

"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 back up.

"Uh, *no*," Alex looked at her, puzzled. "We asked you to go to the party with us. You were totally 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 little date with Mondo."

"You know," Alex said. "You're acting like a **bitch**. Like how Raquel would always nag on Jose."

"A *bitch*?" Evie **snapped at him, her eyebrows practically rising off her forehead**. "Well, *you're* beginning to act like Jose. When you're not dribbling over big chested waitresses, you're acting like some **flakey lazy ass** Flojo. Who knows, maybe you're seeing Alejandra de los Santos behind my back."

"Hey," Alex pulled up in front of the de LaFuentes. He didn't 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 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.

why can't you ever plan on us to do something to get the?

Evie could not believe what was happening. Tonight was supposed to be such a **special** night, a make up night for the Saturday evening before. She looked up at Dee Dee's house. The Malibu lights on the front lawn showcased the de LaFuentes' three tier stone fountain. Water cascaded down to each each tier and Evie was reminded of the back patio at Koi, where water **had** trickled from the decorative bamboo chutes into the koi-filled pond. And now, here was *another* night that was going to be ruined because Alex was being so insensitive.

Evie was tired. She was tired of arguing with Alex. She was not going to see her point any time soon. She took a breath as 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 in the eyes, but rather at the necklace itself. 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. The Bose headphones? Ouch. "I *will*"

"Whatever," Alex leaned over and stuffed the necklace into his glove compartment. It looked so completely out of place crammed between his empty jewel cases 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."

That's a plan I can stick by!"

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?" She looked over ^{*Evie's*} her shoulder. "What's wrong? Where's Alejandro?"

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 no details as she recounted how Alex accused her of being a **bitch**, a nag, and a two-timing 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 flaky and sometimes he treats me like just a dude. **He's always calling me Gomez** 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 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 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. "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 talking smack about 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.

"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 wey!* They're already here!"

For a moment, Evie was so drowned in her own sorrows that she had forgotten the whole reason why she was at Dee Dee's. She sighed to herself. *heard a heavy* **She was now going to have to fake pleasantries the whole evening. She was not in the mood.**

Dee Dee waved her fingers in the air like 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 adorable** she looked. She was wearing a soft pink knee-length dress with a cream-colored tulle edge. Her blonde hair had been curled into ringlets *was* and moussed to perfection.

"Yes," Evie ~~m~~^{ans}Darlene~~ged~~ to smile. "You look beautiful. No, better than beautiful. You look just like...Darlenehi." *Anahi*

Anahi "Darlenehi?" Dee Dee's face lit up. There was no higher praise she could have received. She looked at herself in the bedroom mirror, placed her hand on her hip, and drew down her face, a total Darlenehi pose. "Really? You're not just saying that?"

“No,” Evie promised. “And yes, *really*.”

Darlenehi from RBD was Dee Dee’s favorite, favorite singer/actress/chica rubia in the whole wide world of telenovelas. Dee Dee idolized Darlenehi and RBD.

Evie watched Dee Dee continue to fuss 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 earlier had collected ^{into} in the outer corners of her eyes. There was no way she wanted to meet Rocio and his family 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 possessed every item that ~~Covergirl~~ **and Mac** could possibly carry.

“*Sientese*,” 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 mahogany 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 theraputic, to have her softly rub creams and lotion under her tired eyes.

“Drama should never drain the diva,” Dee Dee smiled proudly as she stepped back to admire her work. “*Bien. Mira.*” She stood back so Evie could look at herself in the vanity mirror. “Now you look more like Maria Dulce to my Darlenehi.”

Evie looked in the mirror. She thought, if anything with her dark hair, she resembled RBD’s Maite more than Maria Dulce. But either way, she would rather look like a Sweet Maria than a Weepy Evie.

When Dee Dee finally felt both girls were Rocio Ready, she led Evie down the stairs, where they were met by Rocio himself. He was waiting in the foyer. He *was* quite the **papi chulo**, 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 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 embarrassly covered her smile with her hand. “*Really?*”

“Yes,” Rocio’s eye’s widened as if she 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? Wait until she told Raquel. Oh wait, she couldn't. She glanced down at her hands, relieved that her hand job from Michael Kelley still looked good.

"*Muchas Gracias,* Rocio," Evie smiled. "I've heard so much about you."

"Good things, I hope," he smiled. "Or at least, not *too* scandalous."

Dee Dee looked over Rocio's shoulder and into the great room. "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 linked her other arm with Evie's. "I couldn't be *mas feliz*. My two favorite people *en el todo mundo!*"

As the three of them headed outside, Evie couldn'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 with another couple who were obviously Rocio's parents.

"Dela!" Rocio's mother stood up and held her hands out to Dee Dee. "Long time no see, *mi'ja*. We miss you in D.F." *Mstrito.*"

She wore a sleeveless black linen dress accented by a dramatic red silk *rebozo* 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 her.

"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 a love for D.F.," Dee Dee explained anxiously. "I really miss the night life. The U.S is nothing like Mexico, and California can be, *come se dice*, oppressor? 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? And what about the mural that was just **dedicated to Rhell Sun on ()** *San Street?* 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.

And That was pretty much the exchange between them and Evie for the rest of the evening and she was a bit relieved. Her eyes still throbbed like two enormous soggy tea bags **and she just felt so emotionally exhausted.**

She was the solo act among three sets of couples, and she quickly felt out of place. It also didn't help that

The night had already started with D.F. memories, social etiquette, and proper Mexico City Spanish, none of which were her strong points.

Dee Dee sat down next to Rocio on one of the rattan benches and Evie followed. 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, and it made Evie anxious. She was 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's father asked Rocio's father.

"We are getting along okay. Thank you," Senor Fontes replied.

Rocio's father had a slight build, like Rocio, and he also wore a sports jacket. Evie noticed that he had on *also* impeccably shined leather shoes. She looked over at Senora Fontes. She had on pricey looking leather shoes, *also*, ~~black~~ sling backs with a slim heel. *These* Thank God, Evie thought, that she didn't wear her flojos to dinner.

"We're getting used to the time change 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 ~~hand knit~~ ^{gulf} *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 pDarlenederia and he makes or *did* make pan, pan dulce *sin manteca*."

The eyebrows of Dos Fontes rose simultaneously and soon 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 hard that soon she started coughing. She quickly covered her mouth with a cloth napkin. Evie secretly hoped she would keep **the napkin there**.

"Now, Graciela. *Stop* it," Frank de LaFuente put his plate down on the glass table ^{top} 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 like 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 fabulously 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. *on her cell.*

“*Que te pasa?*” Marcela asked Evie. It was apparent that she was hiding out. Why would a guest, after all, be in a hot kitchen when she could be outside enjoying another balmy evening in California, helping herself to quince paste and manchengo cheese?

“Nothing,” Evie lied. Ever since she had been spending more time with Dee Dee, Evie 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 more contemporary chica insight than, say, the matronly madre judgement **given by** 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 from the waistband of her stonewashed jeans. 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 the a slab 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 and was looking over her French manicure. God, did *everyone* have *someone* in 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 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 that she had indulged in** 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 small 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 explDarlenetion 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-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 the lighting of a cigar. "Very admirable. I can respect that."

Evie looked at Rocio. He 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 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. **Was he moving to California to** attend an American business school or was he moving just to be with an American blonde? Either way, he was making plans, he was doing something to benefit both him and Dee Dee.

Evie opened her evening bag, discreetly checked her cell phone, and sighed. No text or message from Alex