

## Chapter 15

The following Saturday evening couldn't come fast enough for Evie. She had spent the whole week looking forward to going *out* with Alex. He had responded to her phone message with a text:

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Sat. Nite. ~~Cool~~ *No Prob.*

Smthin diff. ~~TTYL~~

"So, no surfing this weekend?" Alex had double-checked one last time with Evie on Friday afternoon as he was taking her to the reserve. "You sure 'bout that?"

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"I have to work all day tomorrow and then again on Sunday," she reminded him. "I really have only ~~Saturday~~ *tomorrow nite* evening free."

"Okay, but 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, cutie."

\* \* \* \* \*

By Saturday night, Evie had decided on her favorite halter, the satin one with the yellow and green swirls, and a three-tiered satiny skirt she had bought at Tilly's. She even made the bold decision against wearing flojos (*gasp*) and slipped on some

espadrilles (*sorta* satiny) that she'd borrowed from Dee Dee. Thanks to all the long hours at the reserve, Evie was losing her tan. She went to her bathroom and looked through her cabinet for some foundation. She <sup>gradually</sup> waited a darker cream. Maybe, Sabrina had something? <sup>or a bronzer.</sup>

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Evie went down the hall to Sabrina's room, but, like always, found the bedroom door closed.

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She was about to knock when she heard a sound, a muffled noise, coming from inside Sabrina's bedroom. Evie leaned closer. Was Sabrina crying? 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. Here, I'm surrounded by friggin' idiots."

Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. *Friggin' idiots?* Who was she talking about?

"No," Sabrina struggled to catch her breath. "I don't even talk to her. 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? Was Sabrina talking about her? No. She could *not* have heard 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 spoke sharply under her breath, "You are being very rude."

"But she's talking about me, us," Evie lowered her voice in protest.

"Evelina," Lindsay insisted. "Leave her alone."

Evie reluctantly moved away from Sabrina's door.

"I have to come into 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

Lindsay adjusted the box again. "~~Yes, she~~ wants to place the order first thing in the morning, and I'm going to be leaving soon. We have to do it now."

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"O ~~kay~~..." Evie ~~hesitantly~~ started back down the hall to her bedroom. There was no way she was going to argue with Lindsay. And God forbid, she ~~sounded~~ like a spoiled brat.

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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 went into her bathroom and walked past Lindsay, who was lining up the tile samples against the wall. ~~She~~ grabbed her make-up bag off the sink's counter and moved out of Lindsay's way.

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"And then I've been calling the landline," Raquel continued. "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 her shoulders. She was going to have to settle for the orangish brown <sup>offekings of</sup> ~~Sunburst~~ foundation.

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"What's wrong?" Raquel asked.

"Nothing," Evie tried to shake off the feeling. Sabrina's words stung something fierce. She smoothed the cream evenly across her ~~neck and shoulders~~ <sup>she</sup> "Raquel," ~~Evie~~ started. "Do you think I'm spoiled?"

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"What?" she asked. "Who said that? Alex?"

"No. Nobody." Evie lowered her voice again and looked over at Lindsay, but she wasn't even paying attention. In typical "Lindsay Knows Best" fashion, she just stood in the bathroom with a disapproving look on her face as she looked over the tile samples.

"Actually," Evie started. "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 *do* get a lot of stuff that you want."

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"*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 a year that there *is* actually going to be a February 29<sup>th</sup>?"

"It's really how you look at it," Raquel said. "I mean, of course, you should get the things you want. But 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?"

checklist. No VPL, *check*. No unsightly bulge of back fat, *check*. No bac- ... wait. Evie peered closer into the closet mirror and discovered a small, but still very noticeable, blemish. It was right below her left shoulder. Argh! The curse of mid-winter bacne! She instantly squeezed more **Sunburst** goop onto her finger and dabbed the offending violator. But the foundation now made *that* section of her ~~skin~~ look blotchy and uneven. She decided to ~~pull off her whole halter and~~ give herself a thorough application of cover up, but just as she pulled her halter off, her mother walked into her bedroom.

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"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."

It was less about Evie's modesty and more about the incriminating 'RxE' inked near her left breast. Last semester, she, Dee Dee and Raquel had La Ley Cee, a tattoo artist who eschews the "over 18" requirement and will ink anyone with enough of an idea and enough cash. She loved her little RxE in blue black ink near her heart, *it made her feel so in-Rio Estates, a bit secretly scandalous* but if Vicki Gomez ever found out 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.

*that concerned her.*

*in a secretive kind of way*

*was mother*

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"Hey," Raquel asked. "Did you get that fancy ass manicure for your date with Alex?"



Evie laughed. "Wow, Raquel. Thanks. I mean, that is so nice of you." She was touched by her offer. "But hopefully Grandma Chablis will come through and I won't have to put the *mordida* on you."

"Cool," Raquel said. "Well, just let me know."

"Okay," Evie ~~looked at herself in the closet mirror again~~. She was still a little taken by Raquel's offer. "I better go."

Deleted: got up from her bed.

"Lates," Raquel said. "Don't do anything I wouldn't ~~do myself~~ *do myself more of*"

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As she headed downstairs, ~~Evie~~ *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.

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But the minute ~~Evie~~ *she* saw Alex at the bottom of the stairs, her fantasy went from 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 a Saturday Night Hottie. He was in his usual tattered ~~camo 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~~ *she* stank from the ~~leftover medicinal smelling~~ sun block he must have slathered on earlier. Evie guessed that he must've still gone to Sea Street to catch that "oh so important" late afternoon swell.

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"Hey," Alex looked over Evie with a puzzled look on his face. "You're all dressed up."

"Yeah," Evie said. He hadn't said she looked nice, just dressed up. Was that supposed to be a compliment? And why did he look so puzzled?

What, 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 Veuve (her favorite) and pour it into two glass flutes that I brought with me because I had been planning this evening for a whole week. Then I will make a toast to our evening right before I 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 hung out, spent time *together*. I wanted to go out, *out*, remember?"

"What?" Mondo frowned. "No. It stands for 'Whaddya need?'" He ran his hand over his 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, I guess," Evie fastened her seat belt and couldn't help but smirk. "In Amsterdam."

"So," Mondo rubbed his hands together and leaned forward between Evie's and Alex's seats. "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.

She feigned an earnest 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 driveway. "So, you want sushi, Evie?"

*Not after Mondo's inexcusable one-liner.*

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"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 ~~termina~~"

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"*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 ~~verrrrr~~. 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 like he was balancing two imaginary cannon balls.

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Alex couldn't help but chuckle as he drove down Camino del Rio.

Evie shot him a look. "*Alex*."

"Oh, sorry, cutie," 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 everything that came out of Mondo's mouth just truly inappropriate?

\* \* \* \* \*

There was over an hour wait for a table at Koi.

"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' So Cal, everyone wears flip flops."

"Not during dinner hours," the host ~~shook~~ his head.

Evie looked around the restaurant. ~~Outside in the patio, a fire roared in a~~ stone fireplace stood and water trickled from decorative bamboo chutes into a kidney-shaped pond filled with bright orange and yellow koi fish. She noticed ~~that~~ the moon ~~was full~~, large with hues of soft yellow, pink, and beige. Evie couldn't stop thinking how much more romantic it would be to snuggle with Alex on one of the wicker love seats and just inhale the beauty, *alone*.

"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.

"Sushi is sushi," Alex shrugged his shoulders apologetically. "We can come here another time, Evie. Promise."

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Alex sat between Evie and Mondo at the counter at Otani's. 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 ~~vermin~~ and were made up more of aging surf ~~veteranos~~ and leather skinned longshoremen. Both groups, Evie noticed, wore tattooed sleeves depicting their life ~~(or battles?)~~ with the Pacific.

Otani's was cheap eating, and you could fill up if you had a little cash ~~Cash~~. Otani's did not take credit cards, and Alex had forgotten his wallet and only had three bucks on him. Evie's pride refused to let her offer any ~~of the twenty bucks she had on her~~ towards the meal. 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 were seeing them for the first time.

"What's up with your skin, ~~is?~~" he asked ~~her~~.

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."

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"Bronzer?" Mondo looked confused. "For what? It's getting all over your satiny shirt."

~~"It's not a shirt," Evie said. "It's a halter."~~

that

~~"Well, whatever it is, you better be careful. You're getting crap all over it."~~

Mondo said:

"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 Styrofoam cup with his straw. "I thought I'd need it, but I'm okay."

"Do you mind if I wear it?" Evie asked.

shirts

"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 sharp look, but before doing so, Evie noticed that

Alex did take a quick glance over towards the women.

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"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 courted the shrimp tails on her plate with the end of his wooden chopstick. "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 after he finally had stopped courting 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," Evie said as her stomach growled. Hmm, maybe pride wasn't such an honorable thing. *Time to use her twenty?*

"But maybe, if you really want to go," *she started to tell Mondo* "We could drop you off." She looked over at Alex's Nixon. It was only 10 p.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."

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"But Evie, 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 pack of cigarette. "So he says."

"Alex," Evie leaned 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 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 in the same room with Jose?

Both Evie and Mondo waited for an answer from Alex as he continued chewing 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." *He looked at Evie. "I'm easy."*

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At about halfpast 11 p.m., Evie returned home. Her so-called date with Alex was officially over, and *she* ~~Evie~~ was dropped off one full hour before her 12:30 a.m. curfew. No such thing had ever, ever, happened during the so-called best years of Evie Gomez's 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 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 a flakey hornito *and a* pumpkin empanada that her father had brought home. *She was staring* "So, what are you doing home on a *me me* Saturday night?" she asked. "No Hermana *group hug*?"

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"I have a brunch tomorrow," Dee Dee said. "With some of the other Hermana 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 Hermana get-together was an informal meet and greet and after that, the second get-together was more of mixer." Dee Dee took a breath. "Oye, have you seen Josephina? Has she said anything about me?"

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

"No, *Dee Dee*," Evie said. "I told you, she never talks about *anything*. She just *asks* things. The girl talks in question marks. But 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 away from his house 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 16

"Go-mez." Alex threw Evie a sideways glance as they drove to school together.

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"How long you gonna beef with me?"

It was Monday morning and Evie was still feeling tender from the Saturday date fiasco with Alex,

"I'm not beefing," Evie tried to answer casually, but it was no use. <sup>faking it.</sup> He hadn't even <sup>his</sup> <sup>that</sup> <sup>Aux</sup> apologized. Unless, that is, you counted <sup>the</sup> text message she received the morning after. <sup>their not out.</sup>

Mrng Gomez. Cool prty

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Srry u mssd it. TTYL

His text was less of an apology and more of an observation. So he went to a "cool party" and he was "sorry she missed it"? BFD. She couldn't hide her aggravation from <sup>Alex</sup> him and had remained silent for pretty much the whole drive. She kept her arms crossed over her chest and didn't add anything to his comments except an occasional mild "uh, huh" to something he'd said.

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

"But you can control whether or not he comes with us on a date," Evie refused to look at him and instead looked out her window and focused on the fascinating scenery -- oil derricks and lemon groves that lined Highway 33 into Ojai.

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"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 wanted to do something *different*. To me, hanging out with you and Mondo is different. You're my two favorite buds."

"That's just it, Alex," Evie said. "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're a couple? You're not trying to change me are you? Like mold me into a little version of what you think is ideal?"

"What? Of course not."

Evie didn't want him to change. She liked Alex for who he was and what he was about. And that was the reason why she thought he would make a great boyfriend, *her* boyfriend. So why wouldn't he act like it?

"I don't get it, Evie," Alex continued. "Sometimes I don't get you."

Evie discreetly glanced over at Alex and studied the outline of his profile. How could she have *not* have noticed how cute he was when they were just Flojo friends? When she had started Villanueva and had been introduced to him, he had a wide medical bandage adhered across the bridge of his nose. He also had cotton splints stuffed up his nostrils. Evie had figured that he was just like the other vanity plates at Villanueva and that he had also gotten a nose job. It wasn't until later that she learned that the bandages were from a surfing accident -- some newbie's foamboard had flung up right into his face and had shattered his nose and cheekbones. He was supposed to have kept the bandages and splints for at least 1 ½ weeks after his surgery, but upon hearing that some south westerly swell was coming in at the Sea Street break, Alex yanked the splints out himself, right in the school's parking lot. He just *had* to catch that swell. The yanking act alone made Evie think he was just about the coolest guy. And cool guys can make cool boyfriends, *right?* But why, she wondered, couldn't he be cool enough and just tell

*no?*

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Mondo that his company was not wanted on their dates? Evie studied Alex's profile more. Sigh. He was quite handsome.

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"I'm sorry, Alex," Evie 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 Monte Carlo 76 on his iPod.

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They pulled into Villanueva, and before Evie hadn't even gotten out of Alex's truck she received a text from Dee Dee.

Rocio Here! OMG.

Lts to tell!

Dee Dee was *so* excited about having Rocio in Rio Estates and she wanted to do a girl's only lunch off campus to tell Evie and Raquel all about him. As if the both of them hadn't heard enough about him already. But Evie figured it would be a good breather from Alex. Eating lunch apart might give them time to think. She texted him by the start of first period.

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Goin to O-hi w/

the grls 4 Inch.

To which he responded:

No prob

Of course she read more into his two-word text. *Much* more. ‘No prob’ as in ‘No problem. I really don’t care what 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, perhaps over Evie? It took everything in her power not to follow up with a response. During class, she found herself checking her cell just to re-read the two words and see if she could figure out their deeper meaning. Evie looked around the classroom, wishing she had either Dee Dee or Raquel in civics to help her decipher <sup>the</sup> his cryptic text. Who, she scanned the ~~classroom~~, could she trust with such personal information? Absolutely no one. For one thing, the timing was bad. It would so not be good PR for Evie to be hosting the coolest party of the year yet not able to be cool with her <sup>own</sup> man. People would definitely talk. She snapped her cell shut. She just would *not* think about it. But four minutes later, Evie was going crazy. She opened her cell again.

“Hey,” she leaned over to September Valdez, who sat next her. September was a senior and had had many boyfriends during her reign at Villanueva, she was also the vice president of Villanueva’s Senior Sleuth’s Book Club, so she *knew* how to read between the lines. “What do you think this means?” Evie showed her Alex’s message.

“Who sent it?” September took Evie’s cell and propped it up inside her civics book, assuming that Vasquez-Reyes Alarcon didn’t have X ray vision. She studied the text.

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"Alex sent it," Evie whispered from the side of her mouth. She kept her eyes focused on Vaquez. The last thing she wanted was 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 glumly answered.

"No smiley face or heart," September looked it over and shook her head.

"Hmmm...it doesn't look good." She handed the phone back to Evie as soon as Vasquez Reyes-Alarcon turned his back to face the dry board. Evie turned her phone off and felt her stomach sink. Yup, September knew what she was talking about.

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Party

\* \* \* \* \*

"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, from the backseat.

"Yes, and it was unbearable," Dee Dee cranked up Rebelde on her iPod. "I haven't seen him in over four months, and I just wanted to sneak in the guest room and 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 immediately turned the volume down, way down.

She hated Rebelde. "If I had some fine ass *papi chulo*, as you claim he is, under my roof,

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Rebelde  
V2 B D

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 turned up the volume and gave Raquel a look. "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."

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"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 girl stink behind."

"You've obviously done this before," Evie said.

"You could say that," Raquel ~~fac~~ed Evie ~~with a sly grin.~~

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"You know, Eves," she started, "I think it was pretty shitty how Alex treated you Saturday night. I mean, I don't know, maybe you need to teach him a lesson, like light some fire under his ass."

"And how would I do that?" Evie asked.

"You should go out with some other dude," Raquel said. "Just for kicks."

"Raquel," Evie said. "I am *not* going to do something like that. That is *so* not me."

"Well, you never know..." Raquel said. ~~"But I do."~~

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"Didn't you say that Rocio was gonna look into Stanford?" Evie asked Dee Dee. Evie really didn't care where Rocio went to college, but she just didn't want to talk about Alex anymore.

"Yeah," Dee Dee lit up a Midnight Berry at the first stoplight they came to. "In fact, he should talk with Sabrina. She would be the perfect person to talk with."

## Chapter 17

O-hi Frostie was literally the last burger stand still standing on the downtown's main drag. Unlike the majority of new eateries that had overtaken the area, it offered outdoor dining without pretentious heat lamps, multiple page menus, or linen napkins. A handwritten menu board hung above the order window, and if it got too cold outside, you ate inside. And as far tableware went? No forks, spoons or knives. Only parchment thin paper napkins were offered to wipe off the thick grease their burgers left behind. By the time Dee Dee pulled up, O-hi Frostie's wooden picnic tables were already overtaken by backpacks and skateboards, courtesy of nearby Vista Sierra public high school students.

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"Ew," Dee Dee looked them over. "*Vista Sierra.*"

Evie looked at Dee Dee in surprise. Such private school snootiness was unlike her.

"So when do we get to meet Rocio?" Raquel asked Dee Dee as they all got in line to order.

"Definitely at Evie's party," Dee Dee pulled up her sunglasses and studied the menu. Evie wondered why she even bothered to look the menu. The three of them always got the same thing: A gauc dog, which, of course, was a grilled Jodie Maroni hot dog smeared with thick guacamole and wrapped in a flour tortilla, and one large chocolate frostie each.

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"Wait, Evie's *party*?" Raquel balked. "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."

As they all stood in line, two boys, both dressed in low rise, super tight black jeans and scrappy skater T's, 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.

"Uh, yes," Raquel suddenly took over and leaned over Evie. "It is. You can buy an invite if you want. We have a few left. Fifty bucks each. *Cash*."

"Fifty bucks?" The boy with eyeliner asked. He looked back at his three other friends, similarly garbed skaters boys, who were sitting on one of the picnic tables.

"Yeah, we ain't talking entry to some skatepark," Raquel looked over at his friends. "This is the *panchanga* of the year."

"No, it's just I gotta just tell my other friends," he said. He went back over to the picnic table.

As he left, his friend stayed in line with Evie, Dee Dee, and Raquel. He crossed his arms and checked out Dee Dee. It never failed. No matter what set a boy was with, Dee Dee was *always* checked out.

"Are you *all* gonna be there?"

Evie looked down, she was used to feeling invisible when blonde and blue eyed  
Dee Dee was near. Dee Dee never went near the beach, let alone got in the ocean, yet  
everyone always claimed that she had the classic "California Girl Look".

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"Of course, we're *all* gonna be there," Raquel said. "And what about you guys?"  
She looked over at the guy with eyeliner. "Will Jared be in attendance?"

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"Who?" The kid looked back at his friends. "Stevie? Yeah, he'll be coming."

Raquel smiled and whispered to Evie, "In more ways than one."

"Raquel!" Evie covered her face in embarrassment.

"Yeah," Raquel put her arm around Evie. "My girl here, her boy's been slacking  
off, so you guys make sure you show some love to the birthday girl."

"Raquel!" Evie even got more embarrassed.

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embarrassment

"There's gonna be booze, right?" the kid asked. He could care less about deadbeat  
boyfriends.

"We ain't charging fifty bucks for Hawaiian punch." Raquel frowned. She took  
her arm off Evie. "Of course, there's gonna be booze. Haven't you heard? It's an *open*  
bar. Why do you think I just said it's gonna be the party of the year?"

"Okay," The boy <sup>tagged by Raquel</sup> ~~known as~~ Jared Leto came back with a wad of crumpled  
twenties. "How about one thirty for all four of us?"

Evie looked at Raquel and Raquel looked back at her. Dee Dee rolled her eyes  
and went back to looking up at the menu board.

"Sold!" Raquel grabbed the money from Jared's hands.

"So, don't we get a receipt or something?" the other boy asked.

“You want a receipt?” Raquel looked at them. She pulled out a small slip of white paper from her wallet and wrote: “Good for Four Entries.” She blotted her lips on the paper, leaving a deep, dark red smack print. “How’s *that*?”

“Cool.” The kid took the paper, not terribly impressed. Both boys went back to the picnic table to join their friends.

Dee Dee pulled Evie aside and looked over towards the boys. “Evie, you do *not* want those guys coming to your sixteenera. They’re going to expect a lot for all that money.”

“Oh, they’re harmless,” Raquel said as she counted the bills. She glanced over at the boy with eyeliner. “And that Jared Leto one is *fine*. Besides, if they show up at all, they’ll probably all be so lit that they won’t even remember any of this transaction.”

Raquel gave Evie the money and went back to looking up at the menu board. “Lunch is on you, Eves.”

car. But it was just dinner, a dinner party, at the de LaFuentes. Cool enough. Very adult-like. “We’ll definitely come,” Evie said. “Sounds swanky.”

**Deleted:** I can’t wait.”

“But one thing,” Dee Dee added. “You can’t tell Raquel.”

“Huh? Why?”

“It’s not like I’m keeping something from her, to be mean or anything. 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 sometimes 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. She didn’t like keeping things between the three of them. “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 do expect from her anymore.”

It was true. Davey Mitchell had passed Raquel’s two-week mark. They had been going out for nearly a full month, and neither Dee Dee nor Evie had even been introduced to him. *That* was very telling. **a**

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**Deleted:** All Evie knew about him was that he drove a big white truck with tinted window, and on the days that Raquel didn’t drive to school, he would pick her up from Villanueva and whisk her away to who knows where.

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“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 d-dialing my cell. She called on the landline, 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?" 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 d-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 still felt a bit deceitful. "I mean, I won't."

"Don't even mention it to your mother," Dee Dee said. "She might say something to Raquel's mother and, you know."

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"Oh, don't worry," Evie assured Dee Dee before hanging up. "I definitely won't tell my mother your dinner party. Promise"

"What party?"

It was Evie's mother and she was standing in the doorway of Evie's room. Keeping dinner plans on the D.L. might become quite a chore when all parties involved lived within the residential tract of a gated community and had ears as big as Vicki Gomez.

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"Mom, you were so not listening to my conversation!" Evie was furious.

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"I was not listening in," her mother said. "I'm just bringing this in." She held up Evie's student driving manual. "You left it in Lindsay's car." She put it on the dresser and then continued to stand, aimlessly, in Evie's room. "So who's having a dinner party?"

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"I promised Dee Dee that I wouldn't say anything." Evie couldn't believe that her mother could be such a butt-inski, but worse, she couldn't believe how loose her own lips could get.

"Frank and Graciela are throwing a dinner?" Her mother sat down, uninvited, on Evie's bright orange canvas butterfly chair. "I saw Graciela at Pilates the other night and she didn't mention anything to me."

Graciela? Pilates? Ew. Now that was a union Evie never wanted to see.

"It's not really a party," Evie tried to explain, "It's just a little get together for Rocio and his parents."

"Well, whatever they are calling it I would think that after the brunch that I threw for them that Frank would want to return the gesture," her mother said, "Something like this would never have happened if Margaret were still alive."

Evie couldn't believe her mother was comparing Margaret, Dee Dee's dear belated mother, to Frank de LaFuentes new wife, Graciela. Her mother's cattiness belonged less in her bedroom and more near Alejandra de los Santos' scratching post.

"Mom," Evie started. "It's not even about or for the parents. I'm just going for support. For Dee Dee."

"Sure, but why wouldn't Frank or Graciela invite your father and me to even that?"

"Mom, it's really not an adult thing." Was Evie really having this conversation with her mother?

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Chapter 19¶

"I still don't understand," Evie's mother started when Evie mentioned the dinner as Evie was leaving for school the next morning. "Why wouldn't Frank or Graciela invite your father and me to their party?" ¶  
Dee Dee had perhaps forgotten that keeping dinner plans on the D.L. might become quite a chore when all parties involved lived within the residential tract of a gated community.

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“You know, Evie,” her mother started in a tone that Evie knew indicated that she had an idea. And it would probably be a lousy one. “Why don’t you take Sabrina with you to the dinner?”

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“What?” Evie looked at her mother. The last thing she wanted was money or Sabrina barging in on her date with Alex. “Why would I take her?”

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“Because it would be a nice thing to do,” her mother said. “Dee Dee and Sabrina have everything under the sun in common. Sabrina was a Hermana, and now Dee Dee is going to be one, too.”

“We don’t know that yet,” Evie found herself feeling oddly jealous. What was so great about being a Hermana anyway? Was Dee Dee so desperate to have a sister for two in her life? If so, she could have Sabrina, that’s for sure. “Dee Dee still has to be nominated.”

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“Oh, Dee Dee’s a doll,” Vicki Gomez waved her hand aside. “Of course, she’ll be nominated. Also, didn’t you say that Rocio will be attending Stanford?”

“It’s Rocio,” Evie corrected her mother. “And I didn’t say he was attending Stanford, I said he was going to look into it. Checking out a school is much different than attending one.”

“I know that, Evie,” her 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, and I’m feeling a lot of pressure Evie.”

She's feeling pressure?

"Mom, I've got it under control," Her mother was getting under her skin and

~~Fortunately, the land line rang again.~~

~~her mother~~  
"I hope you got it under control, Evie," Vicki Gomez said as she reached for the phone before Evie. "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."

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## Chapter 20

“You look really nice,” Evie told Alex as they drove to the de LaFuentes house.

She was feeling the brown cords and cream-colored dress shirt that he was wearing. And she loved that he had surrendered his standard “bin special” flojos for the evening. He had on actual shoes, black canvas Winos. Too cholo cute. *in a cholo kind of way.*

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Yes, the dinner party at the de LaFuentes was perfect for mending the friction between her 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 dinner, a dinner date, and he had dressed up. He had *planned* to look nice for her.

“Thanks,” Alex looked over at her and smiled. “You do a good job cleaning up yourself, Gomez.”

Evie put up the armrest and snuggled close to Alex. So far, so good. She could even look over being called Gomez.

“You know what,” Alex lowered the volume on his iPod. “I haven’t been to Dee Dee’s since last semester. 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?”

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Evie grimaced. “Ugh. How could I forget? I showed up thinking it would be just you, me, and Dee Dee, and you’re, like, in the swimming pool, drooling all over Xiamora.”

“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 tight 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 *Koi.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.

“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 leaned over and turned down Monte Carlo 76.

“What, that I wanted to go out, alone, with my own boyfriend for once?”



"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 supposed to be your girlfriend, sometimes I wanna be treated like it."

"So, what, I treat you like crap or something?" he 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 possibly be so clueless? "Like you flake on me, a *lot*, and —"

"I don't flake," Alex interrupted. He leaned over and turned up the music.

"Maybe I change my mind or my plans change, but I never just don't show up. I never just leave you hanging."

"So you think you didn't leave me hanging that night at Otani's?" Evie raised her voice, if only to talk over MC76 that Alex had so rudely turned back up.

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“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 me 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 lazy ass Flojo. Why can’t you ever plan something for us to do? All you wanna do is surf 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 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 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 night for the Saturday evening before. She looked up at Dee

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Dee's house. The Malibu lights on the front lawn showcased the de LaFuentes' three tier stone fountain. Water cascaded down to 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 ~~felt~~ tired. She was tired of arguing with Alex. ~~Is this what is was like to go out with someone? Always in the mode of arguing, defending and accusing? She was not into it.~~ 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."

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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 headphones? I gave those to you, too."

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“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 ~~completely~~ out of place crammed between his empty jewel cases and miscellaneous paper trash. “If that’s what you want...time off. Now, that’s a *plan* that I wish *I* had thought of!”

Evie got out of his truck and slammed the door. “Well, let’s see how long you ~~plan to~~ carry it out!”

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## Chapter 21

When Evie showed up in 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 <sup>Evie's</sup> ~~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--how Alex had accused her of being a bitch, a nag, and a two-timing best friend.

"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 his

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texts. He always says "talk to you later." Why doesn't he ever want to talk to me *soon?*, 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 Hermana?"

"Uh, huh, *claro.*" Dee Dee moved in closer to Evie, perhaps hoping that she had the inner scoop about her potential Hermana-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 not 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 way! They're already here!"

Evie was so drowned in her own sorrows that she had forgotten the whole reason why she was at Dee Dee's. She heaved a heavy sigh. She was not in the mood to spend the entire evening faking pleasantness.

**Deleted:** pretending like she was in a good 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?" *do I?*

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 and moussed to perfection.

"Yes," Evie managed to smile. "You look beautiful. No, better than beautiful. You look just like... *Evie looked around the Dee Dee's bedroom walls.* Anahi."

"*Anahi?*" Dee Dee's face lit up. There was no higher praise. She looked at herself in the bedroom mirror, placed her hand on her hip, and drew down her face, a 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 telenovelas. Dee Dee idolized Anahi 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. The three coats of mascara she had applied earlier had collected 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 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, pencils, and a concealer airbrush on her mahogany vanity table. It reminded Evie of being at the dentist office where Dr. Mizraji, lined up every shiny, important looking instrument on the dental tray, ready to tackle any problem.

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Dee Dee stared at Evie’s face. “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. It felt soothing, almost theraputic, to have her softly rub creams and lotions 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 stepped back to let Evie look at herself in the vanity mirror. “Now you look more like Maria Dulce to my Anahi.” , ho?

Evie looked in the mirror. She thought she resembled RBD’s Maite more than Maria Dulce, what with her dark hair and all. 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. He looked just like the pictures Evie had seen of him with Dee Dee in Mexico City. He had a slight build and seemingly freshly cut hair. His eyes were very dark and intense 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 look cosmopolitan and mature. Evie had seen boys dress similarly, but only in the fashion magazines that Dee Dee had laying around her room, never in person.

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"Dela," Rocio smiled as he took her hand and helped her with the last step. "*Te ves muy hermosa.*"

"Oh," Dee Dee covered her ~~smile~~ embarrassed 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?*"

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"*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 intact.

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

"Good things, I hope," he smiled. "Or at least, interesting."

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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.' She felt a bit ashamed, as though being at this dinner party was betraying Raquel. But, <sup>she</sup> Evie had to admit, Raquel *had* been getting a little crazy with her party patterns. Then again, they all got a little scandalous in their own way. *Were* there levels of acceptable craziness? Last year had been a pretty wild semester and, Evie wondered, would she have been invited to the special dinner with fancy pants Mexicans if she still had her choppy blue hair?

Dee Dee's parents, Frank and Graciela, were out in the backyard, under the large palapa lounging area with another couple that 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 <sup>el</sup> Distrito."

She wore a sleeveless black linen dress suit, accented by a dramatic red raw 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 Sea Street? Where was all this coming from? 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 only exchange between them and Evie for the rest of the evening, and she was a bit relieved. The night seemed to be all about cosmopolitan culture, proper social etiquette, and correctly pronounced Spanish, none of which were her strong points. Besides, her eyes throbbed like two enormous soggy tea bags, and she just felt *so* exhausted.

Dee Dee sat down next to Rocio on one of the rattan benches, and Evie followed. She watched Rocio and Dee Dee and couldn’t help but notice how perfect they seemed

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together -- Rocio practically finished Dee Dee's sentences and Dee Dee advised Marcela on what to keep out of Rocio's pasta (peppers, pine-nuts). 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 was wearing impeccably shined leather shoes. She looked over at Senora Fontes. She had on pricey looking leather shoes, too -- black sling backs with a slim heel. Thank *God* Evie hadn't worn wear her flojos to dinner!

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"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 silk 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 mentioned, 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 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 that the napkin would stay put.

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"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 more like an ugly American trying to overtake the culinary art of authentic Mexican baking? *good*

"*Right*," Dee Dee shook her head with a pronounced nod. "And *I* liked it. I couldn't even tell the difference, that much."

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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. *she* ~~Evie~~ pulled out a kitchen stool and sat down to check for cell phone messages. There were none.

"*Que te pasa?*" Marcela asked Evie. It was apparent that she was hiding out. After all, why would a guest be in a hot kitchen when she could be outside enjoying a balmy evening outside?

"Nothing," Evie lied. Ever since she had been spending more time with Dee Dee, *she* ~~Evie~~ had gotten to know Marcela better. Marcela was a lot younger than Lindsay, almost thirty years to Lindsay's sixty. Evie sometimes felt Marecela's contemporary chica

insight was more helpful than Lindsay's matronly madre judgment. "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 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 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--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.

Thankfully each slab looked perfectly intact. *Whew*. Evie had done a good job with the cutting. No one would suspect that she had indulged in therapeutic snacking.

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“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 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-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 over 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. Rocio was also moving away from his family and home to follow a dream, whatever that dream was. Was he moving to California to attend an American business school, or was he moving to California to attend to his American

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girlfriend? 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

## **Chapter 22**

The first thing Evie did on Monday morning at school was return ~~her beloved~~ Bose headphones to Alex. She decided to leave them in his locker with no note, no explanation, no *nada*.

It was two days since their fight and ~~he~~ still hadn't called or texted ~~her and~~ she wasn't about to phone or text him either. After all, he was the one who had left her hanging at the de LaFuentes dinner party. If anyone deserved an apology, she did.

"I can't *believe* he wants your headphones back." Raquel leaned against the lockers. "What an asshole. Weren't they like a gift?"

"Yeah," Evie placed the headphones under his grey and white Senor Lopez pullover. She looked at the pullover and felt slightly deflated. They both used to wear their pullovers together on cold mornings at Sea Street. "He's just being a jerk," she 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 could plant some lawn and then call the school, anonymously. Friend or not, I ain't got no loyalty when it comes to some dude messing with my girl."

"Raquel, *no*." Evie slammed his locker door shut. "He's not that big of a jerk. Besides, he has the combination to my locker and who knows? He might be talked into retaliation via Mondo."

"Yeah," Raquel reluctantly agreed. "He ain't worth it anyway. It's a good thing you don't have any classes with him. That would be a major drag. I remember with Jose, I'd have to see his ugly mug in Spanish and then his skinny white ass legs in P.E. That's why I now *refuse* to date anyone who goes to the same school."

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“Or someone who even *went* to school,” Evie found herself teasing.

“Excuse me?” Raquel cocked one eyebrow. “You know, if I wasn’t such a caring ADA, 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 for their first period classes. “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 Flojo or not, I won’t give up wearing my flip flops.”

“I know, neither can I,” Raquel looked down at her own jewel encrusted flojos. Two of the green swarovski gems had fallen off. “You know what?” Raquel started. “I say we skip the rest of the day and head on down to L.A. Let’s go shopping. I could use some new flojos.”

“Nuh, uh, no way,” Evie turned the corner, towards first period. As good as a shop day in Los, sounded, she couldn’t afford to skip class and get in trouble. Her party depended on her being the perfect student. “If I get caught ditching my - .”

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“I promise, you won’t get caught,” Raquel said confidently.

“How you gonna promise that?” Evie asked.

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Raquel opened her binder and flaunted a wad of slips. They were official Villanueva slips, sheets of 3 x 5 <sup>white</sup> thin paper for every excusable reason to be out of school: Off campus slips, tardy slips, absentee slips, and they were all signed, seemingly, by Headmaster Covarrubias.

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“How did you get those?” Evie couldn’t believe what she was seeing.

"I've got my connections," Raquel bragged as she pulled down her Utopia Cop Out sunglasses and shut her binder. "Come on, let's go find Dee Dee and get out of here."

\* \* \* \* \*

Dee Dee found a parking space for Jumile right in front of Decade on Robertson Boulevard. Dee Dee had suggested they shop at Fred Segal, and Raquel had wanted to go to Mud D., both on Roberston, but Evie was the one who needed to mend her heart and buy a new necklace. Her naked neck announced to everyone that she was Alex-less and she wanted that to change. She had first dibs on where they shopped and she picked Decade.

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"You are so much better without him," Raquel insisted as she got out of Jumile with Evie and Dee Dee "Alex is such a punk ass. I told you how he was at that party, right? The one on Hemlock?"

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"Yeah, you did tell me about that party," Evie told Raquel. She didn't want to hear about that night all over again.

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Evie She hit the buzzer near the front glass doors of Decade and a clerk inside the shop let the three girls in. As soon as they entered, they were all sent back in time via the shop's exquisite interior -- polished blonde wood floors, zebra skin throw rugs, and space-age swag lamps hanging from the ceiling created a sophisticated glamorous mood that you just didn't find, at say, Forever 21. Decade on Robertson supposedly had an

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ample inventory of designer vintage couture <sup>w/ ample prices</sup> and ~~prices right out of Evie's price range,~~

but she had seen enough red carpet poses to learn that a lot of her favorite stars shopped at Decade. It would be fun to browse and a little retail therapy would definitely get her mind off Alex.

"Yeah, so there I was," Raquel went on anyway as she followed Evie and Dee Dee into the shop. "Just kicking back, blazing some one hitters with some new friends, and here comes Jose, with Mondo and Alex. They don't even know any of the Bard Boys. I mean, *I* know the Bard crew, but they were acting as if 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.

"Welcome to Decade," a tall, slender salesclerk <sup>Sand.</sup> with long hair and in a long sleeved shirt and vintage silk ascot looked over at the three girls. He was helping a woman with the plumage on a felt hat. "I'll be right with you."

"Oh, thanks," Evie smiled at him and pulled the hood of her <sup>Yellow Roxy Sweet hoodie</sup> Senor Lopez off her head. She immediately wished she had dressed nicer. She stood out like a sore beach bum.

"You know Evie," Raquel looked through the heavy bracelets arranged on a flesh colored mannequin's arm. "You need a man. 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."

Evie looked over the simple but elegant dresses. There were only about ten dresses one each display rack, a sign that they were most definitely out of Evie's price

range. She carefully pulled out a short, black, strapless dress and glanced at the price tag. Ew, so many zeros for such a little amount fabric! Evie immediately put the dress back.

"I am *not* going out with some Bard Boy," she told Raquel. "There is *no* way in hell."

"Oh, *my*." Raquel pulled her sunglasses half way down and peered at Evie. She put on a southern accent and poised her hand on her chest. "Well, ess-cuse *me*... Muss Evie. I do declare I over spoke."

"Evie needs a gentleman, a *caballero*, right, Evie?" Dee Dee took down a quilted metallic bag from one of the glass shelves. Each shelf had only four or five handbags on display, totally unlike Tilly's where the totes were crammed on racks near the boogie boards and vintage rock Ts. DeeDee placed the chain strap over her shoulder and looked at herself in one of the oval full-length mirrors. "You know, as soon as Rocio moves out here, I'm sure he'll make lots of new acquaintances who will be dying to date someone as cute as you"

"Why do I have to date anyone at all?" Evie exhaled, 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," she told them. "Look at Sabrina. She was with Robert for, like, two years and he was, like, perfect for her, but look what happened to her."

"You know, I just thought of something," Dee Dee added as she continued to look at herself with the bag. "If you're not talking to Alex, who's going to take you to your party?"

**Deleted:** She felt like pulling her hair out.

"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 where she was coming from.

"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, and we'll be so loaded from freebie ad bevs who cares if Alex is there or not?"

"Yeah," Evie said. "Besides, you guys are acting like I'm never going to talk to Alex again," "I mean, it's not like we officially broke up." It helped her to say it out loud. She and Alex did *not* break up. They were just on a time out. *Big* difference. "Besides, it's not like my party's tomorrow. Who knows what will happen between now and then."

"Yeah, but you did give him back his necklace," ~~Dee Dee~~ said

Deleted: Raquel

~~"And the Bose headphones," Raquel added. "Besides, we don't even know if your~~  
parents are gonna let you have the party."

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"Right," Evie's mood dropped again. Her quality check was coming out in ~~a little~~ *less than* ~~over a week~~ and she had yet to check in on her hours or get Dee Dee to start on her essay.

Evie shook her head ~~as if she could shake off the worry.~~ No, she was not going to stress about her party right now. She was going to have fun.

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The salesclerk finished helping the other customer and came up to Evie. ~~She had~~ *as she* just pulled out another dress, ~~a~~ Chanel. "Would you like to try that on?" he asked.

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"Um," Evie glanced at the price tag. It was a little *too* couture, even for fun's sake. Knowing her luck, she'd snag the fabric or break the zipper and she'd have to pay

for the damages. After the fender bender, she couldn't afford any more avoidable accidents. "I don't think so. It doesn't look like my size."

"You can't go by label sizes with vintage couture," the clerk said. "You just have to feel if the dress works or not."

"Feel?"

"Yes." He looked over Evie. "We have quite a large collection of petite sizes."

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"What are you looking for?"

"Um, I don't really know," Evie said. She really was just looking to have fun

"Something fancy," Dee Dee said

"Anything rock star-like?" Raquel asked.

"We do have a few Ossie Clark pieces," the clerk said. "Why don't I set you up in a dressing room and I can bring a few pieces out from our gallery?"

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Collection? Pieces? Gallery? Evie thought they were looking at clothes, not bidding for art.

"Yeah, bring some out," Raquel answered for Evie.

"Of course," the clerk said. "I'll be back shortly." He left for another room in the back of the shop.

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"So when is your driving test?" Raquel asked Evie.

"Next week," Evie answered

"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."

The first dress that caught her eye was long and hot pink. It was <sup>actually</sup> less a dress and more a gown. She had never worn a gown before. She had always thought that if she and Alex went to prom together she would wear a long dress, but would it be a gown? The prom was still two years away, ~~and~~ she wasn't even with Alex or anything Alex. Ugh. She ~~had~~ to stop thinking about him.

Evie slipped out of her flojos, her shorts and her <sup>Roxie hoodie</sup> ~~Senor Lopez~~ and slipped on the gown. She came out of the dressing room and walked over to the three <sup>way</sup> ~~way~~ mirror.

"Man, you look so cool," Raquel ~~said~~ <sup>raved</sup>. <sup>Sided</sup>

"Yes," the clerk agreed. "It's a very body aware gown."

"Uh, well, I don't know if I want to be so aware of my body," Evie modestly ~~crossed her arms~~. But she had to admit the gown was cool, very cool. It was a halter gown and the back went down super low. It had a slit that practically went up to her left armpit and if she wasn't showing enough skin already, there was a diamond shaped peek-a-boo opening right in the middle of her chest. God, she never imagined that she could look so, dare she say it, *hot*, in a dress.

"No, no," Dee Dee said "It looks good, gives you hips."

"Really," Evie looked in the mirror. "You thinks?"

"Evie," Dee Dee said "Your hips are speaking Spanish!"

Evie covered her mouth and laughed.

"Oh, my God," the clerk also laughed. "I *have* to use that line. There's someone who needs to make my hips speak Spanish and I'm not even bilingual!"

Suddenly the shop door's buzzer rang

"Oh, it never ends," the clerk ~~rolled his eyes~~ as he went to release the front door.

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*the gown*  
"You *gotta* get it," Raquel looked Evie over.

Evie looked at the tag. "Oh, my God. I shouldn't even be wearing this!"

"Why?" Dee Dee asked. "Cuantos?"

"It's like two thousand dollars!"

"*And?*" Raquel asked.

"And, *hello*, I don't know about you, but *I* don't have two thousand bucks for a dress or anything, especially after the whole Lindsay fiasco. *Please*." Evie started back into the dressing room to take off the gown. "I'm just trying on things for fun."

"Evie, do you *like* the dress?" Raquel asked.

"Well, yeah. But that doesn't mean -."

"Do you *love* the dress?"

"Well, yeah," Evie said. "No question." She looked at herself in the mirror. Her hips, for sure, did not lie. The gown actually gave her curves. Not quite hourglass, but there was some concave action going on at her waist.

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"Then you *are* getting the dress," Raquel opened her Roxy tote and pulled out her wallet.

"Raquel!" Evie exclaimed when she saw Raquel pull out her wallet. "You are *crazy*. You are *so* not buying me this dress!"

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"Why not?" She nonchalantly pulled out her credit card. "It'll be my birthday present to you."

"Raquel, *no*," Evie covered her entire face. She couldn't believe what she was hearing

"Evie, *yes*. I can't have my ADA looking all *scraps* at her own party. Right, Dee Dee?"

"Uh, right," Dee Dee said. Even she looked a little awkward about the whole transaction that was about to take place. "Now I feel bad. The present I got for Evie sucks compared to the gown."

"Well, if you want," Raquel said. "You can pay for half of it."

"Uh, I don't feel *that* bad," Dee Dee said.

The clerk came back. "So have we made a decision?"

"Yes," Raquel handed him her credit card. "We'll take it. And we'll take *the purse* for her," she directed towards Dee Dee, who still had the quilted bag draped over her shoulder. "And we'll have them both wrapped," Raquel added. "They're gifts."

## Chapter 23

When Evie got home from L.A, she immediately went her room to try on her gown again. *What* would she tell her mother? The gown was far from being a "great find" at one of the *segundas* downtown, but then again, Evie snobbishly figured, what did her mother know about vintage couture?

*As she was zipping up her gown,* she heard her cell phone ring and fumbled in her bag looking for it. But before *Evie* found *her phone*, it stopped ringing and *then* her bedroom's landline rang. *It* was Dee Dee.

"I've got something major to tell you," Dee Dee said. Her voice sounded serious.

"What? Don't tell me that Raquel's credit card was stolen and we gotta return everything?" Evie teased. She looked herself over in her closet mirrors. *Damn. Girl. I she was*

*Caliente!*

"No, don't say that," Dee Dee laughed. "I would hate to have to return my *purse*. God, don't you just love your dress?"

"I'm wearing it right now," Evie confessed sheepishly.

"Are you serious?" Dee Dee asked. "So why do you think Raquel has all this extra *cash* lana?"

"*From* not having to cover Jose's ass all the time," Evie said. She actually like that she knew something about Raquel that Dee Dee didn't. Sure they were all ADAs, but *she* could be a bit of a control freak when it came having first run information on either friend. "Remember?" *she* asked. "Raquel was always paying for him when he ran out of his trust money."

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"I guess," Dee Dee said. "I mean, I didn't know him when they were going out, but she had said he was pretty on the chido side. I'm taking my purse to school tomorrow. Wait until Alejandra de los Santos sees it."

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"Yeah" Evie started. "Wait until –" She stopped herself. She really had no one to impress with her sexy hot pink halter gown. Alex might not even be at her party.

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"So anyway," Dee Dee sighed, "I have to tell you. Rocio came back today, from looking at schools in the Bay Area."

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"Cool," Evie continued to look at herself again in the mirrors. "Has he made any decisions?"

"Yeah," Dee Dee started slowly. "And it looks like he doesn't want to go to college out here, at all."

"Oh, no. Are you serious?" Evie knew Dee Dee must be bumming hard. She was surprised that she hadn't requested an ER/RE! meeting.

"He doesn't want to leave D.F.," Dee Dee explained. "And I don't blame him. So," she cleared her throat. "I'm thinking I'll move back to Mexico too... so I could be closer to him."

"*What?*" Evie laughed. "Yeah, right. Dee Dee, you are so not moving back to Mexico City. You're crazy."

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"No, I'm not," Dee Dee asserted. "I already talked to Graciela about it. She said I could stay with her family in Coyacan." She paused. "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, and what about Las Hermanas?"

"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 Hermana anymore? I can't believe this."

"No, I'm not saying that. I definitely want to be a Hermana, 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 my decision is that I want to be closer to Rocio."

"But Las Hermanas is all you've been talking about forever. What about the first dance, with your dad? And your mom? She *wanted* you to be a Hermana."

"Evie," Dee Dee said. "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..." her voice got soft. "I, I just don't want to get into it right now."

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"Yeah, but Dee Dee," Evie started.

"Evie, I really don't want to talk about it with you."

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Dee Dee practically hung up on Evie. She was stunned. How could so many things change in a matter of days? First, she had lost her boyfriend and now her best friend was leaving! She called Dee Dee back, but her call went straight to voice mail.



Evie then texted Raquel with the emergency code of ER/RE! but didn't hear back from her all night.

## Chapter 24

"Hello?" Arturo waved his hand in front of Evie's face. "Anyone there?"

"Oh, I'm sorry." Evie looked up. She was feeding Chamuco and had no idea that Arturo had even been talking to her. "I wasn't paying attention."

Evie was still in a bit of a daze. Dee Dee announcement ~~the night before~~ was still weighing heavily on her mind. How could she even think of moving back to Mexico? On their drive to school, Dee Dee ~~had~~ refused to discuss it at and Evie didn't push the

Deleted: It was the next day and

*Hung up on her hang up*

subject. It was a long day at Villanueva for Evie. Raquel didn't go to school and Evie was without Alex's shoulder to lean on. *Alex*. His absence was sinking in.

"So, do you want to?" Arturo asked.

"Want to what?" Evie asked.

Arturo cocked his head down in confusion. "Take the horses out. We're pretty much done here, and I know your housekeeper doesn't come for another hour, so I was thinking we could take them out."

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"You mean to ride?" Evie asked.

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"No," Arturo smirked. "Take them out on a date."

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," Evie patted

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Chamuco. "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," she told Arturo. Evie wasn't about to admit that she had colored her file, just a wee bit. She had gone horse horseback riding one time, and one time only, when she was, like, ten years old. But Arturo didn't need to know specifics.

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"Why don't we take Chamuco out?" she ~~was about to ask~~ *asked*.

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"Nuh, uh. No way," Arturo said.

"No, come on," Evie insisted. "We're totally friends. Look." She pulled out a carrot of her front pocket and fed it to him. "Ah, dun't choo like that, huh, Cha-muu-co boy?"

Alex winced.

"What?" Evie asked.

"The baby talk," he said. "It's gotta go."

Evie looked at him. Did she hear right? "Okay, boss. Whatever you say. Let me just go get my pullover and I'll be ready." "

Deleted: ", she patted Chamuco."

"We can take Sprinkles and Panchito out," Arturo said. "They could use the exercise. You can take Sprinkles," he suggested. "He's just about the most gentle horse we have."

Evie gave Chamuco a hug around his neck and then 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 this great ridge to see it."

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

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

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When ~~she~~ came out of the shed, Arturo was already saddled up on Panchito and held the reins to Sprinkles. She was a bit taken by the way he looked, high up on Panchito. Arturo looked *nicæ*. He looked somewhat manly and definitely in charge.

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Maybe there *was* something about a boy in cowboy boots ~~Being on a horse couldn't help~~ either.

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black mustang

Evie felt a little nervous as she ~~started~~ towards Sprinkles. She hadn't been on a horse in years. She lifted up her left foot, stuck her sneaker in the stirrup, and clumsily hoisted herself up onto ~~Sprinkles. Oomf!~~ She flopped ungracefully onto poor Sprinkles' back. She immediately sat up in the saddle and took hold of the reins.

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Arturo looked ~~over~~ Evie. "You look good," he nodded "He agrees with you." He tapped Panchito on his side and pulled the reins to the left. "Come on."

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Evie nudged Sprinkles with the inside of her sneaker, but he did not move. She nudged him again. Still nothing. Arturo was already a few yards ahead of her and heading towards trail that led from the reserve.

"Wait, Turo," Evie called out. "~~You didn't give me a gentle horse. You gave me a dead one!~~"

Deleted: I wanted a gentle horse. Not a dead one."

Arturo looked over his shoulder. "Give him a good kick."

"Kick? I don't want to hurt him!"

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"He can take it," Arturo ~~called back~~, "Your foot's gonna feel just like a little baby pat to him."

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

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"Whoa!" Evie wasn't quite prepared for his *giddyup* to just get up and go so quickly. She held on to the saddle horn and tried to keep her balance, but it was a bit of a challenge, to say the least. Sprinkles wasn't the most steady ride. His body ~~fell into~~ a rhythm that Evie couldn't follow and her bottom was already getting more of a work out than she was planning on. Did Arturo say they were gonna ride for a whole *hour*?

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But fifteen minutes later, the four of them, Evie, Arturo, Sprinkles, and Panchito, were already deep in the chaparral of the riverbank, among flora and fauna that Evie had never even known existed. ~~Even though it was mid-winter, Cacti tunas were in bloom and Evie caught a family of cottontail rabbits scurrying across the dirt path.~~ How long had she lived by the river, in a neighborhood ~~and on a street named for the river,~~ and yet she hadn't spent anytime ~~near~~ the actual river that ran through the whole county?

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"Oh, my God," Evie marveled. "I love it out here. I can't believe I've lived ~~so~~ ~~here~~ all my life. and not once have I've never come up ~~this way.~~"

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"Yeah,

Arturo ~~also~~ looked around. "~~Yeah, a~~ lot of people forget what's in their own backyard. Especially," he looked at Evie and smirked, "if you live in *Rio* Gates."

"Hey," Evie teased back. "I can't help where my parents bought a house."

~~"Yeah, but you can help where you spend your time," Arturo said. "But~~ *Nah,* besides, 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."

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*Hor-*  
"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. ~~Josephina got~~ Princesa for her sixteenth birthday, but I can't remember the last time she's even worked out with her." Arturo sighed and shook his head. "That's the problem with some people. They think that horses are really cool and that they make cute pets. They don't realize how much work they are. Oh, ~~hey,~~ he looked ahead. ~~Check~~ it out." He pointed out a grassy field they were just riding up to. "~~See~~ where it's all matted down over there, in the middle of the field?"

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"Uh, huh," Evie looked over.

"That's where coyotes were sleeping," Arturo said. "From the size of the impression, you can tell it ~~was~~ a large pack of them."

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"What?" Evie looked around nervously. "Coyotes? You're kidding, right? There was ~~no~~ mention of river coyotes at ~~orientation~~. God, something is ~~always~~ out to get you!"

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"What do you mean?" Arturo asked.

"I mean, when I'm surfing, I 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 ~~the sun goes down~~, and besides, I'd protect you."

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"I can protect myself, thank you," Evie teased ~~indignantly~~.

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

"Uh, huh," Evie said. "Well, I haven't actually for a while." She realized it had been over a month since she had gone to Sea Street with Alex. "I used to surf a lot with my boyfriend. I mean, my sorta boyfriend."

"Is he the one who gave you that necklace you always wore?"

"~~The~~ necklace? ~~You mean mine?~~" Evie asked. She didn't think Arturo would

notice something ~~like the accessories that volunteers~~ wore.

"Yeah, the shell one," Arturo said.

~~Guess she was wrong.~~

"Yeah, Evie said. "But 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 gloominess ~~of~~

~~sudden singledom~~. It had been about four days since her argument with Alex, and his

absence from her life had become painfully apparent. She missed the little conversations

they'd have on their way to school and she missed how he'd always take her to the

reserve. It was, really, very sweet and considerate of him to always ask how she was

getting home from work. ~~He really could be the concerned boyfriend at times~~. She kept

rethinking what had gone wrong the night they were going to the de LaFuentes. Had she

been giving him annoying jabs? Was she trying to make him feel guilty? God, maybe she

*was* a nag.

"Poor guy," ~~Arturo clicked his tongue,~~ "I can relate."

"What do you mean, *poor guy*?" Evie frowned. "You don't even know him, and you don't even know my side of the story."

"But I know all about yo-yos."

"Huh?" Evie asked.

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"When Josephina and I first started dating," Arturo started to explain. "I gave her a bracelet. It was supposed to mean that we were going out. 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, she'd take off the bracelet and well, you know the story. She just gave me back her bracelet," Arturo said. "*Again*."

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"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. I'm over her. 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'."

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"Good," Arturo nodded. "Like I said, there is nothing worse than a yo-yo relationship."

"I know that," Evie agreed. She had never been in any other relationship, yo-yo or not, she wasn't about to admit that to him.

Arturo pulled the reins to the right and Evie saw that he was leading them back to the reserve. Their quick little ride was ending too soon

"So hey," ~~Evie asked cautiously~~ "What's gonna happen to Chamuco?"

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"Well, we got ~~another~~ adoption day coming up. Hopefully someone will take him."

"And if someone doesn't ~~take him~~ what happens to him?" Evie wasn't sure if she really wanted to hear the answer.

~~He'll~~ just have to stay at the reserve longer... until the next clinic," Arturo said

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~~We~~ have them ~~four~~ times a year."

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"Why do you think he hasn't he been adopted yet?"

"But people always want younger, healthier horses," Arturo said "Chamuco has already passed his prime."

Evie felt bothered by this news. "Well, at least he ~~was~~ <sup>has</sup> the reserve.

"Yea, and we all take care him. You know, even when you're done with your ~~school~~ credit, the reserve can always use more help. I hope you've thought about staying on."

<sup>SC HR2</sup> "Actually I have," Evie said. She really had been thinking of continuing to work at the ~~reserve~~. Not only had she grown to love the horses and but she was really liking the people ~~who~~ was meeting at the reserve—including Arturo.

"Yeah, when I leave for Davis," he started. "We'll be short one more hand"

"You got accepted into Davis?" Evie asked. Wow, congratulations!

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"Thanks," Arturo smiled. "I'm not starting until the spring, with early enrollment. I'm really looking forward to it."

"That is so cool," Evie said. She felt a little conflicted. She was truly happy for Arturo, but also a bit sad that he would be leaving the reserve. It seemed that everyone was bailing or had bailed on her. What was the weekly total so far this week?

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"And if you start working at the reserve you can learn more about horsemanship," her said.

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"I know about horsemanship," Evie <sup>protegees</sup> ~~felt a sudden need to~~ defend <sup>itself</sup> herself.

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Arturo looked at her dangling feet. "One of the most basic things to know 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 hanging off the side of a horse like that. You need to keep your shoes ~~in~~ the stirrups."

\* \* \* \* \*

By the time they got back to the stables, the sun had already set Evie remembered she hadn't seen the sunset from the ridge Arturo had mentioned.

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"I'll show you next time," ~~he~~ promised. "I was sorta getting worried that it was gonna get dark on us and, you know, los coyotes."

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Evie rolled her eyes at him.

"So did you have fun?" Arturo asked as he got off Panchito.



"Oh, yeah," Evie said. "Definitely. This has been one of the best days I've had in a long time."

"I was thinking, that maybe we can go get coffee or something," Arturo said as he took the reins for both horses. *They were now at Sprinkles stall* "And if you want, I can give you a ride home."

"Oh, my housekeeper is probably already on her way." Evie suddenly felt regretful. She was having fun with Arturo and would have like to hang out with him longer. He had been so cool and friendly during their ride. Plus, it didn't hurt that he was easy on the eyes and that he was quite the *caballero*, as Dee Dee would say.

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Evie started to dismount from Sprinkles and as she swung her left leg around, she *saddle* couldn't help but lose her balance. She grabbed for the ring horn, but still stumbled off Sprinkles

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"Whoa," Arturo caught her to keep her from falling. "Careful there."

"Oh, how embarrassing," Evie fell back into his arms. She quickly stood up on her own. *1* "Yeah, guess I could use a lesson on horsemanship."

Arturo looked at her and smiled, an almost shy smile. "You're really cute."

"Yeah, for someone who doesn't know much about horses," Evie joked. She straightened her shirt and pulled up her low rise jeans. She suddenly felt the oddest sensation in her stomach *No, this could not be happening.*

"I'm going to be direct..." Arturo started

God, why did her stomach feel so weird?

"Would someone like me even have a chance with you?"

"What are you even talking about?" Evie tried to play it off and kept her head down as she wiped the dust and Sprinkles' horse hair off her jeans. She *loved* having a

boy ask such a direct question. Unlike Alex, who had shyly come up from behind to offer affection, Arturo was front and center.

"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 felt dry.

"I don't know, Arturo," she said softly. She didn't want to look into his eyes for fear that he might know what she was feeling. "I guess you'd have to find out."

*Did she really just say that?*

"Oh, yeah?" Arturo pursed his lips and then smiled. "Is that a challenge? Well, I live for challenges." Before Evie knew it, he had lifted her chin and had started to kiss her.

Evie couldn't resist. She placed her hands on Arturo's shoulders and reached up for more. He was tall, taller than Alex, that's for sure and his kiss was deep and long, different than Alex, who gave quick, but gentle kisses. Evie instantly felt that vaguely familiar light-headed feeling.

"Evie?"

Both Evie and Arturo looked up.

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

"Alex," Evie immediately pulled back from Arturo. She wiped her bottom lip with the back of her hand.

"I... you didn't answer my text," Alex started. "And Lindsay said you were still here, and so I just came by." He was speaking to Evie, but his eyes were on Arturo.

"Oh, yeah," Evie nervously fluffed her hair forward and started towards him.

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"No, *don't*." Alex held his palms out towards Evie and took a few steps back.

"Alex, wait," Evie started.

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

## Chapter 25

Excuse me? Had Evie read Alex's text correctly? And what did it mean? She held her cell close and re-read his text on her cell's screen. ~~4getit~~? It was nearly 1 AM, and she had been waiting, dying, to hear from Alex, and now this is what she got? ~~What~~ did it mean? She went through the complete text message message history between her and Alex. How had their relationship shifted from "Nite, QT" to "~~4getit~~" in just a matter of days? Of course, she knew how. One word, Arturo.

After Lindsay had been picked up from the reserve ~~that afternoon~~, Evie had asked her to drive her by Alex's house, but his truck wasn't parked in his driveway. He didn't return any of her phone calls or texts, and his cell phone went straight to voice mail. It was clear to Evie, very clear, that he didn't want to talk to her. It couldn't be true. But maybe it was -- ~~Was Alex~~ not her boyfriend anymore?

Of course, she wasn't able to sleep. Her mind was racing with worry, confusion, and fear. Alex (worry), Arturo (confusion — what *had* happened between them?), and her ~~dreamed~~ driving test (fear, major). Then some of the players ~~changed~~, but the theme continued: Dee Dee (worry), Raquel (confusion), and, of course, ~~the~~ driving test (fear, ~~still~~ major). Alex and Arturo, of course, were ~~always~~ floating around in the background. Evie ~~tucked~~ her cell phone under her pillow, turned over and closed her eyes in determination. She *had* to sleep. Her driving test was in less than four hours.

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*Get to sleep. Sleep! Don't think about him or him or her or...them. Your driving test is the most important thing right now. The first thing you do is check your mirrors. No, you put on your seat belt. Stop it! You need rest. Fall asleep already!*

Arturo, Alex... Arturo. Argh!

Evie turned on her other side and hugged ~~her other~~ pillow when she heard what sounded like Davey Mitchell's truck. She ~~knew that~~ <sup>anywhere</sup> staccato rumble of ~~the 4x4~~. She pulled her cell phone out from under her pillow and checked the time. Could it really be him coming down Camino del Rio at 1:30 in the morning? ~~She~~ pushed away the sheets, got up from her bed ~~and~~ looked through her bedroom shutters. Yes, it was Davey. He was bringing Raquel home from God knows where. Evie crossed her arms and watched Raquel step down from his ~~lifted~~ 4x4 and sneak around the side of her house.

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Evie immediately texted her:

Cn I cme ovr?

To which Raquel replied:

Now?

Evie:

ER

Raquel:

K. Ktch dr. Shh!

Evie quickly threw on some sweat pants, a hoodie, and her Juicy Couture flojos. She crept downstairs and went through the side door of the kitchen ~~before cutting~~ across

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to the Diaz's backyard. When she entered the Diaz's kitchen door, she found Raquel tearing through the refrigerator's freezer.

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

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"Raquel," Evie moaned as she pulled up a stool. "You won't believe it. Alex just broke up with me. He broke up with me by text."

"I thought you guys had already broken up," Raquel said nonchalantly. She hit two minutes on the microwave's timer.

"Not officially," Evie said. Her eyes started to water. Her body felt numb.

"But I thought you gave him back his necklace," Raquel said. She took a soda from the fridge. "Want one?"

"No," Evie shook her head and wiped her eyes. Wasn't Raquel listening? "I mean, we never really talked about it. We just said we were going to take a break."

Raquel sipped her soda and frowned. "But what was there to talk about? You gave him back the necklace. Isn't that how people do it when they're 'going steady'?" She made air-quotes with her fingers.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Evie asked.

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

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

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

"Sorry, Evie." Raquel unwrapped the cornhusks from her tamales and slid them onto a ~~paper~~ plate. "But I'm starving. Do you mind if I eat? It is my house."

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Evie hated that she was being so *sentida*. Raquel wasn't known for being the most compassionate, but tonight she was being downright in-*sentida*.

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

"Evie, I'm *not* being mean. And of course, I care. I'm just hungry. Go on, please. I'm listening"

Evie exhaled "So, I was at the reserve and Alex caught me -"

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

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

"Doing *what*?"

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

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"*Just* kissing?" Raquel's mouth dropped. Evie could see the mouthful of corn masa spread across her teeth and tongue. "Did he have his hands down your pants?"

"No! We were just—"

"Up your shirt?"

"Raquel, *no*! Quit interrupting!"

"But you *were* making out with him?" Raquel took another bite of her tamale.

"Shit!" She ~~said~~ under her breath as she opened her mouth and let a wad of *masa* drop

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unto her plate. She took a quick swig of soda and waved her hand over her opened  
mouth. "It's fucking hot!"

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"Are you alright?" Evie asked.

"No," Raquel continued to wave her fingers over her mouth. "I friggin' burned  
my tongue. *Sheeyat*, Whatever, go on."

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

"Wow." Raquel cut a small piece from one of the tamales with a fork. This time  
she blew on it lightly before putting it into her mouth. "When did this happen?"

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

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

"Where were you?"

"We were kicking it," Raquel said

"Where?" Evie asked.

Raquel looked at her. "At the Hobo Jungle."

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"Hobo Jungle?"

"Yeah" *why?*

Hobo Jungle was a part of the river that was know for its, how would one say,  
challenged population. Whatever you called the people living in Hobo Jungle, river

people, transients or actual hobos; they had been living on the river for years, generations. As a little kid, Evie was always curious about those who lived in Hobo Jungle. Whenever her family would drive on the bridge that crossed that section of the river, <sup>Evie would</sup> she'd bend her neck in vain, hoping to catch a glimpse of a hobo roasting a hot dog pierced by a twig or eating beans out of a can. But <sup>her</sup> Evie's father told her and her sister that Hobo Jungle was not ~~some~~ cute little village of hobos all getting along together and eating hotdogs on a stick. Hobo Jungle was a place to avoid if they knew what was good for them. The area, he said, was full of ex-cons, drug users, and aimless transients. He warned them that if he found out that either of them ever even went *near* Hobo Jungle, he else would give them a spanking to remember.

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And now here was Raquel, ~~kicking it~~ in the Jungle.

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Evie <sup>her</sup> ~~watched Raquel~~ as she scarfed down the rest of her tamales, and it was then

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that she noticed how bad Raquel looked. Not "It's one in the morning and I've been partying all night" bad, but rather "It's one in the morning and I've been partying hard for the last four semesters" bad. Raquel's skin was flakey, and she had two small scabs on the right side of her face. She looked oddly puffy in her face and her fingers. Not necessarily fat, just bloated.

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"Raquel," Evie started ~~hesistantly~~ "Are you okay?"

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

"I don't know," Evie didn't know how to say that she thought Raquel looked bad without sounding insulting. "You just look, I don't know, tired."

"Well, it's almost two in the morning, Evie. And to be honest," Raquel bit back  
"You don't look so hot, either,"

"That's because I haven't slept," Evie got up from the kitchen stool. "And I have my driving test tomorrow, I mean, today, and I just know I'm gonna fail. Everything is turning to crap."

"Well, things can't always go the way we want them to in life."

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

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

"Okay," Evie put her hands on her hips. "I'll be honest." She somehow found the courage to say what had been on her mind for some time. "I think you have a problem. I think you party too much, and to be honest, you're not looking really good."

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"Excuse me?" Raquel looked at Evie, almost amused.

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

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

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"It's a *realistic* observation, Raquel," Evie said. "An observation that's making me worried."



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

"Judgmental?" Evie snapped. "I'm not judgmental. I'm just concerned, Raquel. Excuse me if I get concerned about people I care about."

"Yeah, you sure showed concern with Alex."

She did not just say that

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Raquel scraped the remaining melted jack cheese from her plate and crammed it into her mouth. "Okay, you want to be so honest, all things in the clear?" she asked with her mouth full of *masa*. "Well, I wanna know something, the honest truth."

"What?" Evie asked.

"What *really* happened between you and Jose in the photo booth, at that Sangro party last semester?"

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

"Well, I'm not. Do you have a problem with me asking that?"

"Yeah," Evie said. "I do have a problem because you know what happened. I told you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"*He* bought her flojos?" Raquel asked

The kitchen light went on.

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

"I was just..." Evie started. She hadn't seen Kitty Diaz look so angry in such a long time. *Actually, the last time she looked so pissed was back when she discovered that* Raquel had forged her name on a *business* check, but that was some time ago.

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"Raquel!" Kitty Diaz leaned into Raquel and sniffed. "You stink like booze! What the hell is going on?!"

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