for Duke's main banquet room. They seemed to be just **as pumped up** ~~(delete comma)~~ as if the party was for themselves [them] and their country club friends.

“I can do it. I can bring the grades up.” Evie tried to convince her parents and, ~~only, [delete if only]~~ herself. “It’s only Civics and English. Don’t worry.”

“Oh, we won’t worry,” her father tossed the paperwork on the kitchen counter. “It’s *you* who should be concerned.”

“And I’m afraid we are going to need to know that you are improving, *in advance* of your party,” her mother said. “We still need to send out the evites and the formal paper invites.”

“What do you mean by ‘in advance’?” Evie asked. She put the remaining nuts back in the bowl. She suddenly was no longer hungry.

“Evie, don’t do that,” her mother frowned. “Either eat them or throw them away. Don’t pick.” She went on. “What I mean is, your next quality check is in three weeks, the first week of February, so we’ll have to see how your next check is.”

“*What?*” Evie balked. “You want me to have straight A’s in less than three weeks?”

“No, you just need to show us that you are serious about improving,” her father said. “Like your mother said, ‘in advance’.”

Like your mother said. Evie really resented when her parents formed a faux united front.

“But I just started the semester,” Evie protested. “How am I going to tell you *beforehand* what my final GPA will be?”

“So, should we go on this?” Her father held up the quality check. “Are you telling us that these are your final grades?”

“No.” Evie sulked in her seat.

Her mother rolled the paper work and tapped it her under her chin. She softened her voice. "Don't worry, *mi'jita*. You can do it. I know how important this party is to you." She reached for some nuts and then stopped herself. Nuts were the forbidden **fruit** on her new So SoCal diet.

"Of course you can," her father agreed. "I remember one time when Sabrina got her quality check and was so upset when a B+ brought her whole average down. Remember that, Vicki?"

Again, with Suprema.

~~[delete And]~~ ^{capital} "And she was very determined to improve ^(.) and she did." Evie's father continued as he looked over the rest of the mail. "That kind of focus is in the Gomez blood." He smiled to himself as if the family bloodline originated from him and only him.

Just then Molesto came prancing up. Evie's mother's Bluetooth, [completely covered in dog slop] ~~covered in complete dog slop~~, was stuck half way ^(halfway) out of his mouth.

"Molesto!" Her mother cried out. "Ruben! Call him! He's got my phone!"

Evie's father got up from his stool. "I got it, I got it." He called to Molesto in a sing songy tone. "Mo-les-to, here..." He pretended to hold something in his clenched hand, high above Molesto's head. "Doggie treat. *Mina* ^(.)"

Molesto's big dark eyes followed Ruben Gomez's fist. His tail wagged and his two front legs bowed downward. He promptly dropped the ear piece and barked with excitement.

Of course, Evie's father had nothing moist nor meaty in his hand. He quickly grabbed the Bluetooth away from Molesto and gave it to his wife. "Ah, sorry[,] young guy," he offered condolences as he rubbed Molesto's head.

Evie's mother retrieved the saliva saturated Bluetooth delicately with two fingers and went to get a paper towel to wipe off the slobber. She shook her head at Molesto. "God, he is *such* a dumb dog!"

Evie looked over her quality check and then placed her elbows on the counter and then [delete then] her chin in the palms of her hands. She looked at Molesto[,] who looked so utterly befuddled that Evie's father had no doggie treat in his hand. She sighed. *The Gomez blood*. Could it be possible she was somehow related only to Molesto?

As soon as she could pull away from her parents, ~~Evie's~~ [Evie] ran up to her room and immediately texted Dee Dee and Raquel the 'Rio Estates Emergency' distress signal: ER/RE!

Dee Dee texted back right away:

Cn u cme here?

As did Raquel:

Same plce?

Raquel's quick response surprised Evie. Fun time with Rebound Boy must have ended.

The ER/RE! distress signal **announced** that one of the three bestfriends [best friends] had to discuss something of dire importance and that they *had* to get together,

immediately. Even as kids, long before the technology ~~(technological)~~ revolution of ~~(cell phones,)~~ cellphones, texting and IMs, Evie, Dee Dee ~~(,)~~ and Raquel would meet up by ~~(the)~~ secluded area at the far end of the Rio Estates golf course. It was private and safe, that is, unless a runaway golf ball came whizzing by at 90 miles per hour, which, considering the advanced age of the majority ~~(of the players at the club,)~~ ~~players of the club,~~ often occurred. *members*

Because Dee Dee was still fussing over her precious Patronas meeting, the girls didn't meet at the "same pnce" but rather at Dee Dee's house. Raquel picked up Evie ~~(,)~~ and they ~~both~~ ~~(delete both)~~ drove over for the ER/RE! meet up.

As soon as they were loaded up with the regulatory Snapple and pita chips, courtesy of the de LaFuente's housekeeper, Evie and Raquel settled in Dee Dee's bedroom upstairs.

"Oh, my God," Dee Dee fussed over Evie as soon as she let her and Raquel in. "You're in one piece! What happened with that guy? You just hung up on ~~me~~ ~~(,)~~ and I had no idea what to think."

"You won't even believe today," Evie started as she placed her Snapple and chips on the dresser. "Oh. My. God. It was the scariest thing I ~~(ever)~~ had to ever deal with ~~(,)~~ ~~[delete comma]~~ in my whole life. I mean, this dude was so right in my face, with his jersey and shaved head, you just know he was some gangbanger ready to cap my ass or something."

"Please," Raquel crammed some pita chips into her mouth and smirked at Evie. "A gang *banger*? In Rio Estates? And if he *was* a gangbanger ~~(,)~~ what kind of jersey did he front?"

Evie looked at Raquel. It was *so* like her to try and act like she held all knowledge of street sense and sensibility.

“Raquel, you were *not* even there,” Evie insisted. “You didn’t even see this guy. He was all in my face and just ready to throwdown.”

Okay, maybe a slight exaggeration, but Evie felt the need to enhance her **story**, at **least for the sake of her suburban pride**.

“Ay, well[,] I’m [] must glad it’s all over with,” Dee Dee **checked the heat of her hot rollers on her head**. “When I got your text, I didn’t know what to do. What happened to the veggie Benz? Anything?”

“Nothing,” Evie said. “But I dinged, sorta, the other guy’s car, but Lindsay’s got this brother-in-law at Williams Automotive, so I think it won’t be too much.”

“What, you’re gonna have to pay for it?” Raquel asked.

“Of course,” Evie said. “What, you think I’m gonna ask my mother to have her insurance take care of it? No way.”

Evie got up from the edge of Dee Dee’s bed and paced on the wide loop shag of her bedroom carpet. “But that’s not the worst part. I got my quality check today[,] and my parents are totally freaking out. They told me that I couldn’t have my party unless I bring my average up by the time I get my next quality check. That’s in **three** weeks. There is *no* way I can bring my average up in time.”

“How bad was your QC?” Dee Dee asked as she held [held up two different blouses in front of] two different blouses over her in front of her vanity mirror. That was the problem when the girls didn’t meet on [at] their regular place on the secluded stretch of the golf course. Evie felt that multi-tasking often led to a lack of focus.

"It was okay," Evie took a sip of her Kiwi Strawberry and felt a little embarrassed. Among the three friends, Dee Dee was the brain[,] and without even trying. It often made Evie feel inferior that she studied so much[,] yet Dee Dee achieved better [grades] [delete comma] so effortlessly. "I mean, I got two Cs. One in English and [the] other in [C]ivics."

"How could you get a 'C' in English?" Raquel flipped through Dee Dee's *Elle Girl*. Far from her personal flavor, but she wasn't about to waste her time with any of the "moda estylo" 'zines in Spanish that Dee Dee subscribed to from Mexico. "Harrison is total kick back. Even I'm doing well in her class."

Great. Even Raquel was doing better in English. Could Evie feel *mas* substandard?

"Well, I didn't do so hot," Evie admitted as confidently as she could. "I hate English. All Harrison does is make us write. 'Write your feelings,' 'write your thoughts,' 'write to make the pain go away.' Ugh. I *hate* writing."

"I don't. I love writing," Dee Dee said. She hung up one of the blouses after choosing a femmy pink one with a conservative neckline.

"Since when?" Evie asked suspiciously. She didn't remember that Dee Dee ~~that~~ [replace that with a] *loved* to write so much when they were little kids.

"~~Since I~~ [I] lived in Mexico," Dee Dee answered defiantly. "That was the best thing about going to school there." She suddenly got dreamy eyed. "I got to write and read in Spanish, all the romantic poems and essays by Neruda and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, and of course, love letters from Rocio."

Raquel threw Evie an exasperated [""]'here we go again'[""] look. ~~She, and to be honest Evie,~~ [She and Evie had both grown] had grown weary of the Rocio valentine that stayed pinned on Dee Dee's heart. If Dee Dee wasn't texting him *larga distancia*, she was gabbing with him in that show offy big city *espanol* of hers on the cell. Yes, Evie thought, it was one thing to claim the love of your life, but another thing to friggin' talk about him "~~venti-cuatro/siete~~" ["venti-cuatro/siete.""]

Raquel turned her attention back to Evie. "So why don't you just do some community service crap or something for extra credit in Civics? Vasquez loves that kind of stuff." L.C.

"Oh, yeah?" Evie took another sip of her Snapple.

"Uh, yes," Raquel answered. "How do you think Jose skated through Nueva when he used to go there? All that roadside trash he picked up off Vineyard Avenue wasn't *always* a court appointed assignment."

Evie laughed. "*Serio?*"

"Seriously," Raquel smirked with evil pleasure. "*What* a loser."

"And," Dee Dee added. "I'm sure you could volunteer for something like The Surfrider Foundation or Adopt the Beach. Something totally Evie Gomez."

"Yeah," Raquel agreed. "That would be way cooler than being stuck after school every day with some boring ass tutor."

Evie started to rethink her situation. It might [be] fun to work at local beach events with other ocean minded people like herself. She could definitely get Alex to help her. She started to imagine romantic walks on the sand with him after spending sunny afternoons of [delete of] serving lemonade at, say, a surf contest or beach clean up.

“Yeah,” Evie felt encouraged. “That might be cool.”

“Look,” Raquel continued. “You could do some community service for [c]Civics[,] and then write a paper about your experiences for English. Make it a paper full of hardship and woe, you know how Harrison loves ~~at~~ (all) that ‘struggling brown people’ stuff.”

“More writing?” Evie gawked. “No thank you.”

“I can write the paper for you,” Dee Dee offered. “You can just basically tell me what to say and I’ll write it up, real good. A+ quality.”

“In English or Spanish?” Evie smirked and Raquel snorted a laugh.

“I could do it in *Francais* if you want.” Dee Dee wasn’t gonna let them get the best of her. “You know I’m already at level III and at the top of my class.”

“Okay, Frenchie,” Evie said. “Just make sure you do a good job. If I don’t get my average up, the Sixteenera is off.”

“And we don’t want that,” Raquel took a swig of her Snapple. “It’s been a friggin’ dry spell around here.”

“You’re telling me,” Dee Dee agreed. “Totally ~~seca~~. [“] *italians*”

“And what language is that?”

“**Chilango**.[,]” Dee Dee said with a smug smile.

After Evie left Dee Dee’s house with Raquel, she started to feel hopeful. From what Dee Dee and Raquel had said, performing some minor volunteer duties and then having Dee Dee write up a paper was going to be enough to bring her up to sister Suprema status.

As Raquel drove them back to their houses, Evie's cell vibrated and she saw that Alex had just texted her. She hadn't talked to him all day. Wait until he heard what kind of day she [had] had! Knowing the kind of boyfriend Alex was, Evie knew he would drive over as soon as soon as possible to console her[.][delete-after] after. After, of course, picking up a Midnight Forest Blended, her favorite, from the Coffee Bean.

But when Evie opened her message file on her cell, she couldn't believe what she read.

NW Swell @ C st. Cnt make 2morw. Srry!

To imitate Dee Dee, *Mande*? There is a northwest swell at the Sea Street break[,] and so now he was canceling their plans to go to Santa Barbara? Just so he could go surfing? Again? Argh!

"What's wrong?" Raquel glanced over at Evie's phone. She knew the side effects of text wounds.

"Alex is totally flaking on me," Evie glared at her cell phone's screen. "We had plans to go to Santa Barbara tomorrow, but now he wants to go surfing, *again*."

"That's what happens when you date a man whose first love is following his stoke," Raquel joked. [~~Is it stoke or stroke? I'm not sure.~~]

But Evie didn't laugh. She was about to text Alex back but decided she should talk to him in person, meaning, over the phone. She was overwhelmed with what she had gone through in one day – the car accident, a tongue lashing from a total stranger, her miserable quality check, the possibility that she may not have her birthday party[.][delete question here] -- should she go on? And Alex, her *boyfriend*, wasn't even around to

comfort her during any of the drama. He had been *too* busy surfing at Sea Street[,] and now ~~[delete comma]~~ their Sunday plans were cancelled because he suddenly wanted to go surfing. And did she mention *again*? And to make matters worse, he didn't even invite her to go along!

Evie re-read his text message again and felt angry, and to be honest, a little sad. She and Alex had only been going out a little over two months. Was he already losing interest in her? She fondled the abalone necklace her had given her just last ~~[last month.]~~ November. She wore the necklace ~~everyday~~, [every day,] sometimes even in her sleep. It was a sign of his affection towards her. But now, it seemed his text messages ~~[message]~~ on her cell phone symbolized how he really felt.

Chapter 3

420 in the 805

The following Monday at school, Alex apologized for the millionth time to Evie for flaking on her. The first nine hundred and ninety nine thousand times were on their way to school when, as usual, he picked her [up] so they could share the twenty[-]minute drive to Villanueva Prep together.

"I'm totally sorry about yesterday," he said again. "I promise, we'll go to Santa Barbara. Soon."

"Don't make promises you can't keep," Evie knew she was being a baby about him canceling the day before, but to be honest, she was getting a little tired of Alex's flakiness. This wasn't the first time. There was the time they had plans to go to the new

skatepark over on Rose Avenue^P and he flaked because Mondo's Maurader was down and he needed a ride to Oakview. Then there was the other time when they were supposed to go to her father's Christmas party for all the employees at his bakery^P and, at the last minute, Alex wanted to drive to Santa Barbara for a "super amazing" board sale at Remmie's^P. [He wanted to go] ~~and he wanted to go~~ the night before so he could curb camp and be the first in line for the morning ^{selection} ~~sale~~. **Evie sighed again.** Maybe Raquel was right. Could a girlfriend compete with the internal search for stoke [~~stoke or stroke?~~] that so many surfers were born with?

"No, but really," Alex said again as she opened her locker door. "I am *so* sorry."

One million and one.

"God," Alex said as he looked over her O.C. magazine cut outs, taped to the inside of her door. They were primarily of **Adam Brody**. "You *like* this guy?"

"And what's wrong with him?" Evie asked.

"Nothing," Alex said. "If you like dorks."

"He is *not* a dork," Evie slugged Alex on the arm. "He's sensitive and sweet."

"I can be sensitive and sweet^P," Alex put his hand on her back. "Hey, I'll totally do whatever I can to help you with this volunteer thing. I don't like seeing you so bummed out." He leaned in to wrap his arms around her.

"Hey!" Dee Dee came up behind them. "*Que pasa*, lovebirds?"

Raquel was in tow, listening to her ipod with the wheel cranked to the maximum right.

"Nothing, *now*," Alex smirked as he pulled away from Evie.

"I'm *totally* starving!" Raquel yelled. "Let's go eat, already!"

"Raq," Alex motioned to her ears. "Calm the wheel!"

"Oops, sorry." Raquel took her iPod earplugs out. ~~[Raquel removed her]~~

"When you are gonna get a decent headpiece?" Alex frowned at Raquel's white plastic ear plugs. "Those are crap. No wonder you have to crank them up."

"Sor-ry," Raquel said. "Not *everyone* has a boyfriend who buys them four hundred dollar Bose headphones." She glanced into Evie's locker, where such headphones, a gift from Alex, were carefully tucked in their black pouch ~~[delete comma]~~ on top of her books and notepads. "You two are such *i-snobs*."

"And proud of it," Evie said.

"Hey," Alex rubbed his stomach under his T-shirt. "Let's bail for lunch. I'm jonesing for an O-hi Frostie."

"Claro," Dee Dee smacked her lips. "Sounds muy yummy." *fabricated*

"No," Evie felt irritated all over again. "Remember? I gotta go to the counseling office and get some numbers for volunteering. You guys said you would help."

"Oh[,] yeah. That's right[,] Dee Dee said. "I completely forgot."

Evie[']s mood turned sour as she shut her locker door. How could her own boyfriend and bestfriend [best friend] not remember the major dilemma she was still facing? Were they that self-absorbed? ~~[delete this last sentence]~~ She couldn't think of anything else the rest of the weekend.

Alex clicked his tongue and ~~[delete he]~~ he put his arm around Evie. "Aah, Eves. Come on[,] he smiled. "Let's go find you some volunteer opportunities that will blow paid ones away."

When the four of them got to the volunteer board in the counseling center[,] they discovered, as Evie had guessed, that there were few volunteer options left.

"See!" Evie huffed. "I knew this was gonna happen. I told my parents that there was no way I could get my average up in time. If I don't get rid of those two Cs, my mom is totally gonna cancel the party."

"I'm still not buying that your mom might pull the plug on the party," Raquel said. "Vicki G is all about the hostess with the most mess. [~~do you mean the hostess with the mostess?~~] She never gives up an opportunity [to] showcase **swank**."

"Yeah, I'm actually sorta surprised, too[,] Evie admitted. "She's already told all our relatives and even started that new So SoCal diet. All she does is eat, like, one avocado a day."

"One avocado?" Dee Dee's forehead creased. "But that makes so [no] sense. [.] [~~T~~] they're totally fattening."

"These are **Rancho Palermo** avocados," Evie shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, right[,] Dee Dee nodded. As if organic avocados from a ranch in Somis made such a drastic difference in caloric count.

Alex read the listings from the volunteer board outloud. "Here's some help needed: 'Working with the elderly, three days a week.'"

"Eew," Raquel curled her upper lip. "Working with molder folk? Evie, you do *not* want to do that."

"Yeah, I'd have to agree[,] Alex nodded. He pointed out another listing. "Check out this one, 'Tutoring Youth at Risk.'" He suddenly smirked. "What youth isn't 'at risk'? I mean, aren't we all 'at risk'?"

“Yeah,” Evie laughed. “You’re at risk every time you paddle out on that nine hundred dollar **Stewart** board of yours.”

“Or you buy some of Mondo’s home blend,” Raquel complained. “Which[,] by the way, that dude owes me.” She pulled out her cell phone, ready to speed dial a customer complaint. “I gave him a C note on Friday[,] and I don’t smell the scent of freshly cut lawn.”

Evie felt a little uncomfortable hearing about Raquel’s latest transaction with Mondo. Raquel had upgraded from last semester’s dime bags to this semester’s **bountiful purchases.**

“No cell phones,” Miss Peterson, the office secretary sang as she walked by the four of them to her desk.

“I’m only texting,” Raquel ~~explained~~ [explained, not bothering to look up.] as ~~she~~ ~~didn’t bother to look up.~~

“You know the rules,” Miss Peterson pointed to the doorway. “Take it outside or it will be confiscated.”

Raquel rolled her [eyes] at Evie as if for permission to be excused. “I’m just gonna find out what’s up with Mondo. I’ll be right back to help you.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Evie knew better than to really count on Raquel. Once party supplies entered the picture[,] Raquel became suddenly camera shy. “Just go.”

“I’ll be right back,” Raquel said. “Promise.”

As soon as Raquel was out of earshot, Dee Dee leaned in closer to Alex and Evie. “So what’s up with Raquel?”

“What do you mean?” Evie asked.

“She’s been going a little off the deep end, don’t you think?” Dee Dee glanced over to where Raquel was in the hallway. “Do you know who she has been going out with? Did she tell you?”

“Nuh, uh,” Evie answered. She didn’t like to admit she didn’t know something so personal about Raquel. For the four years that Dee Dee was away in Mexico City, she and Raquel had become very tight. And now, here was Dee Dee knowing something about Raquel that Evie didn’t? [~~delete question mark~~] It didn’t seem right. All three girls should pretty much know the same thing about each at ^{pretty much the} ~~just about the same~~ exact time.

“Davey *Mitchell*.” Dee Dee lowered her voice and looked over to where Raquel was now making a call in the hallway.

“Davey Mitchell?” Evie repeated the name. “~~Whose~~ (Who’s) that?”

“Ronnie Mitchell’s older brother, that’s who,” Dee Dee answered.

Evie knew of Ronnie Mitchell. He was one of the Bard Boys and had been kicked out of nearly every public school for causing all kinds of chaos. However, she didn’t know too much about his older brother, Davey.

“He’s practically twenty 2[-]two years old,” Dee Dee said of Davey. “And he did time at the CYA.”

“Really?” Evie couldn’t believe it. The California Youth Authorities housed inmates between ages thirteen to twenty[-]four. It wasn’t just a probation agency or juvie. Kids housed at the CYA had done some **hard, hard** ~~hard~~ ~~[delete comma]~~ things.

“*Yes*,” Dee Dee knowingly raised her eyebrows. “Raquel told me. She was actually bragging about it. She’s become such a *leva*.”

“Okay, *tias*,” Alex put his hand on the backs of both Evie and Dee Dee. “’nough gossiping by the clothesline. Come on, Raquel is your friend.”

“We’re not gossiping,” Dee Dee insisted. “Raquel *is* our friend and we are just concerned. You should talk to her, Evie. She’ll listen to you.”

“Listen to me? Say what?” Evie asked. There was no way anyone could dim Raquel shine when it was set on ultra high.

“Anything,” Dee Dee insisted. “Just say something.”

Evie looked over towards the quad where Raquel had now found Mondo and was talking to him in person. She wondered if Dee Dee was making a bigger deal about Raquel than it ~~actually was~~. (actually called for.)

“You know,” Alex started, as if he ~~was~~ (were reading) reading Evie’s thoughts. “We all go through phases. Maybe that’s what Raquel is doing. Just give her time. She’s a smart girl. She’ll figure it out.”

“I sure hope so.” Evie took a deep breath.

Just then, the door to one of the counselor’s office opened. None of them could help but hear the voice, [italicize the ~~voice~~] that thick Spanish accented voice of Alejandra de los Santos. It monopolized the whole hallway. She was just concluding her session with her counselor, Counselor A through H. There were only three counselors at Villanueva[,] and each one assisted students based [on] the the first letter of their last name. There was Counselor A-H, Counselor I-Q and Counselor R-Z. Because their last names started with G and D, Evie, Dee Dee and Raquel all had [Counselor A-H.] ~~A~~ through H as a counselor. Alejandra de los Santos had him as well.

"No," Alejandra informed A through H, "I don't plan on living on campus during my internship. I have to live on campus ~~here~~ and if I'm going to be donating so much of my time at Yale, I want to be able to be completely free when I'm done putting in my hours."

"Alejandra," A through H started. "I hope you think more of your internship as just putting in hours. Thousands of other high school juniors across the country would die for the opportunity to intern at Yale. I ~~hope you~~ [Don't take it so lightly."] ~~don't take it so lightly.~~" A through H was the oldest of all the counselors and Evie wondered if his ~~noon time~~ (noontime) Impatience had something to do with needing a ~~noon time~~ [noontime nap,] ~~nap~~ or if he was just exhausted by Alejandra's arrogance.

"I know," Alejandra said quickly, as if she didn't want some lowly high school counselor telling *her* how to think. "Well, thank you for your time."

As she left his office, Alejandra couldn't help but come head to head with Evie, Dee Dee and Alex in the narrow hallway. How could she be so lucky, Evie thought, that Raquel had *just* left? Ever since Raquel ~~had~~ found out that it was Alejandra who had been seeing Jose behind her back, ~~events like the keying of~~ there was the keying of Alejandra's silver Audi, derogatory spanglish scrawled on her locker door and more than ~~an~~ [delete an] accidental 'domino' slams in the hall [had occurred]. Was Raquel involved with every one of these **incidents**? Who ~~knows~~ [knew]? Evie and Dee Dee didn't condone such behavior, but never once ~~questioned~~ [did they question her about it.] ~~questioned~~ about her about it.

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Alejandra's almond shaped eyes scanned the three of them[,] and, perhaps to appear unfazed and possibly to exclude Alex and Evie, she shot off Spanish in rapid fire speed to Dee Dee.

Dee Dee, however, answered in English[, slowly] Slowly and calmly. "Oh, my father loves his new position," she said. "But I *really* don't think *your* father got him his job, Ally. I mean, my father has his own credentials. But it was very nice of your dad to mention the position to him."

Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. Was Alejandra insinuating that her ~~dad~~ [dad had gotten] got Dee Dee's father his new position as chancellor at Cal State Channel Islands? She couldn't believe that Alejandra would be so bold[,] especially when it was just ~~she~~ [her] against the three of them. Her sidekick Sangros, the *Ah*-migas – Natalia, Xiomara[,] and Fabiola – were no ~~where~~ [nowhere] around.

"So," Alex asked Alejandra, "You're gonna do an internship at Yale?"

Evie pressed her foot into the side of his flojos. *Alex, who freaking cares?*

"*Claro*," Alejandra smiled deep[ly] into Alex's eyes. "This summer. But I still don't know," [s] She sighed heavily as she pulled on her [the] dark ~~burnette strand~~ [strand underneath her] ~~that was under her~~ prominent mane of blonde. Last year, the Sangros' trademark had been their vivid blonde highlights. But this semester, after Christmas break, they all [had] returned back [delete back] from Mexico City with ~~hair~~ completely blonde [hair.]. That is, except for a thick, solid strand of brunette intentionally left under their new dye job. The strand was not quite an '80s punk rock rat tail, ~~but~~ ^I it was thick, yet hidden. ^{under the blonde} A secret hint to their affiliation to [their] native country?

“I might just go back to Mexico and intern at UNAM,” Alejandra continued. “I really miss the sophistication of city life.” She glanced at the volunteer list in front of them. “Are you doing an internship, *tambien?*” She asked Alex. “*Oye*, maybe we could both do one at UNAM. That would be fun.” She looked over at Evie.

“Uh, no,” Alex said. “I’m not looking for an internship, but Evie is. Actually, she just needs some volunteer credit, or else she can’t have her party.”

Evie’s face burned. Why are boys *so clueless?*

Of course, Alejandra knew about Evie’s Sixteenera. As Dee Dee had said, everyone at Nueva was talking about ~~it[,]~~ and that included Alejandra and her fellow Sangros. **It was the talk of the new semester.**

Alejandra looked at Evie and then at the volunteer board. “Well, good luck, Evelin-*a*. You know maybe my father can help. He has lots of contacts and is very charitable, to those in need ~~[of]~~ help.” She ~~X~~ ~~[delete then]~~ looked back at Dee Dee.

“Oh, I don’t need help,” Evie answered quickly. Know-it-all high school seniors were just as bad as lowly high school counselors. “I’m just gonna volunteer a few hours a week.”

“I wasn’t talking about volunteer work,” Alejandra smiled slowly. “I’m talking about ‘your party.’ What made you decide to have it at Dukes?”

“What wrong with Duke’s?” Evie regretted asking as soon as the words came out of her mouth. What did she care what Alejandra thought? She wasn’t even on the invite list.

"Well, for one thing," Alejandra took another deep breath as though she had an extensive list of problems to read off. But then her eyes gazed over Evie's shoulder and she suddenly announced her departure.

"Ay, never mind," she patted Evie's shoulder. "If that's what you want for your little party. *Naco*." She ~~then~~ [delete then] slinked away before anyone could say or do anything... *just* as Raquel reappeared. It was ~~then~~ [delete then] obvious that Alejandra had seen Raquel ~~[delete comma]~~ coming towards them.

"Okay, it's *on!*" Raquel held up her hand ~~up~~ [delete up] to high ~~[-]~~ five Alex. She was oblivious that her nemesis had ~~just~~ [delete just] been so close by. Couldn't she smell the residue of ["*sulfur de Sangre*"] still wafting in the air? Raquel patted the zippered outside pocket of her backpack. "So, I got the goods from Mondo. You wanna go out to The Tree?" she asked Alex.

Alex looked at Evie. "Uh..."

"Are you serious?" Evie couldn't believe that he was actually thinking of bailing on her. Again.

"Eves," Alex tilted his head to the side. "Don't be like that..."

"Be like what?" ~~[is]~~ she asked. "Upset that you are flaking on me, again? You said you were gonna help me find work."

"Evie," Raquel said[,]. ~~[id]~~ Don't be all uptight. Besides, how many pairs of eyes do you really need? Dee Dee can get you started ~~[,]~~ and we'll be back before you know it. I got **Rodriquez** after lunch ~~[,]~~ and there is no way I can deal with him without being lit."

"Just go," Evie waved them both aside. She was now certifiably annoyed.

"Are you sure?" Alex asked. "I mean, if you really, really want me to stay..."

“No...just go already.”

“Cool!” Alex gave Evie a quick peck on the cheek and took off with Raquel before Evie could change her mind.

“Don’t worry, Evie,” Dee Dee squeezed her shoulder after Alex and Raquel left the office. “We’ll find something, something, something *muy bueno* for you.”

“Yeah,” Evie looked after Alex and Raquel as they headed towards Juniper’s Tree, the big oak tree at the end of the quad^{far} for their little smoke^{out} session. “I could use something, or someone, *muy bueno* in my life, right about now.”

Chapter 4

“And why do you want to work at a horse reserve?” A through H asked Evie as she took a seat in his office.

After she and Dee Dee had picked what seemed the ideal volunteer position for her – caring for rescued horses at the Southern California Horse Reserve -- Evie tapped on A-H’s door. It was still open from his session with Alejandra de los Santos^{and} and Evie asked if he had time to answer a quick question. But she soon found out that quick questions could lead to excruciating long^{winded} interrogation. A through H now needed to know exactly why Evie wanted to work at the SCHR.

How should she answer him? That the SCHR was the only thing available on the volunteer list that didn’t involve old people or baby thugs? That if she didn’t get some volunteer credit under her belt, like *soon*, she was gonna be celebrating her 16th birthday

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at the Sizzler? Of course, she had to give him the kind of quick answer that all high school counselors want to hear.

"I really want to give back to my community[.]" Evie ~~simply stated~~ [stated simply.] She looked right ~~[delete right]~~ into his eyes with as much sincerity [as] she hoped she could possibly project.

"Your community?" A through H breathed heavy over Evie's file. He [had always been a big man, but he had yet] ~~was also a~~ big man, but had yet to come to terms with his heftier size upon his return from Christmas break. Too many tamales? Evie wondered. His work shirt screamed creases in just about every direction. "I thought you lived in Rio Estates," he said.

"I do," Evie answered. Rio Estates was a high-end gated community with no suitable space to house a horse reserve, but of course, he should know that. "I just want to give back to my equeen community.

"Do you mean equine?" He looked up from Evie's file and smiled.

"Yes[.]" Evie answered. Isn't that what she [had] just said? "I was reading that they needed help ~~[delete comma]~~ for horses that have been abused or injured. I want to ~~to~~ ~~want to help~~"] do that."

"Well, you do know that it's already three weeks into the semester[,] and they may not have availability." A through H adjusted his wire[-]frame glasses and looked at the calendar, [hanging to the left] ~~that hung to the left~~ of him. It was a Villanueva school calendar, the one that all the seniors so enthusiastically sold every year to raise money for their prom, as if any student who attended the tea[-]g[-]t[-]year Nueva really needed more money to show ~~case~~ [showcase] ~~pretension~~. "They may not have room for you."

"But they have a listing on the volunteer board," Evie informed him.

"Oh, those listings are so outdated." A-H opened his drawer to look for something. "We have an intern who is supposed to keep on top of ~~that~~ (them), but he's always on the office phone talking [~~delete to someone~~] to someone or on his cell phone texting [~~delete someone else~~] someone else."

"Oh, do you need someone to work in the office?" Evie asked quickly. An office job would be ^{so} cool. She would have full access to hallway passes and the internet (though most likely with limited viewing blocks)[,] and she could work during class hours and *all* for course credit. *Que* cake. "Because I could do that, too."

"I thought you wanted to work with rescued horses?" A-H (A through H) pulled a cloth lens cleaner from the drawer and started to clean his glasses. "At the reserve."

"Oh, I do[.]" Evie answered. "I was just asking. I mean, if Villanueva needs help, I totally wanna help."

Nice save?

"It's refreshing to hear such school spirit," A through H smiled as [he] continued to clean his glasses, going over the lenses with meticulous form. It seemed obvious to Evie that he was on to her. "Well, if we can't get you at the reserve this semester, there is always their summer program."

"Summer program?" Evie was horrified. "No, I have, I mean, I'd *like* to work this semester."

"And the urgency is because of your love of horses and [has] nothing to do with the two Cs on your last quality check?" A through H held up his glasses to the sunlight [to inspect them.] and inspected them.

“Well,” Evie felt her neck flush. “Maybe,” she answered sheepishly. “Just a little.”

“Don’t worry, Evie,” A through H smiled, a somewhat calm, reassuring smile. He put his glasses back on. “I’ll see what I can do. I’ll give the reserve a call and see if they have any more openings. I think I can pull some strings. By the way, how is your party coming along?”

“My party?” Evie asked.

“Yes, I hear from many of the instructors that it’s been quite the talk on campus, and quite the distraction in the classroom. All the students are talking about it.”

“Oh,” Evie cringed. “I didn’t know that. I’m sorry.” Should she offer him an invite?

“No worries,” A through H took off his glasses again and looked at ~~the~~ ^{them.} [looked at ~~the what???~~] “But ~~[delete But]~~ just try to focus on matters on hand, Evie. Your grades need improving. You know, I was your sister’s counselor when she was a student here. How is she doing at Stanford?”

“Great,” Evie answered. When was Suprema not doing great?

“That’s no surprise,” he answered. “That girl is one focused individual. A real go-getter.”

“Uh, huh,” was all Evie could [think of to] say.

~~And~~ [Evie soon found out that] as ~~Evie found out~~, A through H was good on his word. The strings he pulled actually yanked a last minute internship for her at the Southern California Horse Reserve. He then drafted a note to Vasquez and Harrison,

suggesting they allow Evie to do the extra credit. Counselor A through H sure [delete sure] held true to his administrative title, A-H, as [in] is *Aaah*... Evie could relax, if [only] just a little.

~~But~~ [delete But] Evie's moment of serenity was short[-]lived. She still had to get final approval from both Vasquez and Harrison to do extra credit.

Like Raquel said, Harrison was a push over. [pushover.] She liked the idea of Evie wanting to learn more about "ranchero life" (her words) and encouraged her to use as much Spanish as possible in her report.

"No problem," Evie told her with confidence. And it wouldn't be, considering that it would be Dee Dee writing the whole thing.

"Give me the mood," Mrs. Harrison weaved her hands dramatically in the air, a gesture that Evie guessed she wanted her to capture on paper. "I want to hear the complexity of what a *charro* life really is."

"I don't know how many cowboys I am going to run into at the reserve," Evie confessed. "But I will try." She smiled eagerly as she held out the official paperwork for Harrison's signature. "So, when I write my essay, what kind of credit will I receive?"

"Depending on the length and quality and if you do well on your other class assignments," Mrs. Harrison said as she initialed the paper[.], "[y]You can bring your grade up to half a point, [point. By the end] which by the end of the semester[,], you could very well have a B."

"Wow," Evie wasn't expecting a full letter B. "And that will be reflected on my next quality check? In three weeks?"

"It very well could be," Mrs. Harrison confirmed.

"Then I'm really going to do a very good job," Evie assured her.

Yeah, a very good job getting on Dee Dee's ass to write a damn good paper.

"Oh, I know you will," Mrs. Harrison patted Evie on the back as she led her to the ~~classroom's~~ {classroom door.} ~~door.~~ "I know you have been faced with many obstacles in your life, Evie, being a girl, a young girl of color[,] and I want to do as much as I can to support you. I want to support my *mujeres*!" She rolled out the 'R' in *mujeres* longer than needed {necessary.} "I know if you put your mind to it, you can get anything you want, Evie."

Vasquez, on the other hand, was a bit harder {harder to convince that} ~~to be~~ ~~convinced that~~ Evie was an oppressed upper middle class teen struggling for the Malibu birthday party of her dreams.

"I normally don't allow this type of extra credit after the semester has already started," he stated **dryly** as he erased the chalkboard. He kept his back towards Evie the whole time. "It's standard procedure to request volunteer work at the commencement of a new semester. You know that."

Evie tried to remain **calm** and diplomatic. There was no way she could lose this opportunity. "But Mrs. Harrison and my counselor have already okayed it."

"I'm not swayed by other people's decisions,[]" Mr. Vasquez kept wiping the board. "That's the problem with a lot of people nowadays, in this country. They just go for the popular vote, whatever is fashionable. A lot of people don't think for themselves."

“Oh, I totally agree,” Evie said. *Please*, just *sign* the paper. “I mean, all my friends were telling me I should work at a hospice, or with Heal the Bay, but I felt I could be more useful volunteering at an animal reserve. It’s pretty tragic how horses are so neglected in this country. I mean, they were once the symbol of our frontier, right? Now, not enough citizens bother to care about them.”

Citizens. Country. Frontier. Words that are music, *patriotic* music, to a ~~(C)~~ Civics instructor’s ears.

Mr. Vasquez turned around to face Evie. The bottom of his nose had been accidentally dusted with powder from the white chalk. *Party hearty[,] Mr. V!*

He squinted his eyes at Evie and slowly nodded his head with approval. “Good for you, Evie,” he said. “It’s good to see that you ~~(are)~~ thinking for yourself. I remember last semester, when you dyed your hair blonde and started hanging out with a different crowd, Alejandra de los Santos and all her friends, I became a little concerned about you. You’re a bright ~~girl[,]~~ and now, ~~[delete comma]~~ here you are wanting to do your own thing. Good for you.”

Yes, good for me, Evie floated as Vasquez signed her sheet. She was on her way to becoming the most popular sophomore at Nueva~~(,)~~ and maybe, just maybe, she could catch up with **La Sister Suprema’s legacy.**

Chapter 5

To be honest, Evie didn't know much about horses. Most of what she ~~(had)~~ related to Vasquez she had paraphrased from the Southern California Horse Reserve's flyer. She did, however, love when Dee Dee's mom, Margaret, took her, Dee Dee ~~(,)~~ and Raquel ~~(delete comma)~~ horseback riding in **Oakview**. And she did fancy herself a lover of animals. Really, wasn't she the only one who made sure Meho's ~~(Mho's)~~ litter box remained semi clump-less ~~(,)~~ and wasn't *she* the only one who rewarded Molesto with bona ~~(f)~~ ~~(f)~~ doggie treats after her father ~~(had)~~ so cruelly faked him out with his air nothings?

So ~~(delete So)~~ ^{car} after all the paperwork had been approved, signed and turned in, Evie was scheduled for her first day of volunteer work at the reserve that following Wednesday after school. Alex offered to drop her off at the reserve before heading out to Sea Street. As ~~(Evie)~~ ~~(Evie)~~ walked out to the student parking lot to meet him, she heard someone call out her name.

"Hey, Evie."

She turned around and saw two boys, seniors, coming up behind her.

"Oh, hey," Evie said back.

She recognized them from their photos in the school paper's sport's page, but couldn't remember their names. Normally Evie wouldn't think much of jocks, ~~(delete comma)~~ in their numbered jerseys and obnoxiously lifted ^{4x4's} ~~(trucks?)~~ trucks, but these jocks, *hello*, where on the *water polo team* ~~(,)~~ and while she ~~(had)~~ never bothered to read the accompanying text to remember their names, Raquel had pointed out the differences between team members ~~(s,)~~ which now helped Evie differentiate the two boys ~~(delete who were) who were~~ now walking next to her.

"So," Fine Ass Speedo came up to the left of her. "You be the talk of the town, Miss Eves. How's the party planning?"

"Yeah," Big Bulge Speedo came up to her right. "You gonna supply customized party hats? For all your guests?"

"Party hats?" Evie asked. How did he know she was going to have visors?

"Yeah," Fine Ass said. "You gots to have party hats, like with your name and birth date and shit like that, printed all over them. So when we use them, we have something special to remember you by."

"Actaully, I am having hats," she told them.

["JQoo'." Fine Ass approved. "My cos from SB said your party's all over myspace."

"Myspace?" Evie asked. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah," Big Bulge said. "Your party's gonna knock 805 on it's ass!"

"Marco..."

Fine Ass and Evie turned around. It was Alejandr-a de los Santos and her ah-miga, Fabiol-a walking by.

"Uh, hey," Fine Ass looked over at the two Sangros.

"We're gonna go ^{town} downtown," Fabiol-a said. "*Quieres contigo?*" She didn't look at Evie. It was clear that the invitation ~~was~~ [did not extend] ~~not extended~~ to her.

"Uh, not right now," Fine Ass [said.]. "I'm talking party talk with Eves, here."

["Yeah," Evie couldn't help but add as she looked directly at Alejandr-a. "My party at Duke's."

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She couldn't feel more in Flojo heaven (okay, maybe she ~~was~~ ^{slightly} ~~slight~~ Flojo at heart) when Alejandr-a and Fabiol-a continued to walk away on their own.

When Evie and the Speedos reached Alex's truck, Alex had just taken his long board out of Mondo's Marauder and was putting it into his flatbed. On days he wanted to surf right after school, he'd keep his board locked up in Mondo's car and then transfer it to his truck after classes.

"Hey, Marky," Alex raised his eyebrows and chin at Fine Ass.

"Hey," Fine Ass looked over Alex's longboard. "You gonna rip Sea Street?"

"Nah," Alex curled his upper lip. "Wetsand ~~[X]~~ predicts flat and glassy. I'm gonna try Rincon."

"You're going to Rincon?" Evie balked as she opened the passenger door and tossed her backpack behind the seat. "You didn't tell me that."

Evie felt left out. As long as she ~~s~~ ^(she'd) been dating Alex and as long as she's ^(she'd) been surfing, ~~[delete which was] which was~~ basically the same amount of time, she had never been to Rincon, which was only a mere five more miles north of Sea Street. The waves at Rincon were supposedly as fierce as its local territorialism. Alex pretty much kept her away. Sometimes, Evie felt he patronized her when it came to surfing.

"You didn't ask," Alex teased. "'sides, you gotta get from guppie stage before you can swim with the sharks."

Yes, he did patronize her.

Evie felt a twinge of embarrassment. How could he say such a thing in front of Fine Ass and Big Bulge? *The* two top swimmers of the water polo team?

“You can’t swim?” Fine Ass asked Evie.

“Of course, I can swim,” Evie wrinkled her face and shook her head. “He’s just being stupid.”

“‘Cause I was gonna say, if you need help,” Fine Ass started. “I could totally help you.”

“*You?*” Big Bulge smirked. “After your lousy numbers at the last meet? Look, Evie. If you ever wanna enhance your technique, let *me* know.”

Evie could not believe that she was in the middle of two *water polo* boys, seniors, fighting over her. She couldn’t help but glance over at Alex, who appeared to be not [not to be paying] paying attention as he made sure his board was strapped in.

“Wow, that’s so totally nice of you,” was all Evie could say. “I gotta admit, I still get a little tense when I gotta turtle turn, you know, under the waves.”

“Oh, you don’t wanna be tense when you should be having fun. I can totally help you with that,” Fine Ass nodded. “Just let me know.”

“So, we gotta get going, **Marky**,” Alex told ~~the~~ [delete the] Fine Ass as he came around to the other side of the truck. “Evie’s got an internship over at the SCHR.”

“Oh, yeah?” Fine Ass asked. “Cool, helping the horsies. Well...see you guys later.”

“Yeah, Evie,” Big Bulge added. “Lates,”

“What was that all about?” Alex asked as he started up his truck and pulled out of ~~his~~ (the) parking space.

“What was what?” Evie asked. ~~✓[delete second period]~~

“Flirting like that, in front of me?” Alex said. “So not cool.”

“I wasn’t flirting,” Evie tried to deny it. Was she *really* flirting? Or just being friendly?

“Of course you were,” Alex made his voice high and overtly girly. ““Oh, I get *so* scared when I go under the waves! Help me, help me!””

“I did *not* say that,” Evie pinched him on the side.

“In so many words you did.”

“Aw, you’re just jealous.”

“Not even,” Alex tried to shrug it off. “I just know that you wouldn’t like [it] that if I did that in front of you.”

“You’re right,” Evie admitted. “But God, it’s not like Fine, I mean, Marky talks to me [every day.] everyday. He’s like Mr. Big Man of the water polo team.”

Alex shook his head in disbelief. “God, Evie. You are so impressionable. He’s not *that* great.”

“Right,” Evie looked over at Alex. “And you’re *so* not jealous.”

Alex waited his turn in the student parking lot to make a left on Ventura Avenue. There was no stop light [stoplight] and the long line of student cars, blasting everything from reggaetron to speed metal, was practically ten autos deep.

“So,” Evie started. “Marky said that my party was all over myspace.”

“Yeah,” Alex said. “I meant to tell you that.”

"What?" Evie asked. "Are you serious? How do you know?"

"I've already gotten two bulletins for it." Alex beeped his horn at a black SUV that completely dwarfed his own fairly large sized truck. "Go already. [,]" he muttered under his breath.

"Oh, man," Evie ~~sunk~~ [sank] into her seat. "Now I totally gotta make sure I have a kick[-]ass party, let alone a party. Marky was even saying I should get customized party hats, can you believe it? It's like he already knew."

"You do know that party hats are rubbers, right?"

"What? Are you serious?" Evie held her hand over her mouth and laughed. "Oh [,] my God, I am *such* the dork!"

"Maybe you should get some," Alex then lowered his voice to emulate a radio spokesperson. "Remember, you can't share the love without the glove."

"What if I don't *want* that kind of love?" Evie teased.

"Not even for your birthday?" Alex softened his voice, ~~[delete comma]~~ but didn't look at Evie. "I mean, you *will* be turning sixteen."

Evie smiled out of embarrassment. ~~[.]~~ "Alex, you're gonna crash the truck if you keep talking like that."

"Talking like what?" he asked innocently.

Evie didn't say anything.

"Okay, okay..." Alex said. "I don't want the silent treatment."

Evie looked out the window at the enormous eucalyptus and oak trees [lining] that lined Ventura Avenue. This wasn't the first time ~~[delete that]~~ that Alex had joked about them indulging in more than carpet time. That's what Evie playfully called their extended

play, carpet time. If they dare ~~(d)~~ advanced [advance] onto a couch or bed, it might get *too* comfortable for the both of them ~~(,)~~ and who knows what else they would or could do. If they stayed on the carpet, at least the dense ~~[delete dense]~~ discomfort of the floor or the consequences of rug burns would keep them in check.

To be honest, Evie didn't know if she was quite ready to make the upgrade from carpet time. The first time Alex had made his first move on her was just enough to make her ~~explode~~ ~~(explode in anger)~~ ~~[[Could or Should?]]~~ Should she possibly be ready for more?

The first move ~~(had)~~ happened at Sea Street, of course, right after a twilight surf session. Alex had come up behind her ~~(,)~~ and she thought that he was going to help her unzip her wetsuit, as he sometimes ~~does~~ ~~(did)~~. But suddenly he kissed the back of her neck, a short, quick ~~(,)~~ and gentle peck. Evie ~~(had)~~ nearly *died*. She was *so* not expecting it. Alex then placed his hands on her shoulders ~~(,)~~ and even with her wetsuit on, Evie could swear she felt his fingers tremble. She turned around to face him ~~(,)~~ and suddenly his lips were on her mouth. Evie's head and chest ~~(had burst)~~ ~~burst~~ed with euphoria.

"You're salty," she teased nervously between breaths.

"Mmmm" Alex muttered. His lips were cold, ~~[delete comma]~~ but soft. "And you're so not..."

The sensation ~~(of having)~~ ~~to have~~ Alex's lips on hers was a million more times thrilling than anything she had experienced in her life, a sense of weightless that ~~made~~ her feel [made her feel as if she were going to] ~~she was going to explode~~ from happiness. *'die'* *excitement*

When was the last time she had ever felt such a sensation? ~~[delete She had once thought]~~

~~She had once thought~~ the first time she independently kicked away from the curb to

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ride her bike[,] or the first time she caught a buzz from Vieve Cliquot with Raquel?

But even those miniscule [~~delete miniscule~~] moments couldn't compare to sweet, blissful Alex-stasy.

"Damn!" [This time Alex] ~~Alex this time~~ held his hand on his horn. "What's this dude's problem? Friggin' student driver!"

Evie was instantly yanked from day dream (~~daydream~~) to daytime reality. "Hey," she told Alex. [,]"I'm a student driver."

"I'm sure you don't suck this hard[.]" Alex finally pulled his fist off the horn. "He's had three chances to go. *No balls.*"

"Hey, Alex..." Evie's thoughts ~~was~~ [~~were~~] still in Alex-stasy.

"Uh[,] huh[?]." he answered **half heartedly**.

"When do you think we can go to Santa Barbara?" she asked. "Maybe this Sunday?"

"Uh, yeah. Why not?" Alex revved his engine and finally ripped a left onto Ventura Avenue. "Hey, you know Bien Ben?" he asked. "That guy who transferred from Buena High?"

"Yeah, sorta," Evie said. "I mean, I know who he is."

"Yeah, so [~~He was~~] ~~he was~~ talking about going down to Baja. I was thinking we could all go. Cool, right?"

"Yeah, totally," Evie agreed. Baja was just across the Mexican border. A lot of kids went there for simple [~~delete simple~~] day trips or for the weekend to surf. It really

wasn't a big deal, but the thought of going to another country with Alex, albeit just south of San Diego, excited her. Carpet time in another country? *Que romantico.*

"I'll see if he'd wanna come out to S.H.[.] with us, too[.]." Alex said.

"Who?" Evie's mind was still south of the border[, the border south]. ~~The border south~~ of the U.S., that is.

"Bien," Alex said.

"Can't just you and I go?" Evie asked.

"Uh, yeah," Alex said. "[~~definitely~~ But] But I just thought that because he was new and he surfed and didn't know too many people that it might be cool to take him around. You don't mind, do you? He's good people."

"Hence, his tag, *Bien*," Evie smirked. "But yeah, I don't mind." She regretted asking if she could have Sunday alone with Alex. Was she becoming the obnoxious possessive girlfriend that she had read about in Dee Dee's Mexican magazines? *Posesiva* ✓
o' No? Decide Tu.

Alex slowed down on Ventura Avenue and looked [at] the addresses on the mailboxes. "Where is this place again?"

"It's actually just coming up," Evie looked at her paper with the address. "The lady on the phone said it was a little past Kane Drive." Evie saw the street sign for Kane and pointed[.] "There."

Alex pulled over[.] and Evie noticed the time on the dashboard. Damn, she so wanted to make ~~the~~ [a] good first impression.

"Well, here ~~it~~ [delete it] goes." She glumly unfastened her ~~[seat]~~ safety belt and grabbed her backpack from behind her seat. She was not looking forward to working an afternoon in the Ojai heat when she could be out in ~~[the]~~ sea breeze with Alex.

"It's gonna be okay," Alex said. "It's good to work, ~~[to]~~ get the old muscles moving."

"Oh, like you know so much about hard work, other than paddling out."

"Hey, I've worked at my dad's nursery," Alex said. "Al ~~[during]~~ ~~doing~~ Christmas vacation ~~[,]~~ and I'll be there this spring break. Compared to loading up fifty pound palms and bougainvillea, how bad can brushing down a few ~~ponys~~ ~~[ponies]~~ be?"

"You're right," Evie agreed.

"Hey, you need a ride home?" Alex asked.

"Nah, Lindsay's gonna come get me. Besides, I don't know how long the whole orientation is gonna last. The lady on the phone said it might be between 30 minutes to an hour, depending on how many questions some of the other volunteers had."

"Who are the other volunteers?" Alex turned up The Rolling Blackouts on his iTrip, a definite sign that he was ready to take off, ~~sin~~ Evie, for Rincon.

"I dunno," Evie slammed her door. "Just other high school students desperate for extra credit, I guess. I hope there's some cool people ~~e.~~ ~~["]~~"

"I'm sure there will ~~be~~ ~~[,]~~." Alex said. "Text me later."

"I will," Evie waved ~~[delete good bye]~~ good-bye. "Bye!"

As she followed the handwritten signs ~~that~~ ~~(signs directing her)~~ ^{keep} directed her to the reserve, Evie's ~~[X]~~ Rainbow flojos kicked up dust. No smoking or cell phones were

allowed[,] the signs said, but she only had to worry about the latter. She pulled her telephone [cell phone] out from the back of her shorts and turned it off. *There.* She already felt as though she was turning [over] a new leaf. To ^{click} turn off her phone and donate a whole afternoon without ringtones or text messages? [messages once would have been] Once unthinkable for Evie Gomez [, but] But now she was a bona fide charity donor.

Slowly, the smell of hay, grain [an,]d manure hit Evie's senses[,] and she guessed she must be getting close to the actual reserve. [I would think she would curl up her nose in disgust here since she is a city girl without much if any exposure to horses.] Sure enough, a tall blonde woman in a denim sun hat standing near a chain link gate greeted her.

"Hey, there," the woman called to Evie. She was deeply tanned with gnarly crow's feet extending from the outer corners of her dark eyes. She held a clipboard to her chest. "Are you here for the orientation?"

"Uh, yeah," Evie said. "Yes."

"What's your name?" the woman asked.

"Evelina," she answered. **Evie often introduced herself to adults by her formal name.**

"Do you mean Evie?" The woman looked over her clipboard.

"Oh, yeah," Evie answered.

"And you're from Villanueva," The woman smiled and checked off something on her clipboard. "That's right up the road. Hope the commute wasn't *too* grueling."

"Yeah," Evie laughed lightly. She [had] learned, from spending time at her father's bakery[,] that you sometimes had to grant sympathy chuckles to adults, especially to those in charge.

"Well, you're the last one we were expecting," the woman told Evie. "Why don't you go over and join others? My name's Lynn[,] and I'll be with you in just a bit."

"Sure," Evie smiled back as she made her way over to "join the ~~others~~" [others.]" Her position at the reserve was now clear[,] and her stomach slowly started to turn with first day jitters. She was at the reserve to work. She would be following orders from people she didn't know and would have to do tasks that she didn't necessarily want to do. At fifteen and **three quarters**, Evie never really [had] had a job. Sure as [kids,] a kid, she, Dee Dee and Raquel [had run] ~~on the perquisite~~ [prerequisite] cute little lemonade stand that all kids had in the summer[,] and she had often helped her father out at one of his *panaderias*, but both "jobs" were just for fun. Now, cuteness wouldn't cut it. She was at the reserve to work[.]

As soon as Evie reached the ~~others~~[,] she discovered how dead wrong she was about what she had told Alex. The majority of volunteers were not high school students like herself. They weren't even sophomores, but rather seniors. Not *high school* seniors, but seniors, as in senior citizens, *old* people. There were about eight of them, small, slouching, and fragile looking in baggy[,] high[-]waisted jeans and nylon windbreakers. A few of the men even sported small, war veteran pins on their label [lapels] World War I? Evie wondered.

She had forgotten that there were those in the world who actually like[d] doing good things for good causes, completely free from an agenda, [un]like herself.

To Evie's relief, there was one other person, a girl, who looked about her age. She was ~~very~~ [delete very] thin and extremely pale with black shoulder[-]length hair and thick heavy bangs. Evie likened her appearance to Emily Strange, the scowling T-shirt icon with the **moody** sayings, [delete comma] she had gotten to know via Raquel. [Evie] Evie took a seat in the empty fold[-]up chair next to her.

Lynn walked over and stood in front of the group. Evie shaded her eyes from the late afternoon sun as she listened to her introduce herself as the owner of the [r] Reserve and talk a little bit about the reserve's history. *Yawn.* Evie hoped she'd get credit for this **hum drum** (humdrum) part of the orientation.

"I'm not here that often," Lynn explained. "So, you will be trained by Arturo. He has been with the reserve for over a year[,] and I really trust him. He's my right[-]hand man. And with that," she looked over at a guy sitting in the front row who [m] Evie hadn't noticed before [e[,]]. "I'll let Arturo take over."

Arturo got up from his chair and was greeted with an estatic applause. Evie saw that he was actually younger, maybe even closer to her [own] age.

Evie heard Emily Strange Girl mutter under her breath when she saw Arturo, "Nice."

Evie looked Arturo over. Yeah, he was nice looking[, if you]. ~~If you~~ liked that country, rural, kind of look, which she didn't. He was tall, like Alex, but not [as] ~~he~~ wiry [wiry, with a broad chest and brown hair]. ~~He had a broad chest.~~ He had **brown** hair like Alex's, but his was a lot shorter. His eyes were light, almost green and he was very

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tan, which Evie did like, but ~~(he)~~ wore cowboy boots, which Evie definitely didn't like.
Que fugly.

"My name's Arturo," he introduced himself again. "You can call me Turo if you like, but just don't call me last minute, ~~[delete both commas]~~ to cancel your hours."

The whole group, minus Emily Strange Girl, laughed out loud.

Point proven. Sympathy chuckles (sometimes called kiss ass giggles) *are* granted to adults or those in charge.

"No, but seriously," Arturo continued. "The horses here have already gone through a lot, so if you aren't truly committed to being here, then you need to think of another option for volunteer work. We, actually, *they* really need responsible individuals to help take care of them."

Arturo went on to explain that he was a senior at Thatcher High School and also an officer with the FFA, the Future Farmers of America.

"A lot of people think that the FFA is just a bunch of kids who are into raising livestock, but it's much more than that," ~~(h)~~ He went on to explain ~~[delete comma]~~ in almost a smug demeanor. "We learn leadership and management skills. I'm the head director for Ventura county, a position that I'm very proud of ~~[,]~~ and now I'm running for state director, which is I position I feel pretty confident I'll earn." ✓

Evie looked around at the group. Was this guy for real? The Emily Strange Girl was working on a blemish under her chin, but everyone else, especially Lynn, was so taken by the wonderful magical world of Arturo and his passion for taking charge.

Arturo ~~told~~ [told them they could] ~~everyone that they could~~ request their own hours, ~~[,]~~ however, students usually worked afternoon and weekend hours. "We also have

horses that are boarded here~~[.]~~ [H]he pointed out five stables towards the far back of the reserve. "They're basically our bread and butter. Their ~~owner's~~ ~~[owners']~~ rent pays for our feed~~[our]~~ supplies~~[.]~~ and our own rent." He ~~[delete finally]~~ finally rubbed ~~[his]~~ ~~the~~ palms together~~[, a gesture]~~. ~~A gesture~~ that Evie took to mean that orientation was nearly over. She sat up in her seat.

"Now," Arturo said. "Who's ready to meet our clients?"

There's more?
~~No!~~ Evie was getting impatient.

Of course, all the old people chuckled again and raised their hands in anticipation.

Arturo led the group over to the stables~~[delete comma]~~ just as Lynn excused herself.

"Have fun and be sure to listen to Arturo," she said before adjusting her denim sun hat and heading towards her pick-up ~~[pickup]~~ truck. "I'll be back before you all leave."

As everyone followed Arturo, Evie fell into step with the Emily Strange Girl, who glanced over at Evie.

"I like your necklace," she said.

"Oh," Evie fingered the chips of abalone shells that dangled from the cord.

"Thanks. My boyfriend made it for me."

"Oh," Emily made a face like she just ~~[had]~~ witnessed a kitten ~~mid[-]~~ yawn ~~[delete or something]~~ ~~or something~~. "That is *too* sweet."

Okay, [maybe the girl emulated Emily,] ~~the girl may emulate Emily~~, but she obviously had a *sentida* side.

"What school do you go to?" she asked Evie.

"Villanueva," Evie answered.

The girl threw Evie a knowing glance. "Fan-*cee*. You must have money."

"I don't," Evie answered awkwardly. "But my parents do. Or at least my dad does, but he works. A lot."

"And your mother doesn't?" *She asked.*

"No, not really."

"Oh," the girl said. "So you do have money." *← italic's*

Evie always felt a bit uncomfortable when seemingly cool kids, [~~delete like~~ herself] like herself, questioned **her family's financial position**. Money usually represented yuppie-dumb, i.e. *boring*, and Evie was way more 'down with brown' than 'down with Buffy.' *Totally.*

"Where do you go?" she asked the Emily (Strange) Girl.

"I don't, really," Emily (Strange) Girl answered. "I mean, I do independent study at New Path."

New Path was a C-school, at the north end of the county. Unlike Nueva ([,]) in all it's ([its]) majestic Spanish architectural splendor, New Path was just a bunch of white washed quantum huts and non-descript bungalows at the Camarillo airport. Evie didn't know anyone, except for Jose, Raquel's ex boyfriend, who went to New Path.

"Do you know a guy named Jose?" Evie asked. She couldn't help but feel a little bit Emily Strange herself, hoping to hear that Jose was doing badly. But, he *had* been quite the dick to her, and of course, to Raquel, last semester.

"Jose..." Emily Strange Girl squinted her eyes in thought. "Is he a Mexican guy with wild hair, like a 'fro?"

"Yeah," Evie said.

"Oh, yeah," Emily Girl smiled slyly. "*Everyone* knows *that* Jose."

"I'm sure they do," Evie smirked. "He used to go to my school and —"

"Excuse me, are we interrupting you?" ~~[why the italics?]~~

Evie looked up and realized that Arturo was directing his question right at her.

Suddenly ~~[.]~~ ten pairs of eyes, including Emily's, were on Evie.

"Uh, no ~~[.]~~," Evie's face felt hot. "I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"Please," Arturo looked upward in annoyance ~~[.]~~ "I really don't want to go over this again.

"I know," Evie felt the need to stand up straight. "I'm paying attention."

Arturo glanced down at Evie's feet. "And you can't be wearing flip flops around the stables. We won't be taking these horses down for any stroll on the beach [beach, at least not anytime] ^{soon."} ~~At least, anytime soon."~~

All the volunteers, even Emily Strange Girl, chuckled a bit.

~~[delete extra-]~~ "I just came from school," Evie explained. "I didn't know." Her feet suddenly felt over ~~[-]~~ exposed and naked. She placed one flip flop over the other ~~[delete comma]~~ in a show of **modesty**.

"You wear flip flops *and* shorts to school?" Arturo directed his question less to Evie and more to his newly acquired audience who were now at the mercy of his desperate jokes. "And do you wear a bathing suit to **church**?"

More tittering from the geriatric gallery.

Where was this guy ~~from~~ (?) Evie wondered. Everyone knew of the lax dress code at Nueva. Villanueva.

"What is your name?" Arturo looked at his clipboard.

"Evie, Evie Gomez."

"Ah, yes," Arturo said. "You were just added, right?"

"Uh, yeah[.]" The magnifying glass was definitely on Evie.

"Let me tell you something, Evie[.]" Arturo started. "I know this is a volunteer position, but you need to take your work here seriously. I'm not going to hand out credit just because you show up. You are going to have to ~~do work~~ (work, hard). Hard work."

"I know," Evie said. Jeez, she thought to herself, Mr. "Friend of the Animals" was really laying it on thick to this particular two[-]footed upright mammal.

"So, anyway," Arturo (Arturo continued, still annoyed, "back to") tried to continue, but he was still annoyed. "Back to the real reason why we are all here, the care and rehabilitation of the horses."

Arturo then led everyone to each (stall) stable and introduced each horse by name. Evie noticed that just about everyone took notes[.] and [delete that] that many of them went so far as to draw out a diagram of the reserve. She glanced over and saw that even Emily Strange Girl was writing something in her notebook. Evie immediately felt inadequate and didn't know what to do with her empty hands. Usually she would fiddle with her cell phone, but that was now not an option.

"Now, let's go give old Chamuco a visit," Arturo announced after the group had been introduced to the last of at least twenty horses. "Chamuco," Arturo explained, "is

one of our oldest residents. He was seized from a ranch in Santa Ynez[,] and when he first came here[,] he was starving and dehydrated, but he has come a long way."

The whole group followed Arturo to a stable [stall] farther away from the other horses. A humongous carmel colored Shoshone [Shoshone is an Indian tribe. I would probably have Arturo introduce the horse as a caramel-colored Belgian, a draft horse whose size, very large, is not indicative of temper. Draft horses are considered cold-bloods that are usually quite mellow.] came over to the group, lazily chewing on strands of hay. He had big eyes that were oddly clouded, almost pure white. It was clear that Chamuco was blind. A sympathetic collective "Aaaw" was expressed from (by) the whole group.

"Even though his name means devil in Spanish," Arturo got into the stall with him, "Chamuco is one of our sweetest horses." He pulled a carrot out of his side pocket and fed it to Chamuco while he started talking baby talk. "Aw, ha-vun't choo Chamuco? You've had a toof time. Poor bouy."

Evie glanced over at one of the volunteers[, a woman]. A woman, about four feet tall with dirty grey hair tucked under a silk scarf [who] was fiercely scribbling on her note pad. Evie looked over at the pad. ["Chamuco/devil, has come along way, pick up Poly-grip on the way home."] [""]

"Who'd like to meet Chamuco?" Arturo asked, more as a challenge than a question, as if no one would dare enter the stable with him.

Suddenly the shared eagerness of the group dimmed. None of the volunteers offered [to go into the stall] to get in the stable with Chamuco/devil.

Arturo looked over the group, his eyebrows raised in smugness. He then looked at Evie. "What about you, Evie?" he asked. "Why ~~do[n't]~~ you come in and say hi to ol' Chamuco?"

"Me?" Evie pointed to herself. The whole group parted, as if they were the Red Sea, [Sea separating to allow Evie access to] and were allowing Evie to the **Promised** Horse. Land ✓

"Sure[.]" Arturo motioned her to step the inside the stable[.]. "[c]Come on in."

Evie stepped away from the group and slid between the fence's slants. Her precious ~~[A]~~Rainbow flojos sunk into the muddy earth[.] and all the horse flies that had been pestering Chamuco changed course and were now testing her patience as they buzzed around her face and hair. She tried to ~~swat~~ ~~[swat]~~ them away.

"You have to be careful with horses like Chamuco," Arturo warned her, as well as the whole group. "They can ~~get easily~~ ~~(easily get)~~ startled and ~~can~~ [delete can] give you a good, swift kick. Which reminds me," Arturo looked at the group again with a playful smirk on his face[.]. "Did everyone fill out the liability forms?"

Everyone laughed, that is, except Evie. She couldn't help but feel a bit **hesitant**. She crept cautiously around Chamuco, allowing him enough adequate space so he couldn't possibly ~~dare~~ ~~[delete dare]~~ feel threatened, but just as she was making her way to the right of him, her cell's ringtone went off, all five bars excruciatingly loud[.] ~~[A]~~ long continuous scream of Greta, the lead singer of The Black Dolls, blared from the back pocket of Evie's shorts. It startled Evie, but not ~~as~~ ~~[delete as]~~ nearly as much as it ~~d~~ ~~[startled]~~ Chamuco. His entire gigantic **body** jerked ~~[sideways]~~ **back** and his neck **coiled back** ~~[arched]~~ like a two ton cobra ready to strike.

[Delete from here to "sure made a friend."—it's a duplicate of page 75] him, her cell's ringtone went off, all five bars excruciatingly loud -- a long continuous scream of Greta, the lead singer of The Black Dolls, beared from the back pocket of Evie's shorts. It startled Evie, but not as nearly as much as it did Chamuco. His entire gigantic body jerked **back and his neck coiled back, like a two ton cobra ready to strike.**

"Whoa, whoa, whoa!" Arturo tried to grab Chamuco's by his **neck**. "Easy does it, boy."

Chamuco swayed his head left to right. He stamped his two front hooves ferociously on the ground, kicking up mud and dirt as Evie cowered to the side of the stable and fumbled to turn off her phone that, somehow, continued **wail**.

"Get *out* of the stable!" Arturo yelled at Evie as Chamuco picked up a pace around the stable. His ears were pulled back and he started to knock his body against the wooden slants of the fence.

The volunteers watched in **horror**.

"Turo, Turo, should we go get help?" one of them called out to Arturo.

"No, no," Arturo insisted. "I got him, I got him."

After what seemed a good long while, Chamuco, unbelievably, calmed down. Arturo stroked his mane, offered him another carrot from his back pocket and softly talked that annoying baby talk to him again. Chamuco, it seemed, was finally **relajado**. Arturo, on the other hand, was **enojado**. Big time.

"You *cannot* have your cell phone here!" Arturo spat at Evie from the stable. "Didn't you see the signs before you came in?"

“Yeah,” Evie tried her best to defend herself. “I mean, yes, I did.” She felt horrible that she was to blame for what just happened. The last thing she wanted was to traumatize some poor, blind, defenseless animal that had already been abused enough in his life. “I thought I had turned it off.”

“Why would you even *need* your phone?” Arturo snapped. He then addressed the whole group. “Do *not* bring your cell near the stables. At all. Keep phones in your car or in the supply shed.”

One elderly man with thick white hair and wearing a light blue baseball cap raised his hand. “Uh, I have a question,” he looked around at the rest of the group in confusion.

“Yes, what is it?” Arturo shook his head in exhausted frustration.

“Uh, none of us have mobile phones,” the elderly man **started cautiously**. “Is that going to be a problem?”

“No.” Arturo answered, exasperated. “Don’t worry about it,”

Emily Strange Girl looked over at Evie. “Boy,” she remarked sarcastically. “It looks like you sure made a friend.” [~~delete from here up to the top~~]

[~~start here~~]

By the time Evie got home that evening it was almost seven in the evening. She had spent only a little over three hours at the SCHR, but her body ached as though she had busted her butt driving cattle for three years. She nearly fell asleep in Lindsay’s car on the way home from the reserve. **Mention CAR accident.**

“How was your first day, *mi’ja*?” her mother asked from the kitchen. She was eating half of an avocado with a spoon as Evie came into the house with Lindsay.

"Ugh," All Evie could do was groan. She went to the fridge and poured herself some Kern's horchata. Will Lindsay ever find the time and make horchata from scratch, like she used to?

"Alex called," her mother told her. "He said he had been trying you all day on your cell phone but you never answered. He was getting worried."

"We can't use our phones at the reserve," Evie said. "It spooks ~~[delete out]~~ out the horses."

She decided to omit the incident that erupted between her and Chamuco/devil. She still couldn't shake off the look of pure fright in his eyes. The pure fright ~~she~~ [had] caused.

"You have to tell us all about it." Her mother was now scraping the worn sides of the avocado hull for any possible remaining flesh. "You're father's gonna be home soon. You want something to eat until then?"

"Nuh uh," Evie moaned as [she] took her glass of horchata upstairs with her. "I just wanna take a long bath."

"Evie, wait," ~~[delete extra]~~ her mother called out. "I want to talk to you."

"What?"

"You know your father is really serious about canceling this party," her mother said.

"I know," Evie replied glumly. [Hadr't] Didn't she just bust[ed] her butt for the last four hours? Of course, she knew.

"And I really need you to know how serious he is. If you don't bring your GPA up, you will not only lose the party, but we will [also] lose a lot of money. I already had

the invitations ordered~~[,]~~ and there are the three non~~[-]~~refundable deposits we made~~X~~
[delete comma] for Duke's, for the food[,] and for the DJ."

"I know," Evie repeated. Jeez, could she feel more pressured?

"And your father and I have already asked a lot of our friends from the country club and a lot of family to hold the date for the party," her mother continued. "So, I just hope that you keep that in mind and that you *are* serious about improving your grades."

"Mom, of course I am," Evie told her. "Can't you ~~you~~ [delete second you] tell? Look at me, I'm covered in sweat and mud~~[,]~~ and I've been slaving away all afternoon."

"Okay, okay," her mother smiled. "I just needed you to know."

"Can I go now?" Evie asked.

Her mother smiled. "Yes, of course."

Evie continued up the stairs. God, the *nerve* of her mother ~~[It was like] It's like~~ she wanted to make sure the party happened more for her own sake, just to save face and money. If she wanted the party ~~[so] to~~ friggin' bad, why didn't she just clock in under Evie's name and ~~(muck the horse poop) schlep the horse dung~~ herself?

~~Evie slowly~~ ^{Keep ↓} [Slowly Evie] made her way to the bathroom of her parent's master bedroom and turned the jacuzzi dial of their over~~[-]~~sized tub to high. After she lit two vanilla scented candles and mixed in ~~[delete in]~~ her favorite lavender oil into the whirling jet streams, she stripped off her stinky clothes and slid into the hot water. She called Alex from her cell phone.

"So how was it?" he asked. "I kept calling you and you' never answered. I was worried you got dragged off by a horse or something."

"I feel like I was. I am *so* tired." Evie yawned. "And this was just the orientation. The guy in charge totally had it out for me. He's like, this total kiss ass FFA dork. He ~~made me~~ [made me go into a stall] ~~get in a stable~~ with the most freaked out horse at the reserve and totally went out of his way to make me look like an idiot ~~[delete comma]~~ in front of everyone.

"What an asshole," Alex said.

"Totally," Evie agreed. "I'm thinking maybe I should just find a tutor and forget all this volunteer business."

"Maybe he's just coming on strong at first," Alex guessed. "You know how teachers do that, play the tough guy first and then soften up later."

"We'll see," Evie yawned. "But either way, he was a jerk. He put me and this other girl on doodie patrol."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I have to clean up after the horses," Evie said. "All of them."

"Are you serious?" Alex laughed. "How many horses do they have?"

"Twenty *too* many. Thank God I just have to go a few times after school."

"I hope it's just a few times," Alex said. "You really missed some good surf today."

"*Thanks*," Evie answered sarcastically. She rubbed a pumice stone across the bottom of her foot. She could hear [Alex's TV.] that Alex had his TV on. "What are you watching?"

"Surf porn," Alex said. "You know, big waves[, big]. ~~Big~~ music."

"Big boobs," Evie teased.

"Hmmm, I didn't notice..." Alex said. "Oh, Bien's over, too."

"Oh, really?" Evie asked.

"Yeah, he met up with me today and I ~~(was)~~ were telling him about going down to Baja sometime."

Just then Evie's call-waiting double beeped ~~(.)~~ and she saw that it was Dee Dee on the other line.

"Hey, it's Dee Dee," she told Alex. "You mind if I take her call? I haven't talked to her since school."

"Nah," Alex said. "I'll try you later tonight."

Evie clicked over to Dee Dee.

"*Hola, charra!*" Dee Dee said. "So, how did it go?"

"Don't even ask." Evie was set to uncork her whine all over again. "It sucked. Big time."

"But it's all going to be so worth it," Dee Dee insisted. "As soon as you get your GPA up, you can have your party ~~(.)~~ and then you'll get Cherry Bomb and ~~then delete then~~ your life will so be so set."

"I hope so ~~(.)~~," Evie wasn't feeling as confident as she ~~(had)~~ was a few days earlier. She ran the pumice stone under the bottom of her other foot. "You should have heard my mother tonight. She was all guilt tripping me about the party and everything. It's like she's throwing the party for herself or something."

"*Serio?*" Dee Dee asked. "Well, at least she's on your side."

"Well, she could be on my side ~~(another way.)~~ with other way. Like she could grab a shovel and help me at the reserve."

Dee Dee laughed. "So, *oye*, I haven't told you the most exciting news."

"What?" Evie asked.

"I talked to Rocio today..." Dee Dee paused in what Evie believed was [was an effort to create] 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 ^{crack} ~~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 [""] 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 [an] 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 (longer to make) ~~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 [had] never even met, from Rocio to all her Myspace friends (up to 220)[~~delete friends!~~ friends], knew all about Evie aka RioChica805. At least [about] 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 [was] known for doing it up with over[] the [] top, perfectly selected gifts. Not that presents were what a birthday celebration was all about, but *still*.

"Oh," Dee Dee[s] 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 [could] have her Sixteenera. She *had* to. She set the

(Jacuzzi) cycle to high. The jets blasted hot water[, soothing her] ~~and soon soothed her~~ muscles. She ~~stunk~~ (stank) like a horse (blanket, saddle, her arms ached[,]) and she had yet to practice her ~~[delete her]~~ driving with her father later that evening. She still had to check in with Raquel, but when she finally got out of her (the) bath, she was so tired that she fell asleep shortly before dinner ~~time~~ [delete time] and didn't wake up until early the very ~~[delete very]~~ next morning.

Chapter 6

The rest of the week at the SCHR continued to be ridiculously laborious [I think ✓ ~~this word is too stilted for the tone of the story.~~] for Evie. Wednesday through Friday she ~~leave~~ (she left) 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 delete which was~~ followed by an evening of homework, phone calls, approval of new myspace friend requests, IMs, and *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 [delete getting] callused. Now that she was in a relationship, she had become a card[-]carrying hand holder. Rough, calloused hands would not do.

She rolled the ~~[wheelbarrow or muck bucket]~~ ~~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~~ ~~[delete then]~~ noticed a girl in the ~~shed~~ ~~[shed, reclining quite]~~. She ~~reclined~~ quite casually on the ~~very~~ ~~[delete very]~~ top of three stacked plastic bins with her legs dangling, as if the supply shed ~~was~~ ~~[were]~~ her very own sitting parlor. ~~At~~ ~~[Many]~~ visitors and volunteers ~~[at]~~ 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 hair. She wore very ~~[delete very]~~ tight, high ~~[-]~~ waist ~~[ed]~~ beige riding pants with black leather riding boots that looked like they had just ~~came~~ ~~[come]~~ right out of the box. She also wore a black satin camisole, styled like a corset, ~~for~~ ~~corset~~ and ~~fastened~~ fastened with seemingly hundreds of miniature black satin ~~[-]~~ covered buttons. A single thick gold chain with a **jeweled pendant** hung around her long brown neck ~~[neck]~~ and rested ~~]. The pendant~~ rested right into ~~her~~ ~~[the fold of fold/nest]~~ 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 cigarette, positioned between her thin, delicate fingers, ~~that~~ ~~[that was causing]~~ ~~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 ~~(from under)~~ 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)]~~ The girl continued ~~(with a)~~ ~~to have~~ a vacant look on her face.

~~Volunt girl, Ana~~
"Me and the other ~~volunt~~ ~~s~~," Evie laughed to herself. "You haven't met him?"

"Me?" The girl took an even ~~delet~~ slower pull from her cigarette and smirked. "Oh, yes ~~(,)~~ I've met *him*."

Just then, Arturo entered the shed.

"Josephina," ~~(he said as he took)~~ ~~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. ~~[No way.]~~ *Way*. This girl had obviously met Arturo and knew him well [well, quite 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 each were a question. This was typical San Fernando Valley speak, that somehow ~~(had)~~ made it down the Conejo Grade and into

Ventura ~~(County)~~ Country. This girl, [named Josephina had] ~~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 ~~X~~
[delete comma] beside the extra saddles and blankets, trying on work gloves.

"What do you need, Evie?" He demanded to know. His embrace ~~(of)~~ around
Josephina relaxed as she took back her cigarette ~~[delete from him] 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 ~~(my)~~ cami?"

Arturo pulled back ~~(.)~~ and then the girl looked blankly at Evie, ~~[prompting him to~~
~~introduce her.] which prompted him to introduce her to Evie.~~

"This is Evie ~~[Evie. She's one]~~," 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 ~~[else, or at least, the]~~
~~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. *"I would never imagine that, I"*
"Yeah, we've been best friends since we were little kids. ~~[I]~~ ~~[E]~~ 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[m]~~ she now deemed snooty and spoke in question marks, that Dee Dee was, indeed, a very, very dear friend to ~~her~~ ~~[her, 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, ~~(which was)~~ ~~who~~ ~~were~~ made up of high school seniors and had a small ~~(say[-so])~~ of who was to be selected as a new Patrona for the incoming year. ~~Dee Dee would die if she knew Evie was~~ meeting an actual Patrona.

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

"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 ~~this or her~~ child was ugly?

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

"Evie," she huffed 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 ~~(and walked)~~ 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 ~~[delete comma]~~ before the sun sets."

Ana took a ~~hold~~ ~~[ahold]~~ of the wheelbarrow. "Come on, Evie."

Evie and Ana headed towards ~~the gully~~. ~~[poop dumping area]~~ ~~[or manure pile]~~

"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."

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 11 am [a.m.] and she lay in her bed blissfully devoid of duties or obligation. Nothing would get her out of bed[, nothing.]. ~~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 and Alex had gone 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 suit [wetsuit] 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 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 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[.][T]he 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 kitchen towel. "Sabrina is 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 and towels covered with sand, were now (now were) jeans and tennis shoes embedded with ~~[muck and bits of~~ hay.] mud, straw and bits of hay. "But not until later today, right?"

"Si," Lindsay said, ~~(b)~~ But your mother wanted you (to) stick around (, just). 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 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. (did immediately.) She marched down stairs (downstairs) 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 [pick up your sister] ~~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 [to]night. This is my only one ~~delete 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 vocalized 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 [to] 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 [from] on the ~~bed stand~~ [nightstand,] and pointed it [at] 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."

"If you so badly wanted to go surfing, maybe you should have gotten up earlier," Raquel teased. "Isn't that what real surfers do? What is it, Dawn patrol?"

↻ "Dawn patrol," Evie corrected. "And you are *so* not advising me." 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 ^{L.C.} 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 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 ridiculous!"

"Who knows," Evie said. "What[']s ridiculous?"

"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 ridiculous, that guy, Arturo, 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 Arturo in any form of intimacy is just too repulsive." Evie clicked off her stereo. She realized that she was not in the mood for any music. "So (do) you ~~do~~ ~~[delete do]~~ wanna stop by and say hi to ^{Suprema} ~~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) ~~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?"

"No, 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 (fair, a) ~~A~~ street fair near Sea Street, *their* place?

"Well, when was he gonna tell you?" Raquel asked. "It starts in a couple of hours. 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~~ ~~[delete second 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 ^{some} 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 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~~[-]~~ 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 *booz*er. Big difference."

"Evelina!" [~~Lindsay called down the hall from~~]

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 ~~[delete comma]~~ used 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 [minutes, more or less,], ~~more or less, minutes~~ away from their home. Her mother would be back soon. "Why is she picking her up there?"

"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.

Evie got up from her bed to help Lindsay in Sabrina's room.

"So, how long is Sabrina gonna visit?" she asked as she walked in. Lindsay was airing out the cream colored comforter over Sabrina's queen ~~(-)~~ sized bed.

"I don't know how long," Lindsay said. "You should probably ask your parents."

Evie looked around the room. Sabrina kept everything in such tight, impeccable order that you could practically bounce a quarter off the whole room ~~(-)~~ whereas Evie's

bedroom was constantly under construction. She did, however, pride herself in the orderly fashion she maintained with her flojos. All of them (eleven pairs in all) were lined ^(up) on her closet floor based on price, color, or jewels, in that order. *Que Kimora, no?*

Lindsay leaned up from the bed and glanced over at the photos of Sabrina and her now former boyfriend, Robert. They were tacked on Sabrina's gingham cloth bulletin board. "Maybe we should take those down," she suggested.

"Are you serious?" Evie looked over at the photos. She had just opened Sabrina's vinyl CD carrier case, a relic before iPod nation took over, and winced at her taste in music. From Classical Piano to World Music, how could they possibly be related?

"I think so," Lindsay started to pull out a white plastic thumb tack from the corner of one of the pictures. "Your mother said she was *muy triste*. We don't want to make her more upset." **DICHO** ✓

"I think she'd be way more upset that we are moving things around in her room." Evie closed the CD case. "She doesn't like her things messed with. [Neither do I] As nor do I, Lindsay," Evie exaggerated in proper English enunciation to prove her point.

"Maybe you're right," Lindsay sighed. "But don't blame me if she gets sad. I don't want to be the cause of her tears."

"Hey, Linds^(up) Evie started.

"**Si?**" Lindsay tacked the photo of Sabrina and Robert back up on the board.

"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 everthing^(up) 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 [in] with you."

Evie's heart ~~sunk~~ [sank]

"You shouldn't lie to me, [delete comma] 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~~ [won't] happen again."

"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, [was poised] ~~were~~ politely ~~poised~~ on the night table – cozy *cositas* ready to welcome 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 ~~delete 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, Ruben Gomez had yet to even fire up his new Ultra-Premium. He did, however, look the part of Grill Master Ruben in a Q-tip white chef's hat, practically two feet in height, and a stiff red and white ~~apron~~ [delete apron] striped apron.

"You are so not wearing that," Evie looked ~~over her father~~ [her father over] disapprovingly as Molesto came **trotting** up towards 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.

"Why aren't you using your new ~~grill~~ [grill, the Grill]? The Grill Grandioso 3000?" she asked ~~[delete period]~~ sarcastically as she took a seat on a deck chair and helped herself to some tortilla chips. *takes*

"The Ultra Premium," her father corrected her. "I wanted to use it, but we don't have enough propane[, and]. ~~And~~ the extension cord doesn't reach out to the deck. It's all just a mess."

"I can go get some propane, Senor Ruben," Lindsay offered.

"Nah, it won't be necessary," Evie's father continued to scrub the Weber's grill. "It's been a while since I've used ~~the~~ [delete the] this. It should be fun, like old times [.]". He looked over at Evie. "Like when we used to go camping, remember?"

"Camping?" Evie squinted her eyes at her father. It was now nearly one in the afternoon, but the sun was blazing. How utterly sweet, Evie ~~bitterly thought~~, ~~(thought~~ ~~bitterly,~~) it would've been to be out with Alex and then watching Los Olvidados play at the Seaside Park street fair. Stupid Sabrina. Her little melt down just effed up her whole day.

"Yes," her father said. "We used this grill when we used to go camping at Leo Cabrillo? How can you not remember?"

"Easily," Evie joked as she crammed more chips into her mouth. Leo Carillo was a state beach between Malibu and Rio Estates, right off the Pacific Coast Highway. The highway divided the hiking trails of the canyon and the sandy coastline of the beach, making Leo Carillo truly a place of best [in the best of both worlds] worlds, depending on what side of the highway you were on. Evie realized it had been years since she had thought of Leo Carrillo.

"Those were some good times," her father continued. "Remember you and Sabrina would take the boogie boards out [~~out to the ocean~~][~~or out in the ocean~~] and would be in the ocean all day? We couldn't get you out of the water for nothing. You girls were so water logged [~~waterlogged~~], that you'd look like those Californian raisins when you finally came out."

"Dad, we didn't even camp," Evie **rumpled her lips**. "We slept in the Vacationeer (,) and half the time mom would get so annoyed with all loud campers and the mosquitoes that she'd drive me and 'brina back home so we could all sleep in our own beds for the night. I wouldn't exactly call that camping."

"But you still came back in the morning," Her father refused to let his positive memories be swept away under Evie's moodiness. "We'd spend the whole day at the beach together. It was so fun. You and your sister were ~~inseparable.~~ 'inseparable.'"

Evie looked at her father ~~struggle~~ [struggling] with the Weber grill. It was not getting any cleaner. "Do you even know what you [re] are doing?" she asked.

"E-vie [,]" Lindsay shot her a look as she arranged utensils on the patio table

Evie knew she was sounding **bratty**, but [she] couldn't help it. She was still annoyed that she [had] had to waste a full day at home [,] and she placed the blame on ~~her~~ [not only on Sabrina, but also on] ~~only Sabrina, but~~ both her parents.

"Yes, Evie. I do know what I am doing." Her father didn't mind her sass. "It's pretty simple. I just have to get the coals going, which... might..." He read over the bag. "Take a little bit longer than I thought."

"So, how long is Sabrina gonna stay?" Evie asked her father. Molesto had now rolled over. He wanted his belly rubbed.

"I'm not quite sure. You might want to ask your mother." He added more lighter fluid to the coals and then re-read the charcoal bag. "You know, we might be eating a little later than I thought. I hope Sabrina isn't too hungry when she gets here." He looked over at Lindsay. "Hey, Linds, did you make your salsa? The **verde picante**? It'll go great with the tri-tip."

"Si, si [,]" Lindsay brushed some leaves off the chairs with a kitchen towel. "I also made avocado pie, Sabrina's favorite."

"You didn't use any of my mom's organic **Rancho Palermo** avocados, did you?" Evie asked as she scratched Molesto's belly.

"Of course not," Lindsay said. ~~[delete extra "I"]~~ "I couldn't if I wanted to. She has those under lock and key ~~[along]~~ with all her winning Bunco money."

Before they knew it, Molesto's ears, as if on cue, pricked up and ~~[were]~~ was followed by the purr of Vicki Gomez's Mercedes pulling into the ~~[driveway]~~ ~~drive-way~~. Molesto rolled over ~~[onto]~~ to his feet and took off for the front yard.

"They got back quick," Lindsay looked at her watch.

Evie got up from her chair, wiped the tortilla chip crumbs off her shorts ~~[.]~~ and went to the front yard.

"Tell 'em I'll be right there," Evie's father called out as the flames roared to the height of his chest. "I don't think I can leave this... right now."

Evie came around the house just as her sister was getting out of her mother's Mercedes, but as soon as she saw her sister, she was ~~X~~ ~~[delete a]~~ taken aback. Sabrina, how could you say it nicely, looked really bad. For one thing, Sabrina relished sunshine and poo pooed any suntan oil that contained the socially deadly SPF. Now ~~was~~ ~~[delete was]~~ ~~[she]~~ was pale, almost ~~[a]~~ sickly white, ~~[delete comma]~~ pale ~~[, and]~~. ~~And~~ she was very thin. ~~[The dark roots]~~ ~~Her dark roots~~ of her blonde hair were an inch deep, exposing a form of laziness that Evie had never ~~new~~ ~~[known]~~ existed within her sister. Evie knew Sabrina would never leave the house, let alone take a trip, looking the way she did. She was one of those girly girls who actually dressed up for travel, in fact, the joke of the household was that Sabrina's accessories practically had to match the interior of the airlines she was flying, which is why she rarely flew Southwest. She looked horrible in red, blue ~~[.]~~ and gray.

"Hey, Sabrina..." Evie started as she walked towards her sister. She suddenly felt guilty about the earlier resentment she had felt against her. Sabrina suddenly looked frail and so alone.

"Hey, Evie," Sabrina's face was flat and emotionless. She clung to the strap of her shoulder bag as if it was a life preserver and she paid no mind to Molesto, who eagerly vied for her attention.

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 as she awkwardly clutched her right elbow with her left hand.

"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 Sabrina a long, hard embrace. "*Ay, que flaquita!* Oh, I'll take care of that!"

Sabrina didn't say anything and pretty much resembled a limp, lifeless rag doll. [delete the rest] getting the life out of 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'll make it with fresh tomatoes from the garden."

"It's really okay," Sabrina mumbled softly.

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

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

"That's because you haven't had 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, hard, as if she was trying to put out a fire under her skin. "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 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 [she] appeared to [still] be just as [delete just as] shaken. "No worries. [.] [s]" she said as she went over to Sabrina.

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

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

"Oh, oh..." Evie's mother [said] but she seemed ~~at a loss~~ [at a loss as to what to do.] of what to do. "Lindsay, here," she quickly handed [over] her own handbag and car

keys to her. "I'm going to take Sabrina up to her room, [.] Evie's mother put her arm around Sabrina and led her up to the stone steps and into the house.

"*Si, claro,*" Lindsay took Vicky Gomez's purse and keys. [As she] **She watched after Vicki and Sabrina, her face was combination of worry, fear[,] and confusion.**

"What happened?" Evie asked Lindsay as soon as they were inside. "What's wrong with Sabrina?"

"*Yo no se,*" Lindsay confessed. "I never wanted to make Sabrina upset or make her cry. I would rather die than cause either one of you girls pain."

At that moment, Evie's father, still in his apron and mile high chef's hat, came from around the side of the house.

"Hey," he looked around and found the drive-way [driveway] void of a heart[-] warming family reunion. "What happened to my little girl?"

But ~~delete But~~ [B] both Lindsay and Evie were still ~~delete still~~ too stunned to answer.

Chapter 9

"So what do you think happened to her?" Dee Dee asked Evie.

The three girls, Evie, Dee Dee [.] and Raquel had gathered later that afternoon for another impromptu ER/RE! meeting and, again, ~~delete and, again,~~ at Evie's urgency.

As soon as her mother had taken Sabrina upstairs, the barbeque was, of course, off [.] and the house became oppressively quiet. Lindsay put the food away [.] and her father's enthusiasm, and chef's hat, came down. Evie took the opportunity to sneak out

Gomez's

Ruben

towards the far west end of the Rio Estates country club golf course, the regular **place** for their ER/RE! meet ups. ~~Now they all layed~~, [All three lay flat] flat on their backs, on the meticulously maintained lawn where any passing ^{member} ~~golfer~~ might guess them to be just **three young girls** casually counting clouds or working on their mid[-]winter tans. Oh, if [only] life in the Estates was just that simple.

“Like I said,” Evie repeated. “As far as I know, she and Robert broke up[,] and she’s all upset by it.”

“But why?” Dee Dee exhaled smoke from her flavored Californian Dream. “I mean, who broke up with who?”

“It’s not who broke up with who,” Raquel held her cell phone inches above her face with both hands as she texted. “It’s who broke up with *whom*.”

Evie ignored Raquel. “*She* broke up with him.”

Dee Dee leaned ~~[rolled over]~~ over [on] to her side to face Evie. “That makes no sense. Then why is she the one who is all sad and crying?”

“I have no idea,” Evie waved Dee Dee’s cigarette smoke away from her face.

“He probably cheated on her,” Raquel said. “And then she broke up with him after she found out.”

“How could you say that?” Evie looked over at Raquel. “You’ve never even met Robert[,] and why would anyone ever cheat on Suprema? She’s like perfect.” Evie was surprised that she would even be cheering for Team Suprema, someone who definitely didn’t need anymore PR work.

“Look, they’d been going out for almost two years[,]” Raquel[‘s] thumbs were on fire as she continued typing rapid text. “He was probably bored. Big time.”

|||

"Could you *stop* for a minute?" Evie looked over at her fingers and cell phone.

(cell phone.) "~~For a minute?~~" ~~{delete}~~

"I'm just giving it to Davey," Raquel explained. "We were supposed to hook up today, 'member? But *now* he's saying it'll be later tonight."

"You know," Dee Dee started. "I agree with Raquel. I think there is more to the story. Maybe Sabrina was, like, caught in a tragic love affair with one of her professors or something." She sat up. "Ooh, and then the wife confronted Sabrina at her sorority house, in front of all her sisters." ~~in front of all her sisters.~~ Oh. My. God."

"You," Evie looked at Dee Dee, ~~{n}~~ "Read too many of those **Mexican soap periodicals.**"

"Well, I just don't get it ~~{.}~~" Dee Dee lay back down on the grass. "How could Sabrina just ~~{delete just}~~ leave Stanford and break up with her boyfriend ~~{just}~~ ^{keep} like that? I mean, Sabrina is, like, my role model, and, *yo no se*, I'm just surprised, I guess."

"I don't believe you guys ~~{.}~~" Evie felt annoyed with Dee Dee and Raquel. She expected better advice from her two APAs.

"Hey," Raquel said. "We only know what you tell us ~~{.}~~ and you're the one who sent the emergency text. You wanted our opinion on what we think is going on with Sabrina. It's not our fault you don't agree with what we think." She got a new text and sat up quickly. "*Shit!*"

"*Que pasa?*" Dee Dee looked over at her.

"Friggin' Davey." Raquel fumed at her cell phone. "He's *such* an a-hole. First he flaked on me today ~~{.}~~ and now he's bailing on me tonight."

Evie couldn't help but feel slightly relieved. One less night with Davey Mitchell was one more night of safety for Raquel. Evie finally ^{had seen} ~~saw~~ who Davey Mitchell ~~was~~. [awkward] He had picked up Raquel from school one day in his huge white four ~~(-)~~ by ~~(-)~~ four truck. The words, *In Loving Memory*, in Old English script, were adhered across the truck's back tinted window. Directly below *In Loving Memory* were the names of three of Davey's friends who had died in who knows what kind of way. When Evie had asked Raquel about it, she simply shrugged her shoulders and said the three friends had been at the wrong place at the wrong time. Evie couldn't ~~im~~ge ~~(imagine)~~ dating anyone who had an abridged obituary on their ~~(his)~~ ^{truck} ~~car~~ and God forbid, ~~[delete comma]~~ ~~(if)~~ Raquel's name got added to Davey's rear window list by merely being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

"Hey," Evie suddenly remembered her own evening duties with the reserve.

"What time is it?"

Raquel checked her cell. "Almost six, why?"

"Ah, ~~(.)~~ man. I gotta go." Evie stood up and slipped on her **Trovata** flojos. She had to meet Ana in less than an hour.

"And where you going, Miss Thang?" Raquel inquired with a suspicious tone. It was she, not Evie, who usually had to take off for somewhere on a Saturday night.

"Nowhere exciting ~~(.)~~" Evie cracked her knuckles as she stood up. "I'm on volunteer duty."

"Ew," Dee Dee wrinkled her nose at the sound of Evie's popped fingers. "I *hate* when you do that." She put out her cigarette ~~out~~ ~~[delete out]~~ in ~~(a)~~ patch of dirt. "You're going to work on a Saturday night? I thought you had the whole day free."

"I did," Evie said. "*The day*. But tonight I gotta go to some charro rodeo."

"You mean a *charreada*?" A smile spread across Dee Dee's face.

"Yes, exactly." Evie said. "How do you say it, again?"

"A *charreada*," Dee Dee repeated. "You're going to one? Tonight? *Que chido!*"

"What is it?" Raquel asked. She was on a fervent texting roll, composing scorned woman pay back (payback) to Davey.

"It's a rodeo," Dee Dee started to explain. "But a Mexican rodeo, with more synchronized competition[,] and everyone is dressed in traditional Mexican clothing. It's really festive and colorful. Rocio and I used to go them when we visited his cousins in Jalisco." She suddenly got that ⁽⁽woe is yo⁾ ~~use~~ [use ""] look. "But wait, how does going to a *charreada* work into your volunteer credit?"

"You got me," Evie shrugged her shoulders. "But I ain't asking. As long as I don't have to clean up at the reserve[,] it's fine with me. It's a fundraiser[,] and Arturo said if any of the volunteers wanted to buy a ticket and go, we could still get credit."

"Ah," Raquel smirked. "The virtues of capital gain in an altruistic society."

"And this girl, Ana, who I volunteer with, is gonna pick me up," Evie went on to explain. "We're gonna go together."

"If I didn't have to to write my essay for Las Patronas, I would definitely invite myself[,]." Dee Dee said. "Charreadas are *so* much fun. They have live mariachi music and lots of food. You aren't taking Alejandro?"

"I would," Evie started. "But he's decided to drive down to San Diego tonight. He and Bien, that guy from Buena, are gonna stay the night in S.D. so they can go surfing in Baja tomorrow morning. Dawn patrol."

As soon as she spoke⁽¹⁾ Evie could already sense Dee Dee feeling sorry for her.
He's going away. Again. Without you. Porbecita.

"I was actually gonna go with him," Evie lied. "He wanted to do this whole day thing with me, down in Baja, but I had to work at the reserve."

"Plus," Raquel added. "I really can't see your mom letting you cross into Mexico with Alex. No way would Vicki G stand for that."

"Right," Evie raised her eyebrows and nodded. Although Raquel's observation validated her little fib, she slightly ~~resented~~ it. resented it slightly. Why did Raquel *always* have to point out just how strict her mother was? Just because Kitty, Raquel's mother, was too busy with her software business, her La Madrinas mentoring network⁽¹⁾ and hosting her ~~over-~~^{never} ~~produced~~ Bunco parties to ~~never knew~~ ~~just to notice~~ the craziness Raquel was up to, ^(it) didn't make Evie's mother a complete tyrant.

"But Baja isn't Mexico," Dee Dee felt the need to point out. "Everyone thinks it is, but it isn't. It's really just an extension of California."

"Oh, yeah?" Raquel asked. "If it's just an extension, why do *I* get sweated at the border when my Cabo tan and I are just trying to make our way back into Cali?"

"Maybe it's not your dark tan," Dee Dee mused, "but maybe your dark, moody attitude?[".]"

"Yeah," Evie laughed. "Or, maybe it's the fact that you're always trying to smuggle back [delete back] tequila in your handbag or pot in your panties."

"Excuse me," Raquel informed Evie. "I do *not* drink tequila. That crap is nasty."

"*And*," Evie looked at her. "You don't wear panties."

"You know," Raquel threw Evie a sideways glance. "I *was* thinking of tagging along with you to your little rodeo, but now I just changed my mind, thank you." She went back to texting.

"Oh, yeah, thanks for the offer," Evie smirked. "Now that Davey's ditched you."

"And Alex hasn't [ditched] you?" Raquel asked.

"*Not twice*" Evie said.

"Not twice *in the same day*, maybe," Raquel bit back.

"Chicas, chicas," Dee Dee interrupted with an authoritative, almost bored tone.

"How much longer is this juvenile sparring going to continue? If we're done here, I need to get back home and work on my essay."

"No, but really," Raquel said to Evie. "I'll go with you to this charreada. I could be into getting my mariachi on." She extended her elbows and flapped them around a bit.

"*Serio?*" Evie asked.

"Why not?" Raquel asked. "Can I catch a ride with you and your horse friend?"

Ana, Evie remembered, was also a classmate of Jose's [.] and she could only imagine an evening of severe grilling a` la Raquel. She made a mental note to warn Ana - 'Ixnay on the Jose'. But other than that, Evie thought it would be fun to have Raquel to herself for the evening. Since she has [had] been going out with Davey, it's [it] seemed like forever since they ~~had~~ [had any] QT together on a weekend.

"Of course," Evie **said**. "You should totally come with us."

"Oh," Dee Dee pouted as she put out her cigarette. "**I am so jealous**. You are **going to have a blast**. *Charro* boys are so fine."

"That's enough for me," Raquel slammed her cell phone shut in defiance. "I'm so over Davey."

Chapter 10 Charro, *Claro*

Evie, Raquel and Ana arrived at the *charreada* just as it was starting. Just about [Nearly every seat] every seat was taken up by entire Mexican families, rowdy teenagers[,] or glassy eyed men, [delete comma] already drunk on Corona. While the arena was outfitted with *banderas* in red, white[,] and green, the national colors of the Mexican flag, just about everyone in the bleachers feriously [ferociously or furiously] waved multicolored flags that represented [flags representing] their individual home states of Mexico.

Raquel scanned the bleachers. "Damn, I thought we were going to a rodeo, not some freakin' *futbol* game."

"Hey," Ana tilted her chin towards the lower left end of the bottom bleachers. "There's some space over there. I'm sure we can fit our asses in."

Raquel and Ana, each lugging plastic bags of kettle corn and churritos as well as *elotes* slathered in mayonaise, made their way over to the empty space. Evie followed, balancing their [delete their] three super sized sodas.

"*Vamos a un buen tiempo!*" an announcer yelled into the microphone[,] and the whole crowd stood up and belted out a thunderous grito.

As soon as she sat down, Raquel looked around and then discreetly pulled out a small glass bottle of Jack Daniel's. She poured some into her soda.

Ana eyed the bottle and smiled. "Woman, I like your style."

-italics

-follow only what is marked w/ pen.

Raquel passed the bottle to Ana[,] who poured even more into her own coke.

"You want some Evie?" Ana waved the bottle seductively.

"No, thanks," Evie **said**. "Whisky [~~Whiskey~~] gives me the runs."

"Ah, poor Evie," Raquel feigned sympathy. "~~Lo Sienta~~. I forgot to purchase some fancy Veeve for you."

The first bull rider was released into the ring[,] and the whole crowd stood up from their seats [delete from their seats] to cheer him on.

"This is Jessie G from Fontana!" The announcer yelled into the mic. "And if Jessie can stay on Thunder 'til the whistle blows, well, Jessie G is gonna be going home with his own bottle of tequila! What do you say, amigos?!"

Amigos? Where did they find this announcer?

"Give *me* the tequila!" Raquel held her soda out towards the arena. "I'm running out!"

The crowd that sat [crowd sitting closest] closest to the three girls laughed.

"I thought you didn't drink tequila," Evie reminded Raquel. She knew she was being a buzz kill, but WTF, she didn't have a buzz[,] and she definitely didn't want to get popped for simply being around others trying to get one.

Evie regretted that she had brought Raquel. Not only was [she] already getting loud and obnoxious, [but she was also getting Ana drunk.] she getting Ana drunk. Who was gonna drive them home? **THOUGHTS ON SABRINA**. She checked her cell phone and saw that there were no messages. She wondered if Alex he [delete he] had already arrived to [in] San Diego.

"Man," Raquel [was practically ~~inhale~~ inhaling] her drink through her straw.
"Check out the *hombres* 'round here! *Que* fine!"

Evie looked around. Raquel was right. Charro boys, in their snug charro suits were *muy*, how do you say 'FAF' en espanol? Plus, there were just tons of other men, spectators, milling about in mariachi inspired duds— bolero jackets and tight fitting pencil pants with silver conchas stitched along the side seam[s].

"Damn," Raquel nudged Evie and whistled. "Look at *that* piece of ass!"

Evie and Ana looked over. Ana [laughed covering her mouth] ~~covered her mouth~~
~~laughing~~ but Evie was beside herself. The so-called piece of ass belonged to ~~no one~~ [none
other] ~~other~~ than the biggest *nalgón* himself, Arturo.

Evie almost didn't recognize him. He was wearing/DESCRIBE

"You've gotta be kidding!" Evie said. "That's like my boss, at the reserve."

"What, are you serious?" Raquel pulled up her Utopia Cop Outs to get a better look. "Damn, hook a sister up with some volunteer opportunities. I'm suddenly feeling in a very *giving* kind of mood." She lowered her voice and ribbed Evie in the side. "Ooh, he's looking this way."

"Oh, great," Evie turned her head away, hoping Arturdo wouldn't notice. He had told the volunteers that they didn't have to spend time together as a group, but the less time with *el jefe*, the better.

However, Arturdo did see Evie and Ana and ~~actually~~ ~~[delete actually]~~ waved to them. They both waved back[,] and Evie hoped that would be it. Eye contact made, credit issued. ~~But [delete But]~~ [I instead] Arturdo made his way towards the bleachers directly to them.

"Hey, you two made it," he said. "Nice." He balanced one leg on the bleacher seat above them and leaned his whole body onto it.

Nice? When was Arturo every happy to see them, let alone Evie?

"My name's Raquel," Raquel held her hand out, poised and dainty ~~[delete like]~~
~~like~~, as if she ~~was~~ [were] actually expecting him to kiss it or something. "I'm Evie's best friend."

Arturo took Raquel's hand, but merely shook it. "Oh, you're the one ~~whose~~
[who's] been living in Mexico City."

Evie was surprised that he remembered ~~that~~. ~~[delete that]~~

"Uh, *no*," Raquel shot Evie a look. "I'm the *other* best friend." She then looked back at Arturo and smiled suggestively. "The *pretty* one."

Arturo laughed. "The pretty funny one!"

That, Evie had to admit, made her LOL.

"Well it's better than being named Arturo," Raquel said under her breath.

O[,]h my God.

"What?" Arturo asked.

Evie and Ana couldn't stop from giggling. He did *not* hear that.

Just then, Josephina, of all people, walked up to them. "Arturo?"

"Ah, Josephina," he turned turned to face her and seemed a bit caught off guard.

"You're back already?"

"Yes," Josephina huffed. "What? Am I interrupting something?" She eyed Evie, Raquel[,] and Ana.

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"Oh," Arturdo suddenly seemed awkward. "You remember Evie and Ana[,] and this is their friend..."

Oh, you can just call me *La bonita*," Raquel teased. "No, but really, I'm not a volunteer," Raquel seemed the need to point out. "I'm Evie's best friend."

"O-kay," Josephina shrugged her shoulders as though it really didn't matter to her, either way. "Arturo," She repeated, looking directly at him. "I *have* to use a bathroom? And I am not about to use the stinky outhouses they have here. Can't you take me somewhere?"

"Somewhere?" Arturdo asked. "We'd have to drive into Moorpark or Camarillo."

"Well, let's go there, anywhere ~~but~~ [delete but] other than here[.]" Josephina looked around. "There's all these *borachos* here." She looked over at Raquel and Ana. "Gross?"

"*Pero querida*," Arturdo looked at his watch. "We'll miss the *escaramuzas*."

But Josephina looked at him, her eyes demanding.

Arturo looked around, loosened his shirt collar[,] and softened his tone. "But I don't want you to be uncomfortable," he told her. "I can take you into Camarillo. We'll find somewhere for you."

"So you gonna leave?" Evie asked. As soon as Arturdo bailed, so could they. *Cool.*

"It looks like it," Arturdo said as he put his arm around Josephina. "We'll be back. Maybe we'll see you later."

As soon as Arturdo and his girlfriend left the bleachers, Raquel dove in.

"Oh. *My*. God," Raquel **said**. "That girl talks like a total val[.] and what's her name again? Horsa-phina?"

Ana almost choked, laughing. "Arturdo and Horsa-phina! Perfect! A match made **in manure. I can't stand either one of them.**"

"And how whipped is that Arturdo?" Raquel observed. "My mack is dry, ay, ay."

"Blah," Ana waved her hand aside. "He just doesn't wanna argue with her. She can be pretty high maintainance."

"Or maybe," Evie suggested. "He tries to be like, 'My Super Sweet Boyfriend.' Mr. Perfect."

"Please," Raquel said. "No guy is *that* sweet."

Evie didn't have to think for a second. "Alex is,"

"Oh, yeah?" Raquel looked at her, questioning. "And where is Prince Charming now? He's probably partying in S.D. with some surf honeys as we speak."

Evie didn't even bother to respond. She knew that was far from the truth. She watched Arturdo and Horsa-phina walk from the grand stand (grandstand) arena and [delete and] towards the exit. He took off his suede jacket and covered Josephina's shoulders with it and rubbed her back slightly. Even though it was Arturdo was one of her least favorite people, Evie couldn't help but feel a twinge of envy. She couldn't remember the last time Alex had been so chivalrous with her or the last time (they) she and he had actually gone on a date. Yeah, they had surfed all the time[.] and sometimes they'd split pancakes at Pete's Breakfast House or a burrito at La Gloria downtown, but those weren't really dates. And [delete And][N]now with her volunteer duties, she wasn't

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even able to do those simple things with him. And it wasn't like he was making any effort to keep up any of the romance he used to initiate.

As soon as she was sure Arturo had left the arena, Evie was so ~~[delete so]~~ ready to bail. She really didn't know what to expect from a *charreada*, but so far, it was just like any other yahoo episode of PBR, chock full o' full of bullriders, clowns~~(,)~~ and drunken **drama**.

"*Vamos a ir!*" Evie imitated the charreada's announcer.

^{italics}
"I heard that," Raquel echoed Evie's sentiment. "Lemme just finish my drink."

"Hey, Eves, you got your learner's permit on you? Ana asked. Maybe you should drive."

"Totally," Evie answered. The night was not going to be such a big loss after all.

"Uh, I don't know about that," Raquel said. "She got in a pile up a few weeks ago."

"What?" Ana asked. "What do you mean?"

"She doesn't know what she's talking about," Evie insisted. Besides, between you two borachas, I'm the best driver there is between the three of us. ~~[don't use between twice]~~

As the girls were getting ~~(up)~~ to leave, the announcer introduced a new rider and a young girl, dressed in a cream colored Victorian style dress, rode to the center of the ring on a dark gray horse, rode. ~~[delete rode]~~ The girl rode, side saddle, gently waving ~~[waving gently]~~ to the crowd.

"She's really pretty~~(.)~~" Evie crammed the last of the churritos in[to] her mouth

"Yeah," Raquel agreed. "Her outfit's pretty cool." It was high neckline secured with buttons, billowy sleeves[,] and a long full skirt that had layers upon layers of ruffles. A bright red sash was tied around her fitted waist[,] and her long dark hair was weaved [woven] with a red ribbon into one long French braid.

Evie watched the girl elegantly trot out [trot out elegantly] to the center of ring [and tap] tapped the side of her horse with a black leather riding crop. The horse instantly bowed his head and neck while his front legs bowed in an actual courtesy. This, of course, garnered a tremendous applause from the adoring crowd.

"Ha!" Ana said, still nursing her Jack and coke. "Can you imagine doing that with one of our horses? At the reserve?"

"Not," Evie smirked.

[how do we know her name?] Catalina then hoisted herself up and placed her feet directly on the saddle, [saddle. Delete the rest] while *still* on her horse.

"What is she gonna do?" Evie asked.

~~X~~ "Have no idea," Raquel sounded bored as she swirled the ice in her cup.
"Okay, I'm ready."

"Wait," Evie said. "I wanna see this."

The girl ~~then~~ [delete then] unclipped a small coil of white rope from the side of [delete the side of] her waist and slowly started swinging the the [delete the] rope to [at her side] her side [side.] [delete and then] and then, [C]creating a lasso, spinned [she spun it over her head, around and around over her horse as he picked up a trot around the ring.]

it over her head. She spun the lasso around and around, over her and her horse, as he picked up a trot around the ring.

“Whoa, check it out, Eves,” Raquel nudged Evie. “It’s like she’s surfing, but on a horse.”

Evie *was* checking it out. She had never seen anything like this in her life[,] and the crowd was completely, totally *encantada* with the young rider.

After she promptly [delete promptly] sat back down on her saddle, however, her horse seemed to have a mind of his own. He started to charge towards the other end of the arena in lightening flash speed. Maybe too much speed? How was this girl, [girl, young and petite, going] a young petite looking girl, going to control a charging horse that was [delete that was] headed straight for a concrete wall?

“Whoa, she’s going a little too fast there,” Ana said as she took a swig of her Jack and coke. “If she doesn’t slow down, she’s gonna smack head on.”

Ana was right. The girl was clearly losing control of her horse[, who was]. ~~Her horse~~ [delete Her horse] was leading her right into the concrete barrier. Evie looked around the bleachers, but nobody else seemed to notice or even care. Flags waved, the drums rolled, people cheered. Was everyone insane?

“Oh[,] my God,” Evie clenched Ana’s arm as she watched.

The girl was now a few yards [away from the wall], then a few feet[,] and then before anyone knew it, *BAM!* She pulled tightly on the black leather reins[,] and her speeding horse halted to a complete and sudden stop, seemingly inches from the thick concrete barrier.

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The crowd went crazy! They thumped their feet on the floor of the metal bleachers and cheered even louder.

Evie exhaled. She couldn't believe what she had just witnessed.

"Let's give a big hand to Catalina! Catalina del El Monte. The announcer roared into the microphone. "*La Charrita bonita!* Sixteen years old and rides like a pro!"

Sixteen years old? Did Evie hear right?

"Did he say she was sixteen?" Evie asked Ana.

"Uh, huh," Ana stood up and stretched. "I'm *so* ready to bail."

"Me tambien," Raquel echoed.

It was [delete It was] [F]from that moment on[,] [delete that] that Evie Gomez, very much like the crowd, was totally *encantada*[,] and there was nothing more in her so flawed life that she wanted more [and there was nothing more that she wanted in her so-flawed life than to become] and that was to become a full[-]fledged, full[-]time, fashionably dressed...*charrita*.

Chapter 11

"Brina?" Evie tapped softly on her sister's bedroom door[, but] ~~But~~ she didn't answer.

She tapped again on the door, but when she heard nothing, not even the hum of the TV or the computer, Evie walked to the end of the hall and [in] to her parent's-
[parents'] bedroom.

"Que te molesta, mi'ja?" her mother asked. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, ~~and [delete and]~~ just finishing up applying ^{more} lowlights highlights to her blonde hair.

Evie sat on the linen chest, ~~[delete comma]~~ at the foot of the bed.

"What's wrong with Sabrina?" she asked her mother. "I knocked on her door, but she's not answering. And it was the same thing last night, when I came back ~~for~~ from the rodeo."

"She's probably still sleeping," her mother said. "It's still early."

"Early? It's already 9 a.m." It was unusual that Evie would question someone else's sleeping habits. Until Sabrina arrived, she was the sole snoozer of La Familia Gomez.

"She's going through a tough time," her mother **sighed** as she put a plastic bag over her hair and read the instructions on the box. "It's something we all go through. Heartbreak ...loss." She looked at Evie and smiled. "But your sister is going to be fine. She has so much love around her, how could she not get better? And all she really needs is some good old fashioned pilates. I'm going to take her with me tonight. Hey, why don't you come?"

"Nuh, uh. ~~Now~~ No way," Evie said.

"Evelina!" It was Lindsay calling out.

"God, does there have to be so much yelling in this house?" ^{- Evie's mother} ~~[who said this?]~~ remarked.

Evie had a driving lesson with Lindsay.

"You better get down there," her mother said. "It's Lindsay's day off, but she and she came in this morning just as a ~~favor~~, [favor for you, Evie] ~~for you Evie..~~"

"I know," Evie got up slowly.

"Listen," her mother could sense sadness still clinging to Evie. "Why don't you practice in my car? Would you like that?"

"Uh," Evie hesitated. Her mother's Mercedes? She was *not* about to go there again. "No, it's okay. I'm sorta used to Lindsay's car, already. I mean, it's the only car I've been using, besides when I'm with dad." *and using his."*

Her mother frowned as if she didn't understand. How could anyone turn down her classic burgundy Benz? "Oh," she replied [~~delete simply~~] simply. "Well, okay."

Evie went downstairs to meet Lindsay.

"Are you ready?" Lindsay asked as she took her car keys out of her purse.

"Yeah," Evie took the keys from her. She realized that the last time she had been behind a ~~the~~ wheel was that fateful day in her mother's Mercedes [when she had][~~delete~~ and] and had gotten in that (que to lower voice) *accidente*. But today should be different, Evie figured. She had Lindsay with her[,] and she was ~~not~~ going to be distracted by a phone conversation with Dee Dee. Also, it was a Sunday[,] and according to Lindsay, Jesus was around more. *a bit*

"Now," Lindsay fastened her seat belt after she got in her ~~the~~ car with Evie. "What's the first thing you do?"

Evie reached for the radio dial. "Make sure I got some tasty tunes?"

Lindsay tapped her hand.

"I know, I know," Evie teased as she checked her ~~(the)~~ rearview mirror and side mirror[. ~~Delete of Lindsay's sedan~~] of Lindsay's sedan. "I make sure all my mirrors are adjusted correctly to my height and for my vision."

"*Correcto*," Lindsay pulled down the visor and put on her sunglasses.

Evie slowly backed out of the drive way ~~(driveway)~~ and onto Camino Real. She felt a little shaky. The memory of that ill[-]fated Saturday was like damaged *de ja vue*. She just had to relax.

"So[,] Lindsay," Evie started. "Have you ever been to a charro rodeo?"

"A charreada?" Lindsay asked. "*Claro*. We have them all the time in Mexico. My cousins were *escaramuzas*."

"Really? What's that?" Evie turned to ask her.

Lindsay put her hand on the steering wheel. "Keep your eyes on the road, Evie."
"Escaramuzas are team riders, the ~~[delete the]~~ women. A *charrita* is actually a cowgirl."

"Oh," Evie said. "I went to one last night and it was *so* cool. They did these tricks-."

"*Suertes*," Lindsay interrupted. "They are called *suertes*."

"Oh, right," Evie said. "So, hey, how come you've never taken me to a charreada?"

"Evie, how would I know what might interest you?" Lindsay said. "You are so finicky[. ~~Delete with your taste~~] with your taste. One day it's surfing, and now it's suddenly horses? What are you going to do now? Trade in your flip flops for *botas*?"

"I've *always* been into horses," Evie claimed. She looked down at her Rainbow flojos. She wasn't about to trade them in for cowboy boots, ~~[delete comma]~~ just yet.

"For today, let's concentrate on the driving," Lindsay said. "It's my day off, but I promised I'd come in this morning to help you. The sooner you learn to drive^(?) the sooner —." She stopped herself.

"The sooner what?" Evie asked.

"The sooner you get to drive," Lindsay **replied**.

"No, you were gonna say something else," Evie said. "Is it about my car? Are my parents gonna get me my Beetle for my birthday? They are, right?"

Ignored Evie and
"Turn here," Lindsay pointed to **Calle Boca**. "Evelina, remember to use your signal *every* time you need to make a turn or get into another lane. Give the other driver enough time to ~~let them~~ ~~[delete let them]~~ know what you plan to do."

"Why?" Evie asked. "So they can speed up and block me?"

The sedan suddenly jumped forward.

"And you don't need to hit the brake all the time," Lindsay said. "Keep *both* hands on the steering wheel.

"Oh, I'm *never* gonna get this!" Evie groaned. "[I'm not]" Not good enough to get a driver's license by my birthday."

"You can get your license anytime," Lindsay said. "You don't have to get it by your birthday."

"If I wanna drive away from my birthday party in Cherry Bomb, I do," Evie said.

"*Mande?*" Lindsay looked at her. "Where are you getting this idea that you're getting a car for your birthday?"

"Oh, don't tell me you don't know anything about it," Evie smiled slyly at Lindsay. "But between me and you, Linds—."

"Mi'ja, don't...." Lindsay said. The car stalled. [~~why does the car stall?~~]

"Oh, man," Evie started up the car again. "I'll never get it."

"You are ~~really~~ [really are] doing better," Lindsay said. "Much better than when Sabrina was learning."

Evie suddenly sat up in her seat.

"Really?" she asked. "You taught Sabrina to drive [.] and she sucked?"

"I did *not* say *that*," Lindsay frowned. "She was just very nervous and timid. You are more of a go-getter."

"Really?" Evie suddenly felt gleeful.

Lindsay shook her head and looked out the window. "*Ay*, I don't know what's going to happen to Sabrina. She is still so sad."

"My mom said it's just a matter of time," Evie said. "She's just depressed."

"I don't know, Evelina. I think your sister is sick. She doesn't eat [.] and she just sleeps all the time." Lindsay looked at Evie. "It's a sensitive time [.] and you should try to be extra nice and helpful."

"I *am* nice and helpful," Evie *frowned* at Lindsay.

"Okay," Lindsay leaned over ~~again~~ [~~delete again~~] and held the steering wheel again. "Then just focus on keeping your eyes on the road."

Chapter 11 [12]

The following week at school [.] Evie couldn't think of anything but the charreada.

"You should have been there, Alex," Evie went on ~~[said]~~ as he drove her to the reserve. "It was amazing. **The horses were so amazing, not like the old decrepit things I have to clean up after at the reserve.**"

"Uh, huh," Alex said. "You told me. So, I don't get why you skipped Baja just to be out drinking it up with the girls."

"I wasn't drinking it up," Evie said. "That was Raquel and Ana's deal. And you know I had to go ~~[delete comma]~~ to get the credit. It just turned out to be really cool."

"Well, I'm glad it turned out okay for you," Alex looked at her and smiled. "It just would have been cool if you had come. We made a ~~bon fire~~ **[bonfire]** and grilled corn on the cob **["]**

"We had corn on the cob ~~[delete comma]~~ at the charreada," Evie said. "Actually, *elotes*," she **clarified**, "~~(w)~~ With mayonnaise and chili powder. Now *those* were good."

Alex pulled up at the reserve **[,]** and this time ~~[delete this time]~~ Evie felt slightly more enthused about **[being there.]** ~~[delete her day at the reserve]~~ her day at the reserve. She wanted to find out a bit ~~[delete a bit]~~ more about the charreada from Arturo. How she would ask? Who knows. ~~[delete Who knows.]~~ But when she reached the stables, it appeared that ~~[delete it appeared that]~~ Ana had beat **[en]** her to the punch with **follow up** charro **chit[-]chat.**

"So, did you and Josephina have fun at the charreada?" Ana was in the middle of asking Arturo, just ~~[delete just]~~ as Evie **walked** **[walked over to pull out separate flakes of alfalfa and oat hay.]** ~~ready to divide bales of alfalfa hay from oat hay~~

"Oh, yes," Arturdo cracked an uncharacteristical smile. "I love charreadas. They have them all the time in Pico Rivera, but ~~I just never~~ (I rarely get) get a chance to get out there. My father is a charro. So are my brothers."

"And they do all those tricks?" Ana asked.

"They aren't called tricks," Evie joined in. "They're called *suertes*."

"Right," Arturdo looked at Evie, slightly surprised. "You know, the Mexican charro was the first cowboy. Not that many people know that."

"Really?" Ana continued to express (show) interest (,) and Evie was a little suspicious. It wasn't like her to be so conversational with Arturdo. "That is so cool," Ana continued. "How come you aren't one? I mean, you totally could be one. You know so much about horses."

"It's not really my thing," Arturdo **confessed**. "I just ~~[delete-just]~~ didn't follow that tradition. Besides, my whole family is still back in Colorado and they all practice and perform together."

"You came out to California by yourself?" Ana asked.

"Yeah," Arturdo answered. "I really wanted to go to **Thatcher**."

"And you left behind your whole family? And all your friends?" Ana asked.

"Whoa," Arturdo laughed and held (up) his hand up, faking protest. "I didn't know I was the subject of an in(-)depth interview. Is this part of your extra credit?"

"No, I was just wondering (,)" Ana said.

Evie couldn't ~~also [delete-also]~~ help but feel a bit curious (too). Arturdo was a senior at Thatcher and only a few years older than (her and Ana) Ana and herself. She couldn't believe that someone would move half way (halfway) across the country at such

a young age by themselves. (himself) She loved to surf, but she couldn't imagine moving to, say, Hawaii, just to be closer to some choice waves.

"But come on," Ana tilted her head and smirked at Arturo. Evie wondered, was she actually flirting. "Don't they have horses in Denver?"

"Of course," Arturo furrowed his brow to (at) what seemed such a silly question to Evie. ^{she} ~~She was flirting~~ (?). "But Thatcher is one of the best equine schools in the country and if I want to get into Cal Poly and study in their veterinarian school, I'm going need a high school that can give me the best transfer."

"Well, it was the first time I had ever been to charreada," Ana confessed. "It was really fun. Thanks for asking us."

"Well, thanks for buying a ticket. It all goes to a good cause. A small percentage help(s) rehabilitate injured performance horses. If they don't heal, they eventually get euthenized."

"What?" Evie looked over at him (, alarmed.), ~~was alarmed~~. "Are you serious? They get killed?"

"Oh, yeah," Arturo said. "~~You didn't know that?~~ [delete previous sentence] Their owner(s) don't think they're as useful if they aren't out performing and making money"

"Wow," Evie **said solemnly**. "I didn't know that."

"Yeah, like Chamuco," Arturo said. "He used to be with the Conejo Drill Team, but now, ~~[delete comma]~~ he's just so ~~[delete just so]~~ old and blind, (so) I don't know what's going to happen to him. He is always passed over during our adoption days clinic(s).".

Evie took a deep breath. It was all a little ~~[delete little]~~ bit too much for her. She looked over at Chamuco's stall. He was leaning into his trough, ~~[drinking]~~ lapping up ~~[horses put their mouths in water and sort of suck it up with their lips]~~ water. Her heart just broke. Sure Chamuco got frightened easily ~~[.]~~ and yeah, he was old, but he didn't deserve to be killed, ~~to die. [delete to die]~~ Evie felt horrible ~~[.]~~ and a knot knot twisted in ~~[.]~~ her stomach. ~~[.]~~ She felt a knot twist in her stomach.

"Ar-turrrro!"

It was Josephina calling out for Arturo. Evie was surprised that she ~~[delete that she]~~ ~~[they]~~ hadn't heard her SUV pulling up ~~[pull up]~~ ~~[Delete the rest]~~ onto the reserve.

"We're over here," Arturo called out over his shoulder. "In Blackie's stable."

~~[stall]~~

Josephina stood at the door-way ~~[doorway]~~ in a form ~~[.]~~ fitting ~~grey~~ ^{plum colored} satin halter dress, beige fishnets that stood out against her tanned legs ~~[.]~~ and knee ~~[.]~~ high black leather boots. Her hands on her hips matched the attitude she was about to unleash.

"You're not done yet?" she asked Arturo. Her annoyed tone was less Valley-esque and more demanding. "I thought you made the reservations? At seven?"

"Uh, hello?" Arturo teased as he dropped medicine pills into the selected buckets.

"Arturo," Josephina checked her ~~[.]~~ ~~[wristwatch]~~ ~~watch~~. "It's time to go." She grinded ~~[ground]~~ her boot heel into the gravel ~~[.]~~ ~~[Delete in annoyance]~~ in annoyance. "I don't want to be late. If we don't get ~~[this is a little confusing]~~ Mayru, we might as well not go at all ~~[.]~~"

↳ Take on time,
there

"Josephina," Arturo exhaled. "We'll make it. I'm the one who made the reservations, remember? And we're only 25 minutes away."

Evie wondered if Ana felt as much of a third wheel as she did being ~~third wheel~~ ~~as much as she did, being~~ in the middle of this **lover's disagreement**. She stayed silent as Arturo and Horsaphina debated [whether they] ~~[delete over, if] over if~~ they would get to ~~leave~~ leave 'Mayru' ~~[delete ""]~~ on time.

"I guess Evie and Ana can take over," Arturo suggested as he looked at Evie. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Uh, no," Evie said. "I don't mind."

What could she really say? He was the boss, sorta.

"Cool," ~~[delete Cool]~~ Arturo turned back to Josephina. "I've got my shirt in my truck. [I'll go change] ~~Let me go change~~ really quick."

"Okay, okay," Josephina checked the time again. "But do it quick."

Did all things bitchy have first names that end[ed] in 'A'? What a minute, Evie thought, her given name was Evelina. Never mind.

"I hope I didn't interrupt you guys," Josephina looked at Ana and Evie as Arturo went out to his truck.

"Huh?" Evie asked. "What do you mean?"

"When I walked up," Josephina started. "It's like you guys ~~are~~ [were in the middle] ~~in a middle~~ of a conversation? It seems [like] every time [I see you two with Arturo, I am barging in on something.] ~~you two are with Arturo, I seem to be barging in on something.~~"

"No, we were just being silly," Evie felt awkward. The last thing she wanted was Horsaphina **hating** ~~(her)~~ and then complaining to Arturo. She looked over Horsaphina and assessed damage control. "You look really pretty."

"Oh, yeah," Horsaphina agreed as she smoothed out her dress and adjusted the silver ~~square shaped~~ ~~[delete square shaped]~~ **bracelet on her other wrist**. "Arturo's taking me to Koi."

"Koi?" Evie asked. She had no idea what Koi was. Was it a club? A lingerie boutique as in *Coy*? Maybe it was a mispronounced Native American name for another horse reserve?

"The Teppan Grill?" Josephina smiled when she **noticed** Evie's **confused** expression. "They seat you in groups of twelve~~(,)~~ and if we're late? We have to sit at another table and get a regular chef. I like Mayru. He's the owner?"

"Oh, right~~(,)~~," Evie nodded.

"I can't believe you've never been there," Josephina said.

Neither Evie or ~~(nor)~~ Ana said anything.

Josephina looked around the reserve with an air of disapproval. "Don't you guys ever get tired of working here?" ~~[she has a horse, so wouldn't she be more understanding?]~~

"Nuh uh," Evie said. "Not really." *It seemed odd.* ✓

~~"Not me, either."~~ ["Me neither," Ana echoed Evie.

"Well, I would," Horsaphina stated. "I don't get it. Arturo spends so much time here. But then again, you two *have* to be here? Right?"

"Not really. We're volunteers," Evie pointed out. "I mean, I could have picked any organization to work for."

"Hmm - mmm," Josephina wasn't convinced. "That's not what Arturo told me."

"What are you talking about?" Evie asked.

"He said that your school counselor called to ask if the reserve still had room for you? And they didn't? Arturo had already made out the whole schedule for the year. He's very organized that way. But when he told them no, ~~your counselor?~~ [your counselor went over] ~~Went over~~ his head and went to Lynn, the owner. And she okay'd it, last minute."

"Oh, I didn't know that," Evie said.

No wonder Arturo had been tough on her, Evie thought. But it wasn't *her* fault. If Lynn is the owner, she has the final say, right? And if Evie wasn't around, who would be able to help Ana with all the work? And if Ana wasn't able to do her work, then all the horses would suffer. Yes, it was a good thing Evie [had been allowed a last-minute okay.] ~~was allowed the last minute okay.~~

When Arturo re-appeared, Evie looked over at him. *Wow*. What a difference a nag makes. He had changed from his blue and green Pendleton work shirt to a grey button up shirt. His hair was slightly combed back [.] and Evie noticed the slightest hint of cologne, (**describe**). Did he always wear cologne? Evie hadn't noticed before. She did remember that Alex used to wear cologne (**describe**), at least for the evenings when the Flojos would all go fancy party crashing or something. Evie sighed to herself. But that was all so last semester, in a seemingly distant galaxy so far, far away.

"Arturo," Josephina scowled at his boots. "You *cannot* wear those to Koi. They have a dress code?"

"*Josephina*," Arturo started. She was working his last nerve. "There is nothing wrong with my boots." He looked at the ones she was wearing. "You're wearing boots."

"Yes, but mine were, like, four hundred dollars? They're not some ~~[delete some]~~ work boots from Will's Western Wear."

"Josephina, if you want me to change~~(,)~~ it's only going to make us even more late. Is that what you want?"

But Josephina just looked up at the sky and surrendered. "What *ever*?" [~~Whatever is one word~~]

As soon as they left, Ana spoke up. "So, that was real smart of us, huh?" she smiled smugly to herself.

"Smart of us to do what?" Evie asked.

"Kissing Arturo's ass like that, pretending we were all into the rodeo and working here and stuff," Ana said.

"But I *did* like the charreada," Evie insisted. "And I actually do like working here. I mean, more than I used to."

Evie watched Arturo and ~~[delete and]~~ head for his truck. He held her ~~(the)~~ door open [as he waited for Horsaphina to get in the passenger seat, and then he] for her as he waited for her to get in the passenger seat. He then went around the front of this ~~(his)~~ truck and [got in.] let himself in.

When they finally drove off ~~the reserve~~ [delete the reserve] and were out of sight, Evie excused herself from Ana.

"Man, you better be right back," Ana warned her. "I ain't gonna do ~~this~~ ^(all) ^(this) alone, like last time."

"No, I just gotta make a call," Evie said as she went to get her backpack from the supply shed. She pulled out her cell phone and ~~sped~~ ^(speed) dialed Alex's number. While she waited during the rings, she thought of Arturo. He wasn't such a bad guy. So he did come on a little strong at first, just like Alex had ~~figured~~. [figured, but it was] And ~~it was~~ ^{italics} pretty cool, no, very cool that he cared so much about what he ~~does~~ ^{did} [delete comma] ^{did} at the reserve. She thought it might be time to take the 'd' out of Arturo's name.

Evie got Alex's voice mail.

"Hi, Alex. It's me," she started. "Hey, I'm wondering... this coming weekend. Do you think we can go out? Not, like surfing, but go out, *out*? Okay..." she didn't know what else to say. "Just let me know."

Chapter ~~12~~ [13] Eves-dropping

The following Saturday evening couldn't come fast enough for Evie. She had spent the whole week looking forward to going out, *out* [delete second out] with Alex. He had responded to her phone message with a text:

Sat. Nite. Cool. Smthin diff.

"So, no surfing this weekend?" he double checked one last time with Evie on Friday afternoon as he was taking her to the reserve. "You sure 'bout that?"

"I have to work all day tomorrow and then again on Sunday," she reminded him. "I really have only Saturday evening free. I also have to practice my hula auana **dance** with Dee Dee and Raquel."

"Now *that* I'm very excited to see," Alex said. "You know, traditional hula dancers go topless."

Evie slugged him.

"You know, you sure hit me a lot," Alex rubbed his arm. "I could report you for domestic battery."

"And I could report you for perversion with a minor."

Alex laughed. "Uh, but I'm a minor, too. Or are you mixing me up with someone else?"

italics
"No."

Okay, but listen, so no on surfing, right?" Alex asked again. "Because we *could* do a twilight set. After you're done with your shift at the reserve we can head out to Sea Street. There's supposed to be a **south swell**."

"*Alex*," Evie said. "This is California. There will *always* be a **south swell** coming from somewhere. I wanna go out, *out*, remember? Do something different. You said it was no problem."

"You're right," Alex smiled. "Whatever you say, sexy."

But the following Saturday Evie felt far from sexy as she and Dee Dee rehearsed the Hula Auana.

"Your hips still look **stiff**," Dee Dee observed Evie as she tried to follow the music from her *Honolulu Now* CD.

"I don't *have* hips," Evie looked at her straight, narrow boyish figure in front of the bedroom mirrors. "Unfortunately."

"Well, you better get some," Dee Dee started the CD again. "The Hula is all about hips." She looked at the CD's cover. "*Mira*, look at this girl, ~~is~~ ^{capital} ~~delete that~~ that *these* hips don't lie."

Evie looked at herself in ~~the~~ closet mirrors again. Well, her reflection ~~didn't~~ doesn't lie either.

"So is Raquel showing up or not?" Dee Dee asked.

"Not," Evie answered. "I even called her land ~~land~~ ~~line~~ but her mom said she was still sleeping."

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"Well, she better practice and not mess us all up." Dee Dee frowned. "Remember in 4-H? When we had to do that demonstration with lemons? She didn't rehearse ~~and~~ and she threw us both off, in front of everyone ~~and~~ We lost a lot of points because of her."

"Well," Evie closed her eyes and tried to concentrate on making her hips ~~less stiff~~ ^{more relaxed} fluid.
"There will be no points given the night of my birthday. I just want to do this dance with my two best friends. *Both* of you ~~and~~ and as well as we ~~can~~ could."

Dee Dee got up and practiced alongside Evie. "So where is Alejandro taking you tonight?"

"I have no idea where he made reservations," Evie said. "But afterwards, we'll probably take a walk around downtown or on the pier to watch the sunset." Evie watched Dee Dee. How ~~(was it)~~ is that Dee Dee ~~(could)~~ ~~can~~ do everything so effortlessly? Even with her pale skin and blonde hair, she looked like an authentic Polynesian dancer.

"*Que romantico*," Dee Dee sighed enviously, as her hips fell into the perfect rhythm of the CD's **ukele**. "I can't wait for Rocio to get here ~~(,)~~ and then we can start doing things like that again."

"When does he come?"

"In about a week," Dee Dee said. "And then he'll be here for two weeks, but he's staying a few days longer for your party. *Mira*," Dee Dee ~~(s)~~ toned changed. "You should have Alejandro take you to that new seafood place in the Channel Islands harbor. I went there with my dad and Graciela ~~(,)~~ and it was **sheer swank**. The shrimp scampi was so good. I haven't had scampi like that since I was in Veracruz ~~[delete comma]~~ with Rocio."

"Actually," Evie hoped to sound nonchalant. "We might go to Koi."

"Koi?" Dee Dee sounded surprised. "*Serio?*"

"Yeah. Why wouldn't we go to Koi?"

"I don't know," Dee Dee said. "It's just sorta pricey, that's all."

"Alex has money," Evie couldn't help but feel a little defensive. Dee Dee always went on and on about how well to do Rocio and his family were and how he was able ~~(to)~~ buy her this **chucheria** or take her to **that restaurante**. It was beginning to bug, big time.

“Well,” Dee Dee said. “You’ll have to tell me all about their sushi. I’m sure it’s awesome.”

“I’m sure it is,” Evie said.

By the evening, Evie had decided on her favorite halter, the satin one with a pattern of green and yellow swirls[,] and a three[-]tiered satiny skirt she had bought at Tilly’s. She even made the bold decision [to not wear] against wearing flojos (*gasp*) and slipped on some borrowed espadrilles (*sorta* satiny) from Dee Dee. But as she laced the straps around her ankles, she was horrified to discover that by wearing her flojos 24/7/364, they had created a tan line on her feet, two conspicuous streaks between her big toe and middle toe that created a ‘V’ that ~~[delete that]~~ [fanning] fanned out to the sides. It looked like she was wearing light beige flip flops[,] or worse, had tattooed white ink on the tops of her feet.

Evie looked through her bathroom cabinet for a tube of foundation. She knew she could easily touch up and even out the color[off] her feet, but when she finally found some cover-up, she discovered what she was afraid of. The foundation, called **Sunburst**, was too dark. Thanks to all the long hours at the reserve, ~~[delete yes]~~ yes, Evie was losing her tan. She put the tube back in the cabinet. She needed a lighter foundation, a foundation for light skin, light for someone like...Sabrina. *Yes*.

Evie went down the hall to Sabrina’s room, but, like always, found the bedroom ([door]) room closed. Since her return home from Stanford, Sabrina’s door was always shut.

But just as Evie was about to knock, she heard Sabrina ~~[delete comma]~~ on the other side of the door. She was crying. To someone ~~[on]~~ on the phone. Evie caught her clenched fist just in time, before it hit the bedroom door.

"But it's *not* getting better," Sabrina sobbed. "My family is driving me crazy. I should have just stayed back at Stanford. At least my sisters would know what to do, what to say. Here, I'm surrounded by *idiots*."

Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. *What? Her sisters? Who?*

"No," Sabrina struggled to catch her breath. "She's my only sister, but she's such a little spoiled brat that I might as well not have a sister at all."

Whoa. Evie pulled back from the door. Was she hearing right? How could Sabrina say, even *think* such a thing? She didn't want her as a sister? No. She *didn't* hear right. She leaned in closer to the bedroom door and strained to hear more.

"Evelina!"

Evie looked up and found Lindsay, in the middle of the hallway, holding a small box of tile samples.

"You do *not* sneak around, trying to listen in on other people's conversations," Lindsay spat under her breath. "You are being very rude."

"But she's talking about me, us," Evie lowered her voice in protest.

"Evie," Lindsay insisted. "Leave her alone."

Evie reluctantly moved away from Sabrina's door.

"I have to come in your room." Lindsay heaved the box of tiles to her left hip. "Your mother wants to see which tiles she needs to order for your bathroom."

"Now?" Evie asked.

She didn't mind Lindsay being in her room while she was getting ready to go out, but this particular night, Evie had been looking forward to just blasting Los Abandoned, dabbling with make up and pin[-]up dos[,] and hogging the closet mirrors all to herself. At least that's what she *had* been looking forward to. She was stunned from what she had overheard Sabrina say.

Lindsay adjusted the box again. "Your mother wants to place the order first thing in the morning[,] and I'm going to be leaving soon. We have to do it now."

"Okay..." Evie started back down the hall to her bedroom. There was no way she was going to argue with Lindsay. And God forbid, she didn't want to come across as a *spoiled brat*.

Oh, *hurtful*.

As she entered her room with Lindsay, the bedroom's landline rang. Evie grabbed the receiver off the carpet floor.

"Hullo?" she asked.

"*Finally*." It was Raquel. "*What up, girl?* I called your cell and it went right to voice mail[,] and you didn't answer my text."

"My cell's charging.[]" Evie walked into her bathroom and past Lindsay who was lining up the tile samples on the counter. Evie grabbed her make[-]up bag and moved out of Lindsay's way.

"And then I've been calling the landline," Raquel said, "And it just rings and rings. I didn't even get the voicemail."

"Sabrina's been on the phone." Evie was half listening as she sat on the edge of her bed and squirted a glob of foundation on the top of both her feet. She was going to have to settle for the **Sunburst** foundation.

"What's wrong?" Raquel could sense the deflated tone in Evie's voice.

"Nothing," Evie tried to shake off the feeling. Sabrina's words stung something fierce.

"You're mad 'cause I could [n't] make Hula practice, huh?" Raquel asked.

["Yeah."] "Huh?" Evie smoothed the cream evenly along the tan line on top of each foot.

"I'm sorry about," Raquel went on. "I just could not get out of bed today. I was so tired."

"Raquel," Evie started. "Do you think I'm spoiled?"

"What?" she asked. "Who said that? Alex?"

"No. Nobody." Evie lowered her voice again and looked over at Lindsay[,] who [was] now standing back and looking over the tile samples. [~~delete herself~~] herself. She frowned and shook her head in typical Lindsay disapproval. "Actually," Evie went on. "I just overheard Sabrina on the phone and she told someone, I think one of her sorority sisters, that I was spoiled. A spoiled *brat*, to be precise."

"She *said* that?" Raquel asked. "I don't know. I mean, I guess someone might think you were spoiled, because you ^{-Holics} do get a lot of stuff that you want."

"Me?" Evie was thrown off by Raquel's blunt reply. "That is so far from the truth. Who's the one schlepping horse crap around? Who's the one who may not have her own birthday party? On the year that there *is* actually going to be a February 29th?"

~~[delete And]~~ "And it's really how you look at it," Raquel **observed**. "I mean, of course, you should get the things you want. You are totally worth it, ~~[.]~~ ~~[delete but]~~ but ~~[S]~~ some people might think you are spoiled, but I'm surprised it would be Sabrina saying that. I mean, doesn't she usually get her way? ~~[["]~~

"And more," Evie agreed. "That girl gets the grades she wants, the car she wanted, ~~[and]~~ accepted into the school she wanted. She gets everything her way. Like even now, ~~[with]~~ her being home and everything, I totally have to walk on eggshells around her."

"Ugh, I could *not* deal," Raquel groaned. "That's why I am *so* glad that I'm an only child."

"You and Dee Dee, both," Evie said as she held her feet up to observe **her work**. Both feet looked a little on the dark side, but Alex would never notice in ~~[the]~~ **candlelight lighting** ~~[delete lighting]~~ at Koi.

"But anyway," Raquel said. "Don't worry about Sabrina. From what you tell me, she's just upset over that Robert dude."

"Yeah, I guess," Evie **said**. "It's been a complete bumner of day. Lindsay just told me aobut the car bill, from, you know."

"How much is it?" Raquel asked.

"Eleven hundred," Evie said.

"Eleven hundred? Are you shitting me? I thought you said he had some crap little car?"

"He did," Evie said. "But now he's gonna have one fine ass bumper. I don't know how I'm gonna pay for it." *My Grandma Pama better come through."*

"Well, I'd ask for an invoice *and* a receipt," Raquel said. "He's probably just gonna keep the money and never have his car worked on."

Evie got up from her bed and stood with her back towards the closet mirrors. She ~~then~~ ~~[delete then]~~ quickly looked over her shoulder, a' la red carpet *Teen People* pose. She had to do the check list. No VPL, *check*. No sightly~~[delete sightly]~~ roll of back fat, *check*. No bac-...wait. She peered closer into the closet mirrors and found a small, but still noticeable, blemish. It was right below her left shoulder. Argh! The curse of mid~~(-)~~ winter bacne! Evie squeezed more ~~Sexy Sunset~~ ^{Sunburst} goop onto her finger and dabbed the offending violator. She re-checked, but the foundation looked blotchy and uneven. She decided to pull off her ~~[the]~~ whole halter and give herself a thorough application of ~~Sexy~~ ^{Sunburst} ~~Sunset~~, but just as she pulled her halter off, her mother walked in~~(to)~~ her bedroom.

"Mom, do you mind?" Evie held the phone between her chin and shoulder and covered her chest with her arms. "I'm changing."

"Sorry, Evie." Her mother could have cared less. "The door was open and I already knew that Lindsay was in here." She brushed right past Evie. "**I need to take a look at these tiles.**"

Evie was less concerned about modesty and more worried about the incriminating 'RxE' inked near her left breast. Last semester, she, Dee Dee and Raquel were the recipients of the fine artistry from **La Ley Cee**, who eschews the 'over 18' requirement and will ink anyone with enough of ~~[delete enough of]~~ an idea and enough cash. **She now regretted getting the permanent ink job, but at the time, it was a bonding moment for the three girls.** If Vicki Gomez ever saw that her youngest daughter had a tattoo,

anywhere on her body, there would only be one kind of party for Evie...a good[-]bye party.

"So, I'm really sorry that I didn't make today['s] [delete to] to Hula practice. I promise I'll work on the moves tonight."

"Okay, but I really hope you do," Evie said. "Dee Dee's really worried[,] and I want us to look really good at my party."

"Of course," Raquel said. "Hey, did you get your fancy manicure for your date with Alex?"

"Oh yeah," Evie looked at her ~~finger nails~~ [fingernails], ~~which were~~ [delete which were] painted with [delete with] the sheerest hint of pink. "I got a hand job by Jonathon, just like Dee Dee recommended. Oh man, he was great."

"*Evie*," Her mother, as well as Lindsay, looked over from the bathroom. "*Who* are you talking to?"

"Raquel," Evie said calmly. "And I'm talking about the *manicure* I got at Michael Kelley. They call them hand jobs, just in case you and Linds were eavesdropping and misunderstood me, *mother*."

"We weren't eavesdropping," [h] Her mother said as she glanced over at Evie's nails. "But very nice."

"Evie!" It was now her father calling. "Alex is here."

"Hey," Evie said to Raquel as she gave herself a third and final bronze dusting.

"Romeo is here, gotta go."

"Hey, Evie," Raquel started.

"Yeah?"

"If you need to borrow money, you know, for that guy's car, I can totally lend it to you, and you wouldn't have to worry about paying me back for a while. Really."

"Wow, really?" Evie asked. "I couldn't do that."

"Yes, you ~~can~~ could do that and you can, if you need to."

"Wow, thanks Raq." Evie was so ~~[delete so]~~ touched by her offer. "But hopefully Grandma

Pama ~~my grandma~~ will come through and I won't have to put the **bite** on you."

"Okay," Raquel said. "Well, just let me know."

"Okay, I will," Evie got up. "I better go. Alex is waiting."

"Lates," Raquel said. "And don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

Evie looked ~~at her back~~ ~~[delete at her back]~~ in the closet mirrors again and gave her back, as well as her neck, shoulders, and face, a heavier dusting of Sunburst ~~Sexy Sunset~~.

"Isn't it a little cold for a halter and (a) skirt?" her mother asked her as she and Lindsay were leaving Evie's room. She had decided on the cobalt blue and gold Talavera tile.

True, it was the end of January, but with the weather still balmy, Evie felt she could afford to flash a little skin. Besides, Alex had called her sexy, and he'd never called her that before. Tonight she wanted to certify that she was sexy.

"No, I'm fine." Evie turned around slowly and modeled her outfit for her mother and Lindsay. "How do I look?"

"Uh," Her mother looked her over. ~~over her.~~ "Very *tan.* "

"Good[.]" Evie answered smugly as she applied some ~~[delete some]~~ gloss to her lips. There was no way her mother's lack of style sense would [was going to sober] sober up her buzz. Evie felt sexy[.] therefore[.] she was.

~~And [delete And]~~ [As] as she headed downstairs, she felt fortunate (*not* spoiled) that she lived in a two[-]story home. There is nothing more *O.C.* than descending down a staircase to the arms of a waiting surfer boy.

But the minute Evie saw Alex at the bottom of the stairs, her fantasy went from ~~[the]~~ The *O.C.* to *O. U. Gotta to be Shittin' Me*. Yes, Alex was waiting for her in the foyer, but not looking anything remotely [like] to a Saturday Night Hottie. He was in his usual tattered camouflage cut-offs, the ones cut a little below his knees, and he was wearing his plastic flip flops, the 'bin specials' that Evie knew all too well. He had obviously not taken the planning of their date as seriously as she had. He had sand around his ankles and [he] still ~~stunk~~ [stank] from the ~~left over~~ [leftover] medicinal sun block he must have lathered on earlier. Evie guessed that he must've still gone to Sea Street ~~[delete comma]~~ to catch that ["]oh so important["] late afternoon swell.

"Hey," Alex looked over Evie with a puzzled look on his face. "You're all dressed up."

"Yeah," Evie couldn't help but keep a straight face. He ~~didn't say~~ [hadn't said] she looked nice, just dressed up. Was that supposed to be a compliment? And why did he look so puzzled?

"Yeah, Evie," her father looked at Evie, as well. "And, you got some color on you. Were you out in the sun today?"

Okay, maybe ["]~~[?]~~ 'dressed up' and ["]~~[?]~~ 'color' was male speak for sexy?

"So, where are you two going?" her father asked Alex.

"I dunno," Alex answered in a tone that was a little too laid-back for Evie. "I've been at the beach all day. I'm pretty wiped out." He stretched his head side to side to prove his point. "I think we'll just take it easy." He looked at Evie. "Right, ~~(.)~~ Evie?"

Evie managed a weak smile, but said nothing. He could *not* be serious.

"Well, have fun you two," Evie's father walked them to the front door. "And Evie, don't forget your curfew."

"Do you think," Evie started. "That just tonight –"

"*No*," her father said. "You *have* to be home by 12:30."

As Evie walked alongside Alex towards his truck, she saw his longboard in the flatbed – evidence that he *had* just come from the beach, ~~[delete like she had guessed]~~ like she had guessed. She felt her chest filled ~~(fill)~~ up with heavy disappointment. She looked over at Alex.

"What?" he looked back at her and smiled.

"Nothing." Evie looked away and felt slightly conflicted. Sometimes Alex would look at her ~~(.)~~ and his dark eyes would just penetrate hers, making her feel the way she ~~(had)~~ felt at Sea Street, ~~[delete comma]~~ the morning he had given her the abalone necklace. She suddenly felt guilty. Alex really *was* a sweet boyfriend and maybe she *was* a spoiled brat. Just because he was dressed down didn't mean he hadn't put any thought into arranging a little something special. The evening was just beginning. Maybe he played it off with her dad, you know, one guy trying to be cool with another type of

thing? What, ~~[delete What]~~ [W] was he actually going to go into detail with her father about what he really wanted to do with Evie?

"Well, first, Mr. Gomez, I'm going to take Evie out to a very romantic, very expensive restaurant, where I will request the most secluded table in the whole house, just for the two of us. Then I am going to drive her out to The Shores, where we will stroll out to the most secluded area in the sand dunes[,] and I will spread out a blanket just for the two of us. Then Evie will cuddle up next to me as I crack open a bottle of Vieve (her favorite) and pour it into two glass flutes ([flutes that I brought]) which, of course, that I brought with me, [delete comma] because I had been planning this [delete whole] whole evening for a whole week. Then I will make a toast to our evening right before I [delete will] will pull out a book of poems that I have carefully chosen for Evie, but, I have to confess, the minute I look into her dark brown eyes[,] I'll--"

A long[,] slow whistle interrupted the **satin halter ripping scene** in Evie's head. The whistle came from the front of Alex's truck. She squinted her eyes in the darkness and slowly made out the glow of a cigarette in the passenger seat of [the] cab. No. But yes. It was Mondo. She could *not* believe what she was seeing.

"Why is *Mondo* with you?" Evie struggled to keep her voice down to a whisper

"You wanted to do something different," Alex answered earnestly. "And it's just been a while since we all hung out together[,] and you were saying that --."

"*What?*" Evie forced herself to maintain her composure. "Are you serious?"

"Uh, yeah," Alex sounded confused. "Why?"

"I ~~said~~," Evie started. "That it had been a while since you and I ~~have~~ ~~[delete have]~~ hung out, spent time *together*. I wanted to go out, *out*, remember?"

"Evie," Alex sounded even more confused. "What exactly does going ^cout, ~~out~~ ³mean?"

"Just *forget* it." Evie was quickly losing her patience with Alex.

Mondo got out of the front cab just as they got to the truck

"Hey, G," he looked Evie over, making her feel slightly **Sangro slutty**. "Look at you all gussied up." He pulled the passenger seat forward so he could get in the back of the truck's cab. "So you ready to give the horse gig a break and just chill with Alex and me tonight?"

Alex and me? Grrrr. Evie couldn't help but feel hot with anger. What *was* Alex thinking, bringing Mondo along at their date?

It's not just a horse gig," Evie said. "You know, a lot of people don't realize what can happen to older performance horses. ~~["][does she know this yet?]~~ *delete*

~~"Uh huh," Mondo said. It was obvious that he was not listening.~~ "So, check it out," he took off the white **cap** he was wearing. "Chop job. I bit your style, from last semester."

Last year, Evie had cut and dyed her own hair herself. She was now gratefully relieved that it was growing back to a length she was comfortable with. Mondo's hair, however, was newly buzzed and dyed a Tweety Bird blond.

"Check out the back," Mondo turned his head to show off a separate dye job, a large question mark in deep jet black, smack center on the back of his head.

Evie couldn't keep from laughing. "Why would you have a question mark on the back of your head?" She asked. "What, are you trying to create some new Batman character?"

"What? *No*. It stands for 'Whaddya need?'" Mondo ran his hand over a freshly shorn scalp. "Check it out, my cousin just got back from Amsterdam and he told me that, like, all the cafes have little areas with designated question mark signs. Like, you can get *anything* you want there. You know what I mean? Cool, huh?"

"Yeah," Evie fastened her seat belt. "I guess. In Amsterdam."

"So," Alex ~~got into the back of the cab [why is he in the back of the cab?]~~ and rubbed his hands together. "What's up for this evening?"

Evie decided to stick to her guns. She was going to get her fancy dinner at Koi whether it killed her, or, more appropriately, killed Mondo's date with Alex

Evie feigned a smile. "I was thinking we^(d) go get sushi."

"Sushi?" Mondo smirked. "Uh, no thanks," He held his nose and dropped the sides of his mouth. "I had sushi last night, if you know what I mean." He looked at Alex. **The look in his eyes said everything.**

You have got to be kidding.

"Mondo," Alex reprimanded him as he started his truck. "Come on, there's a lady present."

"Yeah," Mondo looked at Alex in the rearview mirror. "That's what *I* thought. Last night."

Alex started to pull out of the drive~~way~~ ^[driveway] "So, you want sushi, Evie?"

Not after Mondo's lame little one⁽⁻⁾liner.

"You know," Mondo chimed in as he flicked his cigarette butt out the window. "I could actually go for some seafood. We should go to Otani's. They got kick ass tempura."

"*Actually*," Evie tried to lure Alex from siding with Mondo. "I was thinking of Koi."

"Koi?" Mondo frowned as he leaned forward, between Evie and Alex. "You mean that fancy ass place that took over where the E Bar used to be?"

"Yeah," Evie said.

"Nah," Mondo said. "We don't wanna do Koi. It's all SUV scum. We gotta go to **Otani's**." He leaned back in his seat and looked at Alex in the rearview mirror again. "Dude, they have a waitress with a rack *this* big." He made a gesture over his chest as though he was balancing two imaginary cannon balls.

Alex couldn't help but chuckle as he drove down Camino del Rio.

Evie shot him a look. "*Alex*."

"Oh, I'm sorry, sweetie." Alex straightened his smile and rubbed her arm. "Look, we'll go to Koi. Whatever you want."

"Whatever *she* wants?" Mondo looked at Alex and then at Evie. "Talk about spoiled milk."

Evie crossed her arms over her chest. *Spoiled?*

Was Evie just being *sentida* or was Mondo truly saying the most inappropriate things so early in the evening?

The wait list at Koi was over an hour.

"We can't seat you any sooner without a reservation," the **host** told the three of them. "And," he looked over Alex and Mondo's feet. "We have a dress code. No flip flops."

"**You gotta be kidding,**" Mondo protested. "Dude, this is friggin' South Cali, everyone wears flip flops."

"Not doing ~~(during)~~ dinner time," the host held his ground. *hours*

Evie looked around the restaurant. ~~There were~~ ~~[delete]~~ ~~There were~~ ~~(A)~~ a stone *decorative* brick fireplace ~~(stood)~~ outside in the patio ~~(s)~~ and water trickled from bamboo chutes into a kidney ~~(-)~~ shaped pond filled with bright orange and yellow koi fish. She also noticed *the* ~~[the]~~ ~~[delete that there was a]~~ that there was a full moon, large with hues of soft yellow, **pink[,] and beige.** Evie couldn't ~~(stop thinking)~~ ~~think how~~ how ~~[delete how]~~ much more romantic it would be to snuggle with Alex on one of the wicker love seats and just inhale the beauty.

"Why don't we just wait?" Evie suggested. "We can get some appetizers or something. An hour will go by fast."

"Dude," Mondo pulled Alex aside. "That monkey totally dissed us. I ain't gonna shoot my wad here." He seemed to have already made the decision for the three of them as he started back towards the front doors with his fists deep in the pockets of his baggy cords. He killed all notions of romance Evie had fantasied ~~(fantasied)~~ **(fantasized)** about.

"Sushi is sushi," Alex apologetically shrugged his shoulders to Evie. "We can come here another time, Eves. Promise."

At Otani's, Alex sat between Evie and Mondo at the counter. It was a short counter with yellowed, chipped Formica and a sloppy pile of stained, plastic menus at the far end. **The diners were far from SUV seum and were made up more of leathered skin surf *veteranos* and longshoremen. Both groups, Evie noticed wore tattooed sleeves that ~~delete that~~ depicted [depicting] their life with the Pacific.**

Otani's was cheap eating[,] and [you] ~~one~~ could fill up if you had a little cash. Some cash, that is. Otani[']s did not take credit cards[,] and Alex had forgotten his wallet and ~~had~~ ~~delete had~~ only had three bucks on him. The three of them shared one (1) tempura shrimp boat with a complimentary order of sticky white rice[,] and it actually turned out to be a good thing that Mondo did tag along. It allowed Evie to order a diet soda.

As they were finishing up their meal[,] Mondo looked past Alex and eyed Evie's shoulders as if he ~~was~~ [were] seeing them for the first time.

"What's up with your skin, Eves?" he asked.

Evie rubbed her shoulders. "I always get goose bumps when it gets a little cold."

"No," Mondo looked her over. "It looks like you got dirt or something smudged on them." He reached over, across Alex, to brush off whatever he thought was on Evie's skin.

"It's not dirt, Mondo," she pulled away from him. "It's bronzer."

"Bronzer?" Mondo looked confused. "For what? It's getting all over your shirt."

"Never mind, *Mondo*." Evie hugged her arms across her chest and placed her hands on opposite shoulders. It was cold in Otani's[,] and she remembered seeing a jacket in Alex's truck.

"Alex," she started. "Don't you have a jacket in your truck? I thought I saw one."

"Uh, huh," Alex played with the ice in [his] [s] Styrofoam cup with his straw. "I thought I'd need it, but I'm okay."

"Do you mind if I wear it?" Evie asked.

"Nuh uh," he said as put his hand in his pants' pocket and pulled out his car keys.

"But try not to get all that make up on it."

"Oh," Evie didn't take the keys. "Never mind."

"Dude," Mondo nudged Alex to look over at [the] group of women who had just entered Otani [s]. "We're talking **boulders** at 3 o'clock. *Your* 3 o'clock."

"Mondo," Alex threw him a sideways glance, but before doing so, Evie noticed that Alex did look over towards the women.

"Hey," Mondo suddenly said to Evie. "You ate more than your fair share."

"Huh?" Evie saw that he was now looking over her paper plate.

"Look," Mondo counted the shrimp tails on her plate with the end of his wooden chop stick. "Alex and I only have three tails each, but you've got, like, five."

"Mondo," Evie couldn't believe what he was implying. She looked down on her plate. "It's just batter."

"No, it ain't." Mondo pressed down on the tails with his chopstick.

"What, you want me to burp them back up?" Evie asked. Could the tension between her and Mondo get any fiercer? She pushed her paper plate away from him.

"Stop it."

"So," Alex stretched back, oblivious [to] how annoying Mondo was to Evie.

"What's up for the rest of the evening?"

Evie hoped that she didn't hear him correctly. Hadn't he planned *anything*?

"Check it out," Mondo ~~started~~ [started after he finally had stopped] and ~~finally~~ ~~stopped~~ counting shrimp tails. "A buddy of mine was telling me about a party over on Hemlock. Should be pretty K.B."

"What about my board?" Alex rubbed the space between his eyes and yawned. "I don't wanna leave it out at some party."

"Yeah, I'm not really in the mood for a party, either⁽¹⁾" Evie said as her stomach growled. "But maybe, if you really want to go, we could drop you off." She looked over at Alex's Nixon. It was only 10 p⁽¹⁾.m. She still had a good two and a half hours before she had to be home. She and Alex could still have *some* time to themselves.

"*We*?" Mondo looked at Evie. "When did you start sharing Alex's pink slip? You don't even drive."

"I know," Evie said. "I'm just saying that we might do something else."

"But Eves, if you don't wanna go to a party," Alex asked her. "What do you wanna do?"

"I don't know," Evie hated being put in the position of activities director[,] and *why* was Alex not backing her up? "I thought we could go to the pier, walk around. There's a full moon tonight."

"Whoa," Mondo pressed two fingers on the side of his neck. "I hope my pacemaker can keep up with this excitement." He looked at Alex. "Dude, come on, let's go check out the party. Hey, you know who^(s) gonna be there?"

"Who?" Alex asked.

"Our boy, Jose."

The minute Evie heard the name, Jose, her stomach went from empty to numb.

"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 casually pulled out a cigarette. "So he says."

"Alex," Evie **tilted her head to the left and looked up at him**. "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 [delete it was]~~ at some mellow, kick back party. Not only had Jose cheated on Raquel, **[but]** he had **[also]** 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 ~~[in]~~ the same room with Jose?

Both Evie and Mondo waited for an answer from Alex as he continued ~~[delete to]~~ to chew **[ing]** on the end of his straw.

"Dude," Mondo 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 **[.]m[.]** 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 disfavorably 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 other Patrona candidates. [candidates] 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, this is the first one," Dee Dee said. "The last Patrona get[-]together was an informal [~~X~~] meet and greet⁷⁾ and after that, the second get[-]together was more of a 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 never talks about *anything*. She just *asks* things. The girl talks in question marks. 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 his house, with his mother and an ankle bracelet. All the Bard Boys took a party to him,”

“Are you serious?” Evie laughed.

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

It was funny to hear Dee Dee talk so T.V. cop shop. “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.

She was still tender from her Saturday date fiasco with Alex, and to make matters worse, he didn’t even apologize. Unless you counted the text message she received the next morning on Sunday, which was less of an apology and more of an observation. It

was like Alex was so unaware of what ~~had~~ happened. So he went to a 'cool party' and he was 'sorry she missed it', BFD.

"Evie," Alex threw her a sideways glance as they drove to school. She had remained silent for pretty much ~~[delete of]~~ of the ~~[whole]~~ drive. "How long you gonna beef with me?"

"I'm not beefing," Evie tried to answer casually, but it was no use. It was obvious she was still upset with him. She kept her arms crossed over her chest and 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 guessed ~~(at)~~ what might ~~[have made]~~ ~~make~~ her so quiet. "I can't control Mondo."

"But you can control whether or not he comes with us on a date" Evie refused to look at Alex and ~~rather concentrated~~ ~~[concentrated rather]~~ 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 ~~ed~~ to do something ~~[X]~~ 'different.' To me, hanging out with you and Mondo is different. You're my two favorite buds."

"That's just it, Alex," Evie pointed out. "I'm not your bud. I'm your girlfriend."

"But you're also my bud," Alex said. "I don't get it. Why do things have to be so different now that we are boyfriend and girlfriend? You're not trying to change me are you? Like mold me into a little version of what you think is ideal?"

When Alex explained his concerns, it sorta made sense to Evie. Of course, she didn't want him to change. She liked him for who he was and what he was about. And that was the reason why she even wanted him as a boyfriend, ~~her~~ ~~her~~ boyfriend.

"I don't get it, Evie," he said. "And sometimes I don't get you."

Evie looked over at Alex, who now seemed intent to ~~(use on)~~ focusing on the highway. He was really handsome, Evie thought to herself, ~~(.)~~ [H] how could she not have noticed it before, when they were just Flojo friends? Looking at his profile, one would never guess that he had broken his nose. When Evie had started Villanueva, ~~[delete-comma]~~ and had been introduced to Alex, he had a wide medical bandage across the bridge of his nose and cotton splints stuffed up his nostrils. Evie had judged him to be just like some of the other **vanity plates** at Villanueva and figured he had gotten a nose job, as well. It wasn't until later that she learned that the bandages were from a surfing accident caused by some newbie's foamboard that had flung ~~(up)~~ right into his face, ~~(.)~~ ~~shattering~~. ~~It shattered~~ his nose and cheekbones. Upon hearing, at the last minute, that some **south westerly swell** was coming in, Alex yanked the splints out himself after school, just so he could go surfing. Since then, Evie ~~(had)~~ thought that Alex was just about the coolest guys ~~(guy)~~ she had ever met.

"I'm sorry Alex," she tugged on his elbow. "I just wish, sometimes, we could do things more, I dunno, romantic. You know what I mean?"

But Alex didn't say anything back except "uh, huh" as he turned up the volume on his iTrip.

The news of Rocio's arrival to [use at] Rio Estates changed Evie's **train of thought** when she arrived ^{at} to [use at] school. Dee Dee was **so excited** about having Rocio in Rio Estates and wanted to do a girl's only lunch, off campus. She needed to tell Evie and Raquel all about him.

Evie figured it would be a good breather from Alex [C] and she texted him by second period.

Goin to O-hi Frstie w/ the grls

To which he responded:

No prob

Of course she read more into his two [C] word text. *Much* more. 'No prob' as in 'No problem. I really don't care what the fuck you do?' Any textlator could translate Alex's simple six characters (seven, if you included the space) to mean that he was annoyed with Evie. It took everything in Evie's power not to follow up with a second text. She kept reading and re-reading his two words every chance she got in [C] Civics class.

"Hey," she finally leaned over and showed Alex's message to September ^{Valdez} Diaz [C] who sat next her. "What do you think this means?"

"Who sent it?" September asked as she propped up her [C] Civics book, away from Vasquez. She held Evie's cell phone behind it and studied the text.

"Alex sent it," Evie whispered from the side of her mouth as she kept her eyes, [delete comma] and attention, [delete comma] on Vaquez. The last thing she wanted was for her phone to be taken away. Not at this crucial time in her life.

"Alex, as in your boyfriend Alex?" September asked.

"Uh, huh," Evie said.

"No smiley face or heart," September observed. "Hmmm...it doesn't look good."

That, ~~[delete comma]~~ just about killed Evie. September Diaz knew what she was talking about. She was a junior and had had many boyfriends during her reign at Villanueva. **She was also assistant editor of the school's newspaper, so she knew how to read between the lines.**

Evie took her cell phone back from September and immediately turned it off. She would definitely have to drown her doubt, misery, and insecurity in cheese fries and a Frostie with Dee Dee and Raquel at lunchtime.

"So, he got in last night," Dee Dee went on about Rocio as she, Evie, and Raquel headed out of the student parking lot in Jumile. "He's staying in our guest room and *ay*, it was *so* hard to leave him this morning."

"He slept at your house?" Evie asked.

"Yes, and it was ***unbearable***," Dee Dee said. "I haven't seen him in over four months, and I just wanted to sneak in the guest room and just be with him the whole night." She pulled out [on]to Ventura Avenue and made a left, towards O-hi Frostie.

"So why didn't you?" Raquel, who sat shotgun, asked as she moved the rearview mirror towards her face and picked at a scab on her chin. "If I had some fine ass *papi chulo*, as you claim he is, under my roof, that I hadn't seen for months, you best know I'd be giving him a big ol' grand welcome, *Americana* style."

“Raquel, you’re scandalous!” Dee Dee laughed. “I can’t sleep in the same bed with Rocio! My parents would freak, seeing us come out of the same bedroom in the morning.”

“What you gotta do is set an alarm clock in his room,” Raquel began. “Like, set it for an hour earlier, before your parents wake up. But you gotta make *sure* you wake up and get out of the room. Also, make sure you don’t go in the room wearing any perfume or that hair stuff of yours that’s gonna leave behind girl stink.”

“You’ve obviously done this before,” Evie noted from the back seat. Maybe it was good she was going off campus of ^{for} ~~use for~~ lunch. Dee Dee and Raquel, especially Raquel, would keep her mind off Alex and his **subliminal Mex text**.

“You could say that,” Raquel claimed proudly. She re-positioned Jumile’s rearview mirror back for Dee Dee.

“Is Rocio gonna stay at your house the whole time he’s here?” Evie asked Dee Dee.

“Pretty much,” Dee Dee lit up a Midnight Berry at the first stop light they came to. “He’s gonna look at schools in San Diego and then in the Bay Area.”

“Ooh, is he gonna look at Stanford?” Evie asked.

“Yeah, in fact, he should talk with Sabrina,” Dee Dee said. “She would be the perfect person to talk with.”

“Not right now,” Evie looked out the window. “She not the best person for anything.” Evie still hadn’t talked [to] Sabrina about what she had overheard her say on the phone that afternoon[,] and it still stung whenever she thought of her sister’s harsh words.

“Sabrina is still depressed?” Dee Dee asked. “I can’t believe it.”

"I know," Raquel said to Dee Dee. "And she's like your idol"

"I wouldn't say she's *my idol*, but, well, yeah, she's up there. Sabrina's the best."

Dee Dee looked at Evie in the rearview mirror. "I was actually, sorta, hoping that she could write me a recommendation letter, for Las Patronas."

"*No way*, Evie said. It bothered her how much Dee Dee looked up to her sister. She didn't understand how Dee Dee thought that Sabrina was ~~X~~ "the best." "Now is not a good time to ask Sabrina for anything."

"So," Raquel changed the subject. "How's Rocio gonna get around? Is he gonna rent a car?"

"No, you have to be, like, 25 or something to rent one," Dee Dee said. "My dad's going to lend him one of ours, or he's gonna use Jumile." She patted Jumile's dashboard.

"Oh *really?*" Evie caught Dee Dee's eyes in the rearview mirror. "So Rocio must have *good* insurance, right?" She couldn't help but rib Dee Dee. She still didn't believe that her father supposedly wouldn't let *her* take Jumile out for quick fun spin once in a while because of the car insurance.

"Yes, *Evie*," Dee Dee threw her a look. "He's going to get good insurance. *International* insurance."

"So when do we all get to meet him?" Raquel asked. "Rocio's all we've been hearing about, like, 'veinte-cuarto/siete.'" ~~X~~

"Definitely at Evie's party," Dee Dee pulled into Ohi Frostie where the wooden picnic tables were already taken over by backpacks, skateboards, and an overflow of Del Mar public high school students.

"Ew," Dee Dee looked them over. "*Del Mar.*"

"Wait, Evie's *party*?" Raquel balked as she got out of the car. "We gotta wait until *then*? What, you ashamed of us or something?"

"*Por fa*'," Dee Dee furrowed her brow and shook her head. "Don't be so *pinga*. It's just that he is going to be so busy researching colleges and universities that I'm barely going to see him myself."

The three of them got in line at Oh-hi Frostie. Two boys, both dressed in low rise, super tight black jeans and scrappy skater T-shirts, approached Evie.

Raquel covered her mouth with her hand and muttered under her breath to Evie, "*Wassup, rockers?*"

"Are you Evie Gomez?" The one boy with eyeliner asked.

"Uh, yeah," Evie answered cautiously. She looked over at Dee Dee and Raquel. "Why?"

"We wanna know if your party's open," the other kid said.

"Open?" Evie asked.

"In fact," Raquel suddenly leaned over Evie and took over. "It is. You can buy an invite. Fifty bucks each. *Cash.*"

"Fifty bucks?" The kid with eyeliner asked and looked back at his three other friends, similiarly garbed skaters boys, who were sitting on the picnic table.

"Yeah, we ain't talking entry to a skatepark," Raquel said. "This is the party of the year."

"No, it's just I gotta tell my other friends." The kid with eyeliner went back over to the picnic table.

The other kid stayed with Evie and Raquel and Dee Dee. He crossed his arms and looked over Dee Dee, who seemed to pretend not to notice. It never failed. No matter what set boys were with, they always looked Dee Dee over. "So, there's gonna be booze, right?" he asked.

"Of course, there's gonna be booze," Raquel frowned. "What, we're gonna charge fifty bucks for Hawaiian Punch?"

"Raquel," Evie covered her giggle and whispered, "*Stop it!*"

"Okay," Eyeliner Boy came back with a wad of twenties and a few fives. "How about one twenty-five for all four of us?"

Evie looked at Raquel and Raquel looked back at her.

"Sold!" Raquel grabbed the money from Eyeliner Boy's hands.

"Hey, don't we get a receipt or something?" he asked.

"You wanna a receipt?" Raquel looked at them. "Okay." She pulled out a slip of small paper from her wallet and wrote "Good for Five Entries." She then blotted her lips on the paper, leaving a deep, dark red smack print. "How's *that*?"

"Cool," Eyeliner Boy took the paper, not terribly impressed. He and his friend went back to the picnic table[.][delete the rest] to their other friends.

Dee Dee pulled Evie aside and looked over to where the boys were sitting. "Evie, you do *not* want those guys coming to your birthday party. And now they're going to expect something for all that money."

"Oh, they're harmless," Raquel said as she counted the twenty dollar bills. She glanced over at the boys. "And the one with eyeliner is *fine*."

"Yeah," Evie started hesistantly. "Maybe Dee Dee is right. What if they show up and get all pissed that we're not serving liquor or anything?"

"Oh, *please*," Raquel said. "They'll probably show up so lit that they won't even remember any of this business transaction at all."

Raquel shook her head and smiled as she looked up at the menu board. "Lunch is on you, Eves."

Later that evening, Dee Dee called Evie on the phone.

"I need you to keep something on the DL," she told Evie.

"Sure," Evie lowered her voice. She loved playing the confidante. "What's up?"

"Well," Dee Dee started. "You know how Rocio is here and ~~that [delete that]~~ his parents are coming out in a few days, right?"

"Right."

"And ~~that [delete that]~~ this is all a big deal for him, to find a school out here," Dee Dee said. "I mean, he's basically doing this for me, for us to be together."

"Uh[,] huh," Evie answered. Could it also be that California had some of the best schools to offer, than say, Mexico?

"So anyway," Dee Dee continued. "My dad and Graciela want to have a little dinner party for Rocio and his parents and," she paused, "I really want to invite you and Alejandro."

"Oh," Evie was taken off guard. She was expecting some big grand announcement. Like, maybe that ~~[delete that]~~ they were engaged and were going to run off together , or maybe. ~~That maybe~~ Dee Dee wanted her to make crepe paper flowers

for their get-away getaway car. But it was just dinner, a dinner party, at the de LaFuentes. Cool enough. Very adult[-]like and, by bringing Alex along, very date-ish. "We'll definitely come," Evie said. "I can't wait."

"But one thing," Dee Dee added. "You can't tell Raquel."

"Why?" Evie asked.

"It's not like I'm keeping something from her, to be mean. I just..." Dee Dee searched for the right words. "I just don't want to feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. You know how Raquel can be coarse and make a scene. I can't have anything go wrong at this get together."

"But can't you just tell Raquel that?" Evie felt awkward. "Can't you just make it clear to her that she had to be on her best behavior?"

"I wish it was that easy," Dee Dee sighed. "But you know Raquel. You know how she can be and now that she's all with Davey Mitchell, I don't know what to expect from her anymore."

It was true. Davey Mitchell had passed Raquel's two week mark. They ~~She~~ and he had been going out for a full month and neither Dee Dee nor Evie had even been introduced to him. *That* was very telling.

"You know," Dee Dee said. "I wasn't gonna say anything, but Raquel called our house, drunk, twice last week."

"Are you serious?" Evie asked.

"Uh[,] huh," Dee Dee said. "And I'm not taking about ~~dialing~~ d-dialing my cell. She called on the land line, like at three in the morning, and woke up my father and

everything. In fact, he was the one who said it might be better if Raquel didn't come to the get together."

"Are you effing with me?" Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. Dee Dee's father was the most accepting of Raquel, more so than Evie's own father, who she had thought was very forgiving of Raquel's antics. Evie, herself, had received the drunk dials and tipsy texts from Raquel, but they had all been very amorous chatter, consisting of Raquel going on and on about how much she loved Evie and how Evie was her "bestest, bestest friend in the whole wide world." But thank God she never dialed the Gomez's land line. Her mother would shit *stone*.

So, you won't tell her, right?" Dee Dee asked Evie in a hopeful tone.

"I guess not," Evie answered, feeling a bit deceitful. "I mean, I won't."

"Thanks Evie," Dee Dee exhaled. "You're truly are my *ADA*."

"I'm you're *fairy*?" Evie asked, confused.

"No," Dee Dee laughed. "My amiga de alma," Dee Dee said. "It's much more meaningful than a BFF. ~~You're~~ like my soul sister."

Yes you're

But keeping someing on the D.L. might become quite a chore when all parties involved lived within the residential tract of a gated community

"I still don't understand," Evie's mother started on Evie as she waited for Alex to pick her on Saturday night. "Why wouldn't Frank or Graciela invite your father and me to their party?"

"Mom, it's not a party," Evie tried to explain for the umpteenth time. Her mother had been on her case all week once she had mentioned the dinner to her. "It's just a little get together for Rocio and his parents."

Are Raquel's parents going?" she asked.

[~~I~~] "No," Evie said. "And you can't mention it to Kitty."

"What? Why?"

Jeez, Evie looked out the window. Where was Alex?

"I don't understand this at all," Evie's mother continued. "I would think that after the brunch that ~~delete that~~ I threw for Frank and his new wife that he would want to return the gesture. Something like this would never have happened if Margaret ~~(were)~~ ~~was~~ still alive."

Evie could not believe her mother was comparing Margaret, Dee Dee's dear belated mother, to Frank de LaFuentes new wife, Graciela. The cattiness belonged less in the Gomez's ~~(g) Great (r) Room~~ and more near Alejandra de los Santos' scratching post.

"Mom," Evie checked for wrinkles on her skirt in the mirror. It was the second time in less than two weeks that she was wearing a skirt for a night out with Alex. She hoped he noticed *this time*. "It's not even about or for the parents. I'm just going for support. For Dee Dee."

"You know, Evie," her mother started to ask in a tone that indicated she had an idea, usually a lousy one. "Why don't you take Sabrina with you?"

Bingo.

"What?" Evie looked over at her mother. The last think she wanted was mopey ol' Sabrina barging in on her date. "Why would I take her?"

"Because it would be a nice thing to do," her mother said. "Dee Dee and Sabrina have so much in common. Sabrina was a Patrona and now Dee Dee is going to be one, too."

"We don't know that yet," Evie found herself getting territorial. Sabrina was a mopey pain in the butt, but still, she was *her* mopey pain in the butt. "Dee Dee still has to be nominated."

"Oh, Dee Dee's a doll," Vicki Gomez waved her hand aside. "Of course, she'll be nominated. Also, didn't you say that Rocia will be attending Stanford?"

"It's *Rocio*," Evie **corrected her mother**. "And I didn't say he was *attending* Stanford, I said he was looking into their departments. Checking out a school is much different than attending one."

"Well," Evie's mother said. "I just thought you'd want to help get your sister get out of her rut. But speaking of school..."

Uh oh. Here it comes.

"How is your volunteer work coming along? Is your GPA going to be up before the next quality check? Your father asked me about it the other day [L] and I'm feeling a lot of pressure, Evie."

She's feeling pressure?

"Mom, I've got ~~in~~ ~~(it)~~ under control," Evie peeked out the ~~g~~ Great ~~r~~ Room's window again. Where was Alex when she needed him? Her mother was really getting under her skin.

"I hope so, Evie," Vicki Gomez said. "It would be a shame if we didn't get to have your party. But if we *do* have it," she raised her eyebrow, "I just *hope* I don't forget to send Frank and Graciela an invite."

When Alex came to pick Evie up for the dinner, she liked that he was in brown cords and a cream colored dress shirt. She looked down and saw that he wasn't even wearing flojos. He actually had on shoes, black canvas Winos. *Too* cute.

Yes, it was apparent that a dinner party at the de LaFuentes was perfect in terms of mending the friction between Evie and Alex. Granted, it wasn't a night out at a **super swanky** Japanese restaurant, or a **super romantic** poetry reading at the beach, but still it was still ~~[delete still]~~ dinner, a dinner date, and he had dressed up. The night seemed to be a precious maybe.

"You look really nice," Alex said as he walked Evie to his truck. "You look cute in dresses."

"Oh, thanks." Evie smiled as Alex held the door open for her.

So far, so good, Evie thought as she got into his truck. She put the arm rest up and snuggled up ~~[delete up]~~ as close to him as she could.

"You know, I haven't been to Dee Dee's since last semester," Alex said as he lowered the volume on his iTrip and pulled out of the driveway. "Remember? When I went over to give her swimming lessons last semester and Alejandra de los Santos and her little pack of *fresitas* were there?"

Evie grimaced. "Ugh. How could I forget that? I showed up thinking it would be just you, me[,] and Dee Dee and you're, like, in the swimming pool, drooling all over Xiamor-a."

"I really don't remember that," Alex smiled jokingly.

"Well, I do."

"But I *do* remember," Alex started. "That the de LaFuentes had a pretty posh pad. They're probably gonna have some good grub tonight."

"Totally," Evie agreed. "But I can tell you one thing they aren't going to have."

"What?" Alex asked.

"They aren't going to have *sushi*." Evie playfully pinched his side.

"Evie," Alex frowned over at her. "Let it go, will you?"

"I was just messin'." Evie cuddled up closer to him. to him closer.

"No, you weren't," he shrugged a little. "You keep making these little jabs, like you're trying to make me feel guilty or something."

"No, I'm not." Evie could feel his arm tense up. She looked up at him. "Seriously, I was just joking."

Alex sighed. "You *keep* blaming me for that night. You know, maybe you were just expecting too much."

"Expecting too much?" Evie asked. "What, that I want to go out, alone, with my own boyfriend once in a while?"

"I dunno," Alex said. "It's like I feel like all this pressure that you want me to act a certain way."

Evie let go of Alex's arm and sat up in the seat.

"Alex," she started. "If I'm your girlfriend, sometimes I wanna be treated like one."

"So, what, I treat you like crap or something?" Alex asked. He was now turning onto Camino Pacifico and was a few blocks from Camino Cortez, Dee Dee's street.

"I didn't say that," Evie said. "It's just seems that you treated me with more chivalry when I was just a friend."

"What is that supposed to mean?" he asked.

"I mean, you were more of gentleman —"

"I know what chivalry means," Alex snapped.

"Look," Evie started. "All I'm saying is when you were trying to get my attention, you were all nice and everything, but now that I'm your girlfriend you, like, totally take me for granted."

"For granted?" Alex asked. "Like what? When?"

"Jeez, where do I begin?" Evie shook her head in bewilderment. How could he possible [possibly] be so **clueless**? "Like you flake on me, *a lot* and —"

"I don't flake," Alex interrupted[.] He leaned over and turned up his iTrip.

"Maybe I change my mind or [my] plans change, but I never just not just show up. I never leave you [delete just] just hanging."

"So you think you didn't leave me hanging that night at Otani's?" Evie raised her voice, if only to talk over the music that Alex had so rudely turned up.

"Uh, *no*," Alex looked at her, puzzled. "We asked you to go to the party with us. You were invited, but you *chose* not to go."

"Oh, so let me get this straight," Evie started. "You and Mondo were kind enough to invite to the party with the both of you. *You two* invited *me*. Wow, gee, Alex, I hope I didn't intrude on your date with Mondo."

"You know," Alex said. "You're acting like a nag. Like how Raquel would always be with Jose."

"A *nag*?" Evie snapped at him, her eyebrows ~~were [delete were]~~ practically raised [raising] off her forehead. "Well, *you're* beginning to act like Jose. When you're not dribbling over big chested waitresses, you're a flakey flojo. And who knows, maybe you're seeing Alejandra de los Santos behind my back."

"Hey," Alex pulled up in front of the de LaFuentes. He did not turn off the engine. "I'm not the one who made out with my best friend's *significant other* in a photo booth, behind her back."

Evie was now **legally** ~~declared [delete declared]~~ livid. "Alex, how the *hell* could you say something like that! You know what happened that night. Jose attacked *me*! You know that's what happened (,) and now for you to use it against me [is] complete shit. God, Alex," Evie leaned to the far side of the seat. She crossed her arms and shook her head. "I thought I knew you. I thought I really, really knew you, but I guess I don't."

"That makes two of us," Alex bit back.

Evie could not believe what was happening. Tonight was supposed to be such a special night, a make up for the Saturday evening before. She looked up at Dee Dee's house. Their **Malibu lights** showcased the three tier stone fountain on the front lawn. With its water cascading down to each each tier, Evie was reminded of the back patio at Koi, where water trickled from the decorative bamboo chutes into the koi(-)filled

kidney-shaped pond. And now, here was *another* night that was going to be ruined because Alex was being so insensitive.

Evie closed her eyes and took a breath. She reached around her neck and unhooked the clasp of her abalone necklace. "Here," her hand was shaking as she gave the necklace to Alex. "Just take it."

Alex looked at the necklace, then at her. "Evie..." he started.

"No, just take it." She didn't look him the eyes, but rather at the necklace. The knots that held the pieces of abalone shell in place were hand twisted and looked like a third grade attempt at high fashion. How could she have *worn* something so hideous?

"Obviously, it's too hard for you to say or do nice things for me anymore," she told Alex. "Obviously, it's too much of a challenge. Here," she held out the cord. "Just take it."

Alex took the necklace. "So what is this supposed to mean?"

"I don't know," Evie said. "Maybe we should just take a break."

"A *break*?" Alex asked

"Yeah," Evie said curtly. "Time off."

"Okay," Alex looked out his side window. "Then why don't you just give me back the the headphones? I gave those to you, too."

"Fine." Evie's heart ~~sank.~~ ~~sunk.~~ The Bose headphones? Ouch. "I *will*"


"Whatever," Alex leaned over and stuffed the necklace into his glove compartment. It suddenly looked so oddly insignificant crammed between his empty CD jewel cases, misfolded maps[,] and miscellaneous paper trash. "If that's what you want...time off."


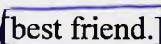
"Yes," Evie got out of his truck and slammed the door. "It's *exactly* what I want"

When Evie showed up at Dee Dee's room, she was puffy eyed and bare necked.

"Hey," Dee Dee's face dropped when she saw Evie at her doorway. "*Que paso?* What's wrong? Where's Alex?"

Before Evie knew it, she was crying all over again. "We got in a fight. He just dropped me off and then took off!"

"What? *Serio?*" Dee Dee led Evie to the edge of her bed. "Here  sit down." She grabbed a box of blue Kleenex from the shelf under her night table. "What happened? Tell me."

Evie went into the horrid details about her argument with Alex. She left out nothing as she recounted how Alex accused her of being a bitch, a nag, and a two -timing bestfriend  (best friend.). That's all she pretty much remembered of the whole conversation.

"And what did you say to all that?" Dee Dee asked.

"Nothing," Evie said. "I said nothing. I just gave him back his stupid necklace."

"You gave him back his necklace?"

"And the headphones," Evie blew her nose. "I mean, I'm gonna give those back to him when I get them."

"*Hijole,*" Dee Dee looked around her room, in shock. "I'm really, really surprised, especially the part about Alejandro saying all that stuff about you and Jose. Alejandro has always seemed like such a gentleman."

"He is, or was, I guess." Evie said. "I mean, he's not horrible, but he just acts so flakey [flaky] and sometimes he treats me like just a dude. And sometimes, I just burn out. Is that so wrong?"

"Of course not," Dee Dee handed her more tissue. "You are the cutest girl [] and you deserve a guy who is going to treat you like a princesa."

Princesa.

"You know, Josephina?" Evie wiped her nose. "At the reserve? The senior Patrona?"

"Uh, huh, claro." Dee Dee moved in closer to Evie [, perhaps], Perhaps hoping that she had a inner scoop about her potential Patrona-ship?

"Well, Arturo is totally sweet to her," Evie said. "I mean, he just [delete just] dotes on her [] and I just don't understand why I can't have a boyfriend like that." She wiped the corners of her eyes.

"Arturo?" Dee Dee frowned in confusion. "That's hard to believe. I thought you said that he was a jerk, like a total control freak."

"Not to her, he isn't." Evie said. "Arturo is totally sweet and romantic to her."

"Evie," Dee Dee said. "You were totally going off on him, like just a month ago, and now you[re] saying that he's the ideal boyfriend?"

"I didn't say he was *the* ideal."

"**In so many words you did,**" Dee Dee said. "And when did you start calling him Arturo? I thought he was *Ar-turdo*."

"Huh?" Evie didn't know what Dee Dee was getting at. "No, everyone calls him Arturo."

"Everyone, but you," Dee Dee said. "[delete]"

"Dela," Marcela interrupted Evie and Dee Dee as she tapped on Dee Dee's bedroom door. ***"La familia Fontes estan aqui."***

"Oh," Dee Dee jumped up from her bed. *"Ay way!* They're already here!"

For a moment, Evie was so drowned in her own sorrows, [delete comma] that she had forgotten the whole reason why she was at Dee Dee's. She sighed to herself. She was now going to have to fake pleasantries the whole evening, *sin* Alex.

Dee Dee waved her fingers in the air [use ^{like} like] as though she was trying to make wet polish dry on her fingernails. "I am *so* nervous." She twirled around for Evie. "Do I look okay?"

Evie looked up at Dee Dee. **She hadn't noticed how truly beautiful she had dressed for the evening. She was wearing a soft pink knee[-]length dress with a cream[-]colored tulle edge. Her blonde hair had been styled [in]to perfectly maintained ringlets.**

"Yes," Evie managed to smile. "You look beautiful. No, better than beautiful. You look just like...Anahi."

"*Anahi?*" **Dee Dee's face lit up.** "Oh[,] my God." She looked at herself in the bedroom mirror[,] and [delete and] placed her hand on her hip[,] and drew down her face -- total Anahi pose. "Really? You're not just saying that?"

"No," Evie promised. "And yes, *really*."

Anahi from RBD was Dee Dee's favorite, favorite singer/actress/chica *rubia* in the whole wide world of Telemundo, [a]X Actually, Telivisa, the *other* Spanish station if

you wanted to get technical about it, but the whole wide *mundo* if you wanted to understand how much Dee Dee idolized Anahi and RBD.

Evie watched Dee Dee continue to fuss [~~delete about~~] about in front of the mirror, and then she caught a look at herself. Her face was red, puffy, and tearstained. All three coats of mascara that she had applied had collected in the outer corners of her eyes. There was no way she wanted to meet Rocio and his family, [~~delete comma~~] looking all *la llorona*.

“Dee Dee,” Evie got up from the bed and wiped her cheeks with the edge of her palms. “Can I borrow some concealer? For my eyes?”

“*Claro*, of course,” Dee Dee went over to her bathroom and brought out a professional-looking black leather make-up case that showcased every item that **Covergirl and Mac** could possibly carry.

“Sit,” Dee Dee patted the cushioned stool in front of her vanity table and mirror. As Evie sat down, Dee Dee laid out a line of small tubes, pencil sticks, and concealer airbrushes in a neat row on her vanity table. It reminded Evie of being at Dr. Mizrahi’s, where he lined up every shiny, important looking instrument on the **dental tray**, ready to tackle any problem.

Dee Dee looked Evie’s face over. “Ooh, you’ve lost a lot of your tan. We’ll definitely have to go with something *mas blanca*.”

Evie tried to relax and just let Dee Dee take over. Once she did, it felt soothing, almost therapeutic, to have her softly rub creams and lotion under her [~~delete worn,~~] worn, tired eyes.

"Drama should never drain the diva," Dee Dee smiled proudly as she stepped back to admire her work. "*Bien. Mira*, now you look more like Maria Dulce to my Anahi."

Evie looked in the mirror. She thought, if anything, with her dark hair, she resembled RBD's Maite, ~~[delete comma]~~ more than Maria Dulce. But either way, she would rather look like a Sweet Maria than a Weepy Evie. At least for this particular evening.

When Evie and Dee Dee finally **felt camera ready**, they hurried down the stairs[,] where they were met by Rocio, who was waiting in the foyer. He *was* quite cute, Evie thought when she first saw him. He looked just like the pictures she had seen of him with Dee Dee in Mexico City. He had a slight build and seemingly newly cut hair. His eyes were very dark and topped with thick, bushy eyebrows, almost like Dee Dee's father. And he was wearing a casual dark blue dinner jacket that made him appear mature and somewhat cosmopolitan. Evie had seen boys dress similarly, but they were the male models, posing on motor scooters or the steps of some historic looking building, ~~[delete comma]~~ in the fashion magazines that Dee Dee had laying around her room. Evie had never seen a boy in a dinner jacket in person.

"Dela," Rocio smiled as he took her hand and helped her with the last step. "*Te ves muy hermosa.*"

"Oh," Dee Dee covered her embarrassed smile with her hand. "*Really?*"

"Yes," Rocio's eye's widened as if she ~~was~~ were crazy to question him.

"Really."

"Oh, Rocio, I—" Dee Dee stopped herself and looked over at Evie. "Oh, I am so sorry! This is Evie." She placed her hand on Evie's shoulder. "***Recuerdas? Mi amiga del Alma?***"

"Si, si," Rocio took Evie's hand and actually kissed it. "***Estoy encantado.*** You are even lovelier in person."

Lovelier? Evie couldn't ever remember being called lovely. Did people, boys, even talk like that? She guessed in Mexico City they did. And they kissed hands too? She could get used to this. She glanced down at her hands, relieved that she still had the manicured remnants of her hand job from Michael Kelley.

"*Muchas Gracias*, Rocio," Evie smiled. "I've heard so much about you."

"Good things, I hope," he smiled. "Or at least, **not so scandalous.**"

Dee Dee looked over Rocio's shoulder. "Where are your parents?"

"Listen, they're already out in the backyard," A large grin continued to expand across Rocio's face. "There was immediate respect. I felt it, first thing."

"Really? Oh, Rocio," Dee Dee linked arms with him. "I am so happy you are here." She ~~then~~ [delete then] linked her other arm with Evie's. "I couldn't be **happier**. My two favorite people *en el todo mundo!*"

As the three of them headed outside, Evie couldn't ~~can't~~ help but wonder where Raquel fit in between Dee Dee's 'two favorite people in the whole world.' Also, would she have been invited to the special dinner if she still had the stripped blue hair from last semester?

Dee Dee's parents, Frank and Graciela, were out in the backyard, under the large palapa lounging area, ~~[delete comma]~~ with another couple [who were] ~~that was~~ obviously Rocio's parents.

"Dela!" the woman stood up and held her hands out to Dee Dee. "Long time no see, *mi'ja*. We miss you in D.F."

Rocio's mother wore a sleeveless black linen dress, ~~[delete comma]~~ accented by a dramatic red silk *rebozo*, ~~[delete comma]~~ that Evie recognized from Studio Tres Rios. Her wavy dark hair was pulled back into an elegant bun and secured by a large simple silver barrette.

Dee Dee went over to hug Rocio's mother.

"Oh, I miss you too, **Herminia**. I miss D. F. in general. How are Fred and Ofelia? Oh, and what about Café Blanca? Have you been there lately?" Dee Dee stopped herself and covered her face, again, in bashfulness. "*Lo siento*," she apologized. "I sometimes go on and on about Mexico."

Sometimes?

"It's just that I have such an affinity for D.F.," Dee Dee [explained anxiously.] ~~anxiously explained~~. "I really miss the night life. The U.S is nothing like Mexico, and California can be, *come se dice*, stifling, if you know what I mean. No theatre, no culture..."

No culture? Hadn't Evie just taken her to Skate Punk to look at their new line of knitted skull bags? Where was all this coming from? Evie wondered. And why hadn't she been introduced to Rocio's parents yet? She felt awkward just standing there.

Dee Dee finally glanced over at Evie. "Oh, *lo siento*," She said as if she had just read Evie's thoughts. "I forgot. This is my dear friend, *mi amiga mejor*, Evelina."

"Hello," Evie nodded towards Mr. and Mrs. Fontes and followed Rocio's cue with his Spanish. "*Estoy Encantada*."

"*Estamos encantados*," Rocio's parents nodded and smiled back.

That was pretty much the exchange between them and Evie for the rest of the evening.

Dee Dee sat down next to Rocio on one of the rattan benches and Evie followed. She was the solo act among three sets of couples[,] and she soon felt lonely and a bit out of place. It didn't help that her eyes still felt like two enormous soggy tea bags. Evie hoped she could keep up with an evening that already seemed filled with memories, social etiquette[,] and proper Spanish. When she began to notice how Rocio practically finished Dee Dee's sentences and how Dee Dee advised Marcela what to keep out of Rocio's pasta (no peppers, no pine-nuts), it seemed so apparent to Evie that Dee Dee and Rocio were truly meant for each other. It was like they were already mini adults in the making[,] and it made Evie anxious. She was [~~delete already~~] already going to be sixteen years old. Would she *ever* meet the perfect guy for her?

"So, have you gotten used to the time change?" Dee Dee father asked Rocio's father.

"We are getting along okay. Thank you[,]," *Senor* Fontes replied.

Senor Fontes had a slight build, like Rocio, and he also wore a sports jacket. Evie noticed, he also [~~delete also~~] had on impeccably shined leather shoes. She looked over at

Senora Fontes. She had on pricey looking leather shoes too. Thank God, Evie did not wear her flojos to dinner.

"We're getting used to the time change, ~~[delete comma]~~ much better than we're getting used to this American tequila," Rocio's father playfully held up his drink. "I was expecting, since you are such the big *chingon* out here in California, you'd be serving up Tequila Oro or something."

"This is actually *Temequila*," Frank held up his own glass. "I couldn't resist seeing how it compared to the real stuff, or, should I say, tequila manufactured in Mexico."

"Oh, really?" Rocio's father looked at his drink again and nodded his head with a newfound interest. "So it *was* distilled here. *Que Interesante*. But you know, you can't mess with tradition."

Graciela suddenly chuckled to herself.

"What is it?" Rocio's father looked over at her.

Graciela looked down in embarrassment as she tried to cover her smile with the edge of her own *rebozo*. "Oh, nothing," she said. "I don't want to be mean."

"Now you *have* to tell us," Rocio's mother nudged with encouragement.

"It just reminds me," Graciela looked over at Evie. "And I hope I don't upset you, Evelina."

"Me? Why would I get upset?" She had no idea what Graciela could be talking about.

"I was just thinking about your father and when we had brunch at your parent's house, remember that?"

"Oh, yeah," Evie said. "I mean, yes."

As Evie's mother had said, she had hosted a small, intimate brunch to welcome the de LaFuentes back from Mexico. It was last October and the morning after the big party that Raquel's mother had thrown them.

"And your father," Graciela started to chuckle again as she turned away from Evie and looked at Rocio's parents. "Evelina's father owns a *panaderia* and he makes or *did* make pan, pan dulce *sin manteca*."

The eyebrows of ^{Dos} ~~Ter~~ ~~Fontes~~ raised ~~rose~~ together, and soon enough both parents joined Graciela in laughter.

"*Sin manteca?*" Rocio's mother looked at Evie. "Without lard? *Figate?*"

But it was Graciela who answered. "*Si, si*." She started to laugh so hearty that a cough erupted and she quickly covered her mouth with a cloth napkin. Evie secretly hoped she would keep it there.

"Now, Graciela. *Stop* it," Frank de LaFuente put his plate down on the glass table and came to Evie's aid. "*Mira*, we never know anything until we take chances. Right, Evie?"

"Right," Evie smiled meekly. Could she feel even more the ugly, hegemonic American?

"*Right*," Dee Dee shook her head with a pronounced nod. "And *I* liked it. I couldn't even tell the difference, that much."

As the dinner plates were cleared and the three couples continued to reminisce about the fabulous[ly] wonderful city life in D.F., Evie found comfort by retreating to the

kitchen. She figured she could hang, at least for a little while, with Marcela and the helper that the de LaFuentes had hired to help her prepare and serve food. Evie pulled out a kitchen stool and sat down to check her phone messages. There were none.

"*Que te pasa?*" Marcela questioned Evie. It was apparent that she was hiding out. Why would a guest, after all, be in a stuffy kitchen when ~~they~~ [she] could be outside ~~[delete comma]~~ enjoying another balmy evening in California, helping themselves [herself] to quince paste and manchengo cheese?

"Nothing," Evie lied. Every ~~(Ever)~~ since she ~~has~~ [had] been spending more time with Dee Dee, Evie ~~has~~ [had] gotten to know Marcela better. Marcela was a lot younger than Lindsay, almost thirty years to Lindsay's sixty, and Evie sometimes felt she [had] ~~[delete got]~~ got more contemporary chica insight than, say, the matronly madre judgement of Lindsay. "[It['s]] just my boyfriend and I—"

Marcela's cell phone suddenly vibrated from her hip. "*Ay, lo siento* [.] Evelina," she apologized as she unclipped it. She read the text. "Oh, it's my baby's papa. I have to call him.))"

"No worries," Evie said. "Go ahead, make your call."

As soon as Marcela turned her back and got on the phone, Evie found a cheese knife and cut herself the tiniest sliver of the Spanish membrillo from [a slab on a serving tray.] the slab that was on a serving tray. She looked over at Marcela, who now held her cell super close to her ear. She had a big smile on her face. God, did *everyone* have *someone* in their [his or her] friggin' life? Evie cut herself another piece of membrillo, this time with cheese.

"E-vie," Dee Dee came into the kitchen. "I wondered where you were. Come on," she took Evie's hand and pulled her off the stool. "We're about to have dessert. Why are you being so antisocial?"

Evie had no choice but to quickly swallow the quince and cheese she had crammed in her mouth and follow Dee Dee out to the backyard. The glass hurricane lamps on the main patio table had been lit, and now both Graciela and Rocio's mother were fully draped in their *rebozos*. Surely for show, Evie guessed, as it was such a warm night and no cover-ups were really needed

Marcela's helper soon came out after Evie and Dee Dee, [delete after Evie and Dee Dee,] with the tray of quincepaste and cheese. Evie looked the tray over, and each slab looked perfectly intact. *Whew*. She had done a good job with the cutting. No one would suspect her earlier therapeutic snacking.

"Oh, *this is just wonderful.*" Rocio's mother raved as the helper set the tray down. "The whole dinner **was** *excelente*." She put her hand over Graciela's. "And the *bolillos* you served? *Muy blandito!*"

"Gracias, Herminia," Graciela smiled as she poured hot water from a teapot into delicate teacups.

"So, tell us, Rocio," Frank de LaFuentes started. "How has it been looking at schools? You know, I have to say," he ribbed playfully. "I'm a little offended you haven't looked into Channel Islands."

"No, no, sir," Rocio placed his fork on his dessert plate as though a long explanation on his part was going to commence. "It's nothing against CI. I would love to attend Channel Islands. The campus is so beautiful, and I'd be closer to Dela." He

looked at Dee Dee and squeezed her hand. "But I need to get my MBA from a university that has the best department available. I can't waste time if I want to start a business and a family by the time I'm in my mid~~(t)~~twenties." This time, he did not look at Dee Dee, but Evie noticed he squeezed her fingers again.

"Well, that's very admirable," Frank said in a tone you'd expect to be followed by a pat on the back and a [use the] lighting of a cigar. "Very admirable. I can respect that."

Evie couldn't help but feel that Rocio was so mature and just, well, *capable*. He was barely eighteen years old and already thinking of a future with Dee Dee? In a way, he sorta reminded Evie a little bit like ^{of} ~~[use of]~~ Arturo, even to the point that he was also moving away from his family and home to follow a dream, whatever dream that might be -- to ~~[attend]~~ ~~[delete in]~~ ⁱⁿ an American business school or to be with an American blonde?

Evie opened her evening bag, discreetly checked her cell phone~~(.)~~ and sighed. No new text or messages.

Chapter 16

The first thing Evie did on Monday morning at school was return her **beloved** Bose headphones ~~back~~ ~~[delete back]~~ to Alex. She decided to leave them in his locker with no note, no explanation, no *nada*.

"I can't *believe* he wants your headphones back." Raquel leaned against the wall of lockers and fumed. "What an asshole. Weren't they like a gift?"

"Yeah," Evie placed the headphones under his Senor Lopez pullover. She looked at the pullover and felt sightly sad. They both used to wear their pullovers together on chilly mornings at Sea Street. "He's just being a jerk," Evie remarked. "He asked for them back as soon as I gave him back my necklace."

Raquel peered over Evie and into Alex's locker. "You know, we could do some serious damage here. I couldn't ~~could~~ plant some lawn and then call the school, anonymously."

"Raquel, *no*," Evie slammed the locker door shut. "He's not that big of a jerk. Besides, he has the combination to my locker."

"Yeah, I guess he ain't worth it anyway," Raquel reluctantly agreed. "It's a good thing you don't have any classes with him. That would be a major drag. I remember with Jose, I still had to see his ugly mug in Spanish and his skinny white ass legs in P.E. That's why I now *refuse* to date anyone who goes to the same school."

"Or someone who even *went* to school," Evie found herself teasing.

"Exuse me?" Raquel cocked one eyebrow. "You know, if I wasn't such a caring friend, I *could* say something but I won't. You're 'La Sad Girl' now, so I'm just gonna be all nice and supportive." She put her arm around Evie and they started down the hall.

"But check it out, now you and I can be a team, *the* team. Forget last semester and all that Flojo crap. We're *Solas Patrollas*."

"But you still have Davey," Evie pointed out. "And I won't give up wearing my flip flops."

"I know, neither can I," Raquel looked down at her own Rainbow flip flops. "And about Davey? We just hang out. I mean, it's nothing *serio*. We're just having fun."

"But don't forget about Dee Dee," Evie reminded her.

"Dee Dee," Raquel pulled down her Cop Out sunglasses. "Is in a team, a league, of all her own."

Evie's first days at school Alex-less were **unbearable**. She constantly checked her cell phone ~~through out~~ throughout her classes, every hour, every half hour. During lunch, she scanned the cafeteria for signs of him ~~[delete comma]~~ but found not one hint of his dark hair, **his camouflage cut offs** or even of him ~~him even~~ flaunting the Bose headphones ~~he took~~ he had taken back from her. It was eery. How could Alex just possibly disappear from sight?

As she made her way to the salad bar, she saw Yvonne Tello with Tracy Williams.

"Have you seen Alex?" Evie casually asked as she took a salad tray after them. Alex had biology with Yvonne, just before lunch.

"You mean Alex, *Alex*? Your boyfriend?" Yvonne asked.

"Yeah," Evie **said**. "Was he in class?"

"What, you don't know if your own boyfriend is at school?" Tracy asked.

"Of course, I do," Evie **fibbed**. "It's just that I left my cell at home and I haven't seen him since this morning. That's all."

Yvonne looked over at **Tracy Williams** ~~[delete comma]~~ with a questioning look.

"So, Evie," Tracy started.

"Yeah?"

"So there's been talk that you may not have your party," she said.

"Who said that?" Evie's body turned numb.

"Alejandra de los Santos," Yvonne said. "She's been telling everyone. Something about you having to work at the horse reserve and that they aren't going to give you the night off. That you have to clean stables or something."

"What?" Evie said. "Tracy, that's *so* not true. That is a lie. Do you really think I wouldn't have my party because I have to work? I'm totally having my party. It's on."

"Yeah, I thought so," ~~Tracy~~ Tracy said as she **scooped some seafood** salad onto her plate. "It did seem a little outlandish. But anyway, my aunt Anita is getting married in Mammoth that Friday, the Friday of your birthday weekend[,] and I was wondering if I should just stay up there the whole weekend and go skiing[,] or if I should fly back down for your party. But now I'll come back for your party."

"Yes, you have to." Evie wasn't even planning on inviting Tracy or ~~Y-vonne~~ ^{Yvonne} to her party, but now she felt she had to, just to spite Alejandra de los Santos. Also, she figured that two more guests on the guest list wouldn't break the bank. "You definitely have to come back [for my party.] ~~to come to my party.~~"

Evie stuffed mini Swedish meatballs into the two taco shells on her plate. [, ~~added~~ ~~another taco shell, and crammed~~] She then added another taco shell and crammed more Swedish meatballs into that one, as well. All the hard work at **being the most popular sophomore** at Villanueva was stressing her out.

After three days, Alex still hadn't called or ~~texted~~ ^{texted} [text] Evie[,] and she wasn't about to phone or text him either. After all, [he had left her hanging] ~~he did leave her hanging~~ at the de LaFuentes dinner party and she, if [anyone,] anything, deserved an

apology. And ~~[delete And]~~ ~~(S)~~ since they were in the middle of a beef, it was ~~BTLE JCE~~ Beetle Juice honking for Evie every school morning. On the fourth day, it was ~~JUMILE~~ Jumile.

"You are so much better with out [without] him," Raquel insisted from the front seat of ~~JUMILE~~ Jumile as Dee Dee drove. "He's such a punk ass. I told you how he was at that party, right? The one on Hemlock?"

"Yeah, you did, Raquel." Evie didn't want to hear about that night all over again,

"So, there I was on the couch at Lil' G's mom's house," Raquel started. "Just kicking back, blazing some one hitters with some new friends ~~(D)~~ and here comes Jose, with Mondo and Alex. All three of them come in ~~[delete comma]~~ as if they owned the place or something. They don't even know any of the Bard Boys. I mean, I know the Bard crew, but they ~~(were)~~ be acting as if ~~their~~ [they were] part of the g-unit or something."

"I really don't think Alex thinks *that*," Evie said. Sure she was mad at Alex, but he didn't deserve to be sorely misrepresented.

"Well, he comes in acting like it," Raquel claimed. "You weren't there, Evie. So, anyway, I'm looking around for Davey, because the last thing I want is Jose getting all up in my face without Davey around. I mean, we know how Jose can be. Remember Evie? Remember how he almost decked you in the parking lot last semester?"

"I remember," Evie looked out the ~~[delete the]~~ ~~JUMILE~~ Jumile's window into space. She was so over this video log of her life, but Raquel insisted on rewinding it over and over again.

"But Jose knows better," Raquel said. "He just walked by, like he totally didn't say anything to me, as if I didn't exist."

Jumile's

"But that's what you do want," Dee Dee steered JUMBLE onto the highway, towards school. "You don't [want] Jose stalking you."

"Of course not," Raquel **said quickly**. "I'm just saying that he doesn't have to act like I never existed, like he's better than me ^{or} ~~than~~ [use or] something. And I'm, like, on terms with Mondo and Alex, but Alex didn't say jack to me. Nothing. Mondo, at least lifted his chin up to me, but Alex, punk ass, was probably too afraid to acknowledge me in front of Jose. That just shows you, Evie, he is so whipped. There is no way he can ever be a man. You need a man, Evie. A *real* man. You know what? I'm gonna hook you up with one of Davey's friends. He's got lots of cool friends."

"I am *not* going out with some Bard Boy," Evie **said**. "There is *no* way in hell."

"Oh, *my*." Raquel ~~tilted~~ [tilted] down her sunglasses and looked back at Evie [.] She put on a southern accent as well as her hand on her chest. "Well, ess-cuse *me*... **Little Muss Goodship**."

"Evie needs a gentleman, a *caballero*." Dee Dee looked at Evie from the rearview mirror. "**Right**, Evie? You know, as soon as Rocio moves out here, I'm sure he'll make lots of new ~~classmates and~~ [delete classmates and] acquaintances who ~~would~~ [will] be dying to date someone as cute as you."

"Why do I have to date anyone at all?" Evie exhaled in exaggeration. She felt like pulling her hair out. Dee Dee and Raquel were talking like grand tias, deciding between themselves what was best for her [.] and she didn't want any of it. "It's like the both of you think that all I *need* is some boy to make things all better. Look at Sabrina. She was with Robert for, like, two years [.] and look what happened to her [.]?"

"You know, I just thought of something," Dee Dee said. "If you're not talking with [use to] Alex, who's going to take you to your party?"

"Dee Dee," Raquel looked over at her **in amazement**. "Didn't you just hear Evie? It's not like she's having some backwards friggin' quinceanera and she has to have some boy escort her."

"*Right*," Evie said. At least Raquel was getting it.

"I know," Dee Dee agreed. "But she can't be at her own party all by herself."

"She's not *going* to be by herself," Raquel said. "We'll be there. The three of us and Jumile and Beetle Juice and, who else, Evie?"

"*Cherry Bomb*," Evie smiled weakly. She was losing more and more confidence that [she] was going to get her party and her car, but it was comforting when Raquel took her side and supported her.

"Besides, you guys are acting like I'm never going to talk to Alex again," Evie added. "I mean, it's not like we broke up." It helped her to say that, ~~outloud~~. [out loud.] She and Alex did *not* break up. They were just on a time out. Big difference. "My party is still, like, three weeks away. Who knows what will happen between now and then."

"Right," Raquel agreed. "And we don't even know if your parents are gonna let you have the party. I mean, didn't your mom say you had to send out paper invites[?]. Shouldn't you be sending them out by now?"

"Yeah, I guess," Evie[s] mood dropped again. Well, Raquel *was* on a short roll there, for a while[.]

"And when is your drivng test?" Raquel asked.

"Next week," Evie answered. God, it seemed like Raquel was suddenly on her case.

"And you're all ready?" Dee Dee asked. "Right?"

"I think so," Evie said confidently, again, if only to convince herself. "I've been practicing with my dad and Lindsay for, like, the last month."

"And then you just gotta finish your horse credit. Speaking of which, how is that whipped ass Arturo doing?" Raquel asked.

"Has Josephina ~~[delete comma]~~ said anything about me?" Dee Dee asked.

"You mean, Horsa-phina?" Raquel took a drag of Dee Dee's Midnight Berry.

"She's such a Sangro in horse clothing. I panned that (one) the minute I met her."

"No," Evie answered Dee Dee. "She hasn't said anything, yet. But Arturo, he's tolerable. I mean, as far as bosses goes. (go.)"

Halics
~~To be honest~~, Arturo had become more than just tolerable. Evie was beginning to like him. Not in a romantic sense, far from it, but he seemed (a) genuinely good person, a *buena persona* as Lindsay would say. And, okay, she had to admit, he was easy on the eyes.

"What happened to your necklace?" Arturo asked when she showed up Wednesday to put in more hours at the reserve.

"My necklace?" Evie asked. She didn't think Arturo would notice something she wore.

"Yeah, the shell one," Arturo said.

"My boyfriend made it for me," Evie said. "And...I gave it back to him."

"Did you break up with him?" he asked.

Just a tad privado, don't you think, Turo?

"No, not really." Evie didn't feel like going into the details, especially with Arturo, who was in a solid steady relationship and wouldn't understand the ~~glum~~ [gloominess] she was feeling. It had been about four days since her argument with Alex and she missed him. She missed his good [night texts] and she missed the little conversations they'd have on their way to school. She kept rethinking over and over again ~~[delete in her mind]~~ in her mind what had gone wrong the night they were going to the de LaFuentes. ~~[Had]~~ Did she keep ~~[kept]~~ giving him annoying jabs? Was she trying to make him feel guilty? God, maybe she was a bitch.

"Not *really*?" Arturo asked. "You don't know if you two are broken up? Poor guy. I can relate."

"What do you mean, *poor* guy?" Evie asked. "You don't even know him."

"But I know all about the jeweled yo-yo."

"Huh?" Evie asked.

"When Josephina and I first started dating," Arturo started to explain. "I gave her a bracelet. It was a complete symbol of our exclusivity. Wasn't your necklace like that?"

"Yeah, I guess," Evie said. "I mean, yeah, it was."

"Exactly," Arturo said. "But every time Josephina would get mad at me, she would break up with me, which was like every other week, and then she would take the bracelet off and give it back. At first it used to piss me off, but then it all became so routine. We'd have a fight and she'd take off the bracelet. So, yes, I actually *can* relate to your boyfriend, or whatever you are calling him now."

"Well, I don't plan on asking for the necklace back," Evie **insisted**. "And I didn't break up with him, officially."

"Does he know that?" Arturo asked.

"I'm sure he does," Evie said. "I mean, I didn't say, 'Here's your necklace back, I never want to see you again'."

"Good," Arturo nodded. "There is nothing worse than a yo-yo relationship."

"I know that," Evie **agreed**. Although she had never really been in any [other relationship] kind of relationship, yo-yo or not.

When Evie got home from the reserve[,] she just wanted to just ~~[delete just]~~ give herself a break from typical INGing: myspac-ing, text-ing and IM-ing. She got some juice from the fridge and went into the den to just [delete just] chill and watch TV. But wouldn't you know it, Dee Dee called on the landline. Dee Dee ~~[hadn't gone]~~ didn't go gone to school[,] and Evie hadn't talked to her all day. Okay, a little catch-ING up would be in order.

"So, how are you feeling?" Evie asked. "When Raquel picked me up today[,] she said Graciela had called her mom and said you were sick."

"I'm not sick," Dee Dee said. "But I can see her saying that. God forbid anyone knows that she and my father allowed me to take a day off from school and go with Rocio to Cal State San Luis Obispo."

"Really?" Evie was surprised. Dee Dee would never miss school just to go on a trip. Even when she was a little girl and had been truly ill, Dee Dee would show up to

school with a mini package of tissue and Vic's Mentholated stinking something awful on her chest. "So you went to San Louie? To check out the school?"

"Speaking of Rocio," Dee Dee said. "That's the reason I called. I have to tell you something."

What, another dinner party?

"We talked on the drive back from San Louie," Dee Dee said. "And it looks like he doesn't want to go to college out here."

"Oh, no. Are you serious?" Evie asked. She knew Dee Dee must be bumming hard. She so wanted Rocio to be with her in California. She was surprised they weren't having an ER/RE! meeting.

"He doesn't want to leave D.F.," Dee Dee explained. "And I don't blame him, either. So," she cleared her throat. "I'm thinking I'll move back to Mexico... so I could be closer to him."

"*What?*" Evie laughed. "Dee Dee, you are *so* not moving back to Mexico City. You're crazy."

"No, I'm not," Dee Dee asserted. "I already talked to Graciela about it. She said I could stay with her family in Coyacan. That's where Frida used to live, with Diego."

"Yeah, I *know* that, Dee Dee." Evie felt irritated. "But wait, I don't understand. How can you just move back to D.F.? You just started at Villanueva. What about Las Patronas?"

"I know," Dee Dee sighed. "I feel really bad about *that*."

"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 ~~[delete and]~~ my decision is that I want to be closer to Rocio."

"**But Las Patronas is all you've been talking about,** ~~[delete comma]~~ 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 ~~[, who was left]~~ ~~[delete and she]~~ and 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 texted [text] Raquel with the emergency code of ER/RE! and waited all night to hear back from her.

This chapter she goes to a party with Raquel.

Chapter 18

- Michelle - there
might be changes
M document -
just follow
these...

"Hello?" Arturo waved his hand in front of Evie's face. "Anyone ~~there~~?"

"Oh, I'm sorry." Evie looked up ~~from space~~. ~~[this sentence is a little odd - I'd rephrase it?]~~ She was at the reserve, absentmindedly watering down the ground, ~~[delete comma]~~ to keep dust from kicking up. "I wasn't paying attention."

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 [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 his head in confusion. "Take the horses out. We're pretty much done here and I know your housekeeper doesn't come for another hour, ~~so~~ [delete and] and I was thinking we couldn't ~~could~~ 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 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 told 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.

"Cool," Arturo said. "We can take ~~Spinkles~~ Sprinkles and Panchito out 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." [earlier you said 1100]

"What?" Arturo asked. "What happened?"

"Nothing [Don't ask.]"

"Okay, I won't," Arturo took off his work gloves and went over to Panchito's stall. "If anything, we could both use a nice relaxing ~~[delete nice relaxing]~~ ride [down by instead of near] ~~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.

Can we talk?

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

"Evie!!" Arturo called out. "Come on, we're losing the sunset. There's ~~(2)~~ this great ridge to ~~[watch if from.]~~ see it."

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

Evie looked over Alex's text. What to do, what to do? She closed her phone ~~[delete shut]~~ 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 experience were allowed to ride or take out the horses. ~~[Delete off the reserve]~~ 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, just ~~[delete 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 approach, she did manage to get on top of him and not fall over to ~~[delete 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~~ ^{(flora =} and
plants, ~~fauna = animals~~ ^{fauna} and ~~animal life~~ ^{fauna} that ~~Eve~~ ^(Evie), shamefully, had never even

known existed. ~~never knew existed.~~

"Wow, this is *so* beautiful," Evie marveled over all the towering yucca plants, ~~and~~
[~~delete and~~] cacti[,] and little [~~delete little~~] jack rabbits ~~scurrying~~ scurrying across the dirt
path. "I can't believe I've lived so close to the river, [~~delete comma~~] 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[.]," [Q: italicize both words?]

Italics

"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 who does Josephina ride?"

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

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

"Yeah, I am," Arturo said casually. "I'm the one who takes Princesa out for exercise. Sometimes Josephina's father or brother will come and they'll [delete they'll] take her out, but that's about it. (I would have Evie comment on why she has a horse but doesn't do anything with it. Is it all for the looks/status?) He looked away and then 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 in the brochure of [use about] wild packs of river [delete river] coyotes.~~ "Man, something is *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."

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

"So," Arturo pulled his rein Arturo reined to the left, 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 in 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."

After that, neither Evie nor 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.

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"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?"

-So is this

"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?"

"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."

"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 that. You have them, you have them. You need to keep them in the stirrups. saddle's foot holster."

[Half an hour later] ~~A half hour later~~ Evie and Arturo returned to the reserve.

"Do you have to get going?" Arturo asked as he took the reins ~~from~~ ^{for} ~~[use for]~~ both horses.

^{suddenly felt regret regretful}
"Yeah," Evie ~~regretted slowly~~ ~~[Evie sounded regretful]~~. "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~~ ~~[coffee]~~ 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 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, looking [looking Evie right in the eyes.] 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~~ know Arturo," she said softly. She tried hard not to look into his eyes for fear that [he] 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~~ ~~[delete And]~~ before Evie knew it, he ~~[had]~~ lifted her chin towards his mouth and ~~[was kissing her]~~ ~~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, who gave short, but gentle ~~[delete commas]~~ kisses. Evie instantly felt that ~~[vaguely]~~ familiar light ~~[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]~~ so I just came by," Alex started. "Lindsay said you were still here ~~[and]~~ and I thought you'd need a ride home." He was speaking to Evie, but his eyes were on Arturo.

"Oh, yeah." Evie nervously pulled her hair forward and started towards him.