

Chapter 26

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

"I'm sorry," her driving instructor wrote a big fat 9 in blue ink on the score sheet. "I had to remind you to put your seat belt. That's an immediate fail." Your biggest problems were parallel parking, gear shifting and speed. You need to work on these.

Evie didn't say anything as she reluctantly took the paperwork from her instructor and headed back into the DMV office, where her mother and Lindsay were waiting. She swung open the glass door, and they both stood up from the plastic chairs they had been sitting on. They were both looked confuse smiling, as if they were anticipating good news. But once they saw Evie's face, they both just knew.

What happened
"How did it go, *mi'ja*?" her mother asked anyway. Why are you back so early?

"I didn't pass," Evie held out her score sheet. She was on the verge of tears. She I forgot to put on my seatbelt. nervously rubbed the side of her face and looked around the DMV. People were either slouched over the main counters, lamenting to stone faced clerks, or they were slouched

over paperwork and pulling their hair out as they struggled with the written part of the driving test. Yes. The DMV was an evil, ugly place.

Deleted: tables

Deleted:

^{What} "Oh," her mother took the score sheet, ~~looked it over~~, and clicked her tongue.

How can that be?

"So you'll take it again. No problem." *Lindsay*

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

Deleted: DMV

They left the office and went around the side of the DMV building to get Lindsay's car. Evie took a seat in the back and looked out the window. How could she have forgotten to put on her seat belt? ^{How how how?} Her parents had paid the California Driving School a lot of money to teach her how to drive, and she had spent a lot of time practicing with her father and Lindsay. She must have failed, ^{forgotten} she figured, simply because she had had practically only three hours of sleep. She had left Raquel's house at nearly two a.m. and didn't fall asleep until nearly five in the morning. *Of course.* She was in a daze from sleep deprivation. It was not her fault. She *was* a good driver. How could anyone have expected her to pass a driving test in her condition?

Deleted: flunked her test?

As Lindsay drove downtown, every driver on the road seemed to be boasting their independence as they whizzed along down Vineyard Avenue in their cars. They were free and liberated, not confined to the backseat like ^{she} ~~Evie~~ was, and ~~Evie~~ wondered if she would ^{she} ever be allowed to participate in such an exclusive parade? Her stomach started to hurt.

Deleted: to Evie

Deleted: she

Deleted:

Deleted: Evie

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

She was so not in the mood for school, Raquel would ~~definitely~~ still be pissed off at her, and Dee Dee ~~most likely wouldn't even be in classes by~~ ^q was probably off somewhere with Rocio picking out China patterns. And Alex? Yeah, right. Mr. ~~Ford~~ ^{49ctit} Like he really cared.

Deleted: .

Deleted: Nvz Mnd

"Evie," her mother turned around to face her. "You can't miss school just because you didn't pass your driving test,"

"It's not that," Evie's held her side and leaned into the back seat's fabric upholstery. "I just really, really don't feel good. I didn't sleep at all last night, and I feel sick."

"Oh, I don't know," her mother looked at Lindsay and then back at Evie. "But you do look really tired"

^{When} They ~~arrived home and~~ pulled into the Gomez's driveway, Lindsay kept her sedan running as Evie got out.

"We're going to meet your father," her mother told her. "It's better if he doesn't know that I'm letting you skip school, so don't say anything when he gets home."

Deleted: with

"I won't," Evie got her backpack from the car's floor. "Are you gonna tell him I flunked my test?"

"I'm going to have to," her mother replied. "Are you going to be okay?"

"Yeah," Evie yawned. "I really just need some sleep."

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

"Okay," Evie said.

Yeah right. Sabrina would be the *last* person she would go to if she needed anything

When Evie got inside the house, all she wanted to do was go to the den, grab the multi colored afghan, a' la Lindsay, and snuggle in front of the Plasma. Maybe *People's Court* was on. Now that would be great. The way Judge Milian lashed out Cuban dichos and costly penalties to poorly prepared defendants always made Evie feel better about her own problems.

Deleted: television

Deleted: and gave

But when she stepped down into to the den, Evie was surprised to find Sabrina there. She was in a pajama top and sweat bottoms, spread out on the den's brown leather couch *and* covered with Lindsay's crocheted afghan. Her feet where propped up on the coffeetable.

"What are you doing here?" Evie asked as she crossed over her legs.

She didn't mean to come across as accusatory as she might have sounded. It was just that since Sabrina had been home, she *never* left her room. *And of course*, Evie still held a grudge over the smack she had overheard Sabrina say about her on the phone.

Deleted: Also,

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

"No, I mean, you're usually in your room." Evie flopped down on the matching leather loveseat and kicked up her own feet on the coffee table. Their mother had insisted there was to be no 'flopping' or 'kicking up' on the den's expensive, mid-century California Mission furniture. But their mother wasn't around at the moment.

Sabrina kept her eyes on the Plasma screen. She was watching a Korean soap opera with no subtitles. She laughed along with the programmed laugh track

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

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

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

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

"~~What, don't tell me,~~" Evie started sarcastically. "~~You're now president of the~~
Korean Club?"

Deleted: hat?

Deleted: Don't tell me y

"Evie," Sabrina still didn't look at her, but rather reclined her head farther back onto the couch. "Just let me be. I've been in my room all morning, and I just wanted to take advantage of no one being home today. Or I *thought* no one was gonna be home. Why aren't you in school?"

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

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

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

"What is that supposed to mean?" Sabrina asked.

"You know what I mean," Evie said. "I *heard* you."

"Heard me, what?" Sabrina asked.

"I heard you, last week," Evie continued. "You were on the phone basically talking smack about me, saying how much you hate being here and calling me a spoiled brat."

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

One Mississippi, two Mississippi... Evie counted in her head.

"Evie," Sabrina finally sighed. "You just wouldn't understand."

"Oh," Evie said. "And that's because I'm such a friggin' idiot or a spoiled brat?"

"No. Evie. It's just," her sister started. "I've been having a really, really hard time and..."

"And what?" Evie wasn't so convinced that Suprema could ever have such a hard time at anything.

"Evie, I don't want to get into it," Sabrina continued. "For the last month, I've had to have an answer for everything and everyone. *Why* was I breaking up with Robert? *Why* was I going back home? *When* was I going back to school? It's like everyone wanted a tidy little answer tied up in a perfect little bow, and you know what? I don't *have* the answers. I'm tired. I just want to, I don't know... chill."

Chill? Did that word actually exist in Sabrina's vocabulary?

"You don't know," Sabrina said. "Maybe you don't understand. I mean, you've always been the baby of the family, the favorite and --."

"The *favorite*?" Evie gawked. "*Me*?"

"Uh, yeah," Sabrina said. "You."

"You're crazy," Evie told her. "You're the one everyone just idolizes. Mom, Dad, Lindsay, Dee Dee's dad... even A through H."

"A through H?" Sabrina pursed her lips and slowly cracked a smile. "You mean the counselor? I haven't heard that name in years. He's still at Nueva? You call him that too?"

"~~Uh, yeah,~~" Evie felt the ice thawing. "I mean, everyone does."

"Does he still clean his glasses, over and over again?" Sabrina asked. "Like obsessive compulsive?"

"Oh, my God," Evie laughed. "Yes. I don't think he ever pays attention to what anyone is saying."

"Oh, he's paying attention all right," Sabrina said. "But only if you're a female student. He's the biggest perv."

"*What?*" Evie balked. "A Through H? Gross! He's like three hundred years old. That is so not true!"

"It *is* true," Sabrina insisted. "We used to say that A through H stood for Ass and Hiney. That was his specialty."

Sabrina slapped her hands together and let out a high-pitched laugh. Evie knew that laugh. It sounded like a baby seal crying out for his mother and it was annoying enough to make anyone around Sabrina wince. But to Evie the laugh made Sabrina seem less suprema and, actually, more human,

"Oh, my God," Sabrina said. "Those were some fun times, back at Villanueva. I wish I was back there, when life was much ~~more~~ chill."

There was that word again.

"Chill?" Evie asked. "Are you sure we went to the same school?"

"You just have a different circle of friends than I had," Sabrina said. "I was always with the square kids, the future CPAs of the world." She rolled her eyes. "I don't know, I think maybe because I am the oldest, mom and dad were tougher on me. Mom was so strict with me when I was at Nueva. I wasn't allowed to date, or hang out at Sea

Street. And to be running around with someone like Raquel when I was fifteen? No way."

"Fifteen and three quarters," Evie corrected her. "I'm almost sixteen."

"*A little less sixteen,*" her sister smiled at her.

"Hey, I love that song," Evie said. She was surprised that her sister knew of it.

"Yeah, one of my sisters at Stanford always played Fall Out Boy," Sabrina said

She suddenly turned down the volume on the Plasma. "Eves, I'm sorry about what you heard that day on the phone. I've just been out of my mind. I don't like being here, but it really doesn't have anything to do with you. Mom and Dad are really getting on my case. Mom especially. She can be so stifling."

"Tell me about it," Evie was surprised that her sister shared the same sentiment. She had always thought that the two "Go-mez Girls" consisted of her mother and Sabrina. She was the odd one out.

"I just feel like I am letting everyone down," Sabrina continued. "I don't need to be reminded how much Stanford is costing mom and dad, or how I didn't love Robert enough."

"Is that why you broke up?" Evie asked. "You don't love him anymore?"

"No, I do love him," Sabrina sighed and curled her legs onto the couch. "But he was going to start grad school this spring, in Massachusetts, and he wanted me to transfer schools so I could be closer to him. At first I was into the idea, but then I just felt like I was losing a part, a big part, of myself. I wasn't Sabrina Gomez anymore. I was Robert Ramirez's girlfriend." She shook her head. "I wasn't about to leave my sorority sisters, my friends, my family... California."

Deleted: o

"In that order, right?" Evie smirked.

"No," Sabrina threw Evie a sideways glance. "But God, Evie, Robert was, like, so insulted, and he would go on and on about me not going with him, as if I didn't love him enough or something. I grew up wanting to be a Stanford grad, not some grad student's girlfriend in friggin' Massachusetts." She sighed again. "It takes a lot of compromise to be in a relationship, and maybe I'm just not ready to be in such a serious one. And I feel sorta selfish, because I really want to do what *I* want to do, and sometimes people can't understand that."

"Right," Evie nodded. It made sense didn't it? But then she thought about Alex. It seemed that sometimes he wanted to do what *he* wanted to do and she wasn't letting him. Ooh, was she as bad at Robert?

Deleted: h

"So anyway, I really just want to rest," Sabrina pulled the afghan up to her chin. "At least for one quarter, and then I'll go back to school. I want a fresh start. Fresh starts are always good."

"Yeah," Evie agreed as she rubbed her arms. "Everybody needs a fresh start once in a while."

"Are you cold?" Sabrina asked.

"Yeah," Evie stretched. "I'm gonna go get a blanket upstairs."

"You can share the afghan with me."

"Oh," Evie was surprised by her sister's offer. "Okay."

Deleted: ff

She got up from the loveseat and joined her sister on the couch. Sabrina spread the blanket over the both of them.

Deleted: Evie

"So what do you wanna watch?" she asked Evie.

"Uh, I don't care."

"Are you sure?" Sabrina asked.

"Yeah," Evie said. "We can watch whatever you want."

Chapter 27

When their mother and Lindsay got back, Evie and Sabrina were still in the den. They had created a feast of canned bean dip and bagel chips and were watching old episodes of Laguna Beach that Evie had TiVo'd.

"One of my sisters went out with Jason," Sabrina told Evie. "Just one date, but ~~it~~ was enough. ~~She~~ he said he was *really* cheap."

Deleted: s

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

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

"Oh. *My*. God," Evie laughed. "That's messed up."

"And he was so short," Sabrina laughed with her. "Talk about trial size!"

"It is *so* nice to see you out of your room. ~~mi'ja,~~ their mother told Sabrina as she came down into the den and joined both girls on the couch. ~~And good~~ to see you two together. I'm going to call your father. Maybe we could barbeque tonight."

Deleted:

Deleted: a

Both she and Evie had taken their feet off the coffee table.

Deleted: " their mother told Sabrina as she came down into the den.

Evie squirmed ~~deeper into~~ the den's ~~couch~~. Should she make a run for her bedroom... window? Her mother was obviously hearing about last night's activities.

Deleted: on

Deleted: l

Deleted: overeat

"Kitty, no, of course, not," Vicki Gomez continued. "I won't say a word. You have my promise. Yes, she's right here." She looked over at Evie again, just as she was getting up ~~to leave~~.

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

After a few more "oh nos" and "of course, nots" ~~Evie's mother~~ hung up the phone

Deleted: Vicki Gomez

"What happened?" Evie cautiously asked her mother. "What did Kitty say?"

"Raquel hasn't been feeling well," her mother said hesitantly. "So, Kitty's going," she paused. "So Kitty's going to check her into Isla del Mar."

"Isla *del Mar*?" Evie was taken aback.

"What?" ~~Sabrina looked up~~ "Why?"

Deleted: Sabrina looked up.

Isla del Mar was a center on the northeast hills of the county that treated people for addiction or depression. Sometimes, last semester, the Flojos, Evie, Raquel, Mondo, Alex, and Jose would cram into Mondo's Maurader and make their way up the winding road to Isla's parking lot. It was relaxing to sit and lean against the long, high stucco wall of the in-patient entry building and take in the panoramic view of the city and the ocean. If you went at night, which they often did, you could see the offshore oil rigs twinkling in the distance. However, Evie never dreamed that one of *their own* would be on the inside of the same building

"Kitty said Raquel got in trouble, again."

"In trouble with what?"

Her mother didn't answer.

"Mom," Evie said. "Tell me. She's my best friend."

"Evie, I told Kitty I wouldn't say anything, but now I'm thinking that you need to know and that I need to know."

~~"Need to know what?"~~ Evie asked. ~~Why was her mother talking in riddles?~~

Deleted: K

"Did you know that Raquel was dealing drugs?"

"What?" Evie exclaimed. *"No!"*

"Are you being honest with me?" Her mother looked at her sternly. Even Sabrina looked at Evie, wide-eyed with curiosity.

"Mom, *no*," Evie insisted. "I swear I didn't. What are you talking about?"

Formatted: Font: Italic

"Evie, don't swear," her mother said.

"No, I mean, I promise, *promise* that I didn't know anything about this. I had no idea."

"None of your friends do or deal drugs?"

Uh, oh. Evie thought of Mondo. He sold pot, but was he really a friend? Sure they had hung out in the same clique last semester, but was Mondo really a friend now? Not that much, really, anymore.

"Friends?" Evie asked. "No, but I do know of people at school who sell pot and stuff, but they aren't my friends."

Evie's mother put her hands on the kitchen counter and took a deep breath.

"Evie, it's pretty serious. Raquel could end up at the CYA or something, so it's better she get help now. Kitty and Charlie want to curb it before it gets out of control, but frankly, I think they should have done something a lot earlier."

"Mom, how could you say that?" Sabrina shook her head "You just said that Raquel's in serious trouble, and now all you can be is critical towards Kitty and Charlie?"

Deleted: judgmental

Deleted:

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

"What's gonna happen to her?" Evie asked

"Kitty's taking her to Isla tomorrow morning."

Deleted: i

Deleted: going to take

"Tomorrow?" Evie asked "Already? What's the rush?"

"I don't know exactly," their mother confessed "They wanted to take her in today, but they needed to get some things at home in order first."

"Well, I'm going over then," Evie got up from the couch and started for the kitchen door.

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

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

"Evie," her mother said "You can't go over now. Give this time to Kitty and Charlie. That's all I'm saying."

Evie brushed past her mother and stormed up to her room. Could this day get any more jacked up? Just as she was about to flop onto her bed (on which flopping was allowed), her mother called out from downstairs

"E-vie! Vi-si-tor!"

Visitor? Her mother practically sang the announcement something that usually
only her father or Lindsay did. Who would be visiting now? Why did her mother sound so
wait, it *must* be . . . *Raquel*.

Deleted: practically

Deleted:

Deleted: .

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

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

What was *he* doing at *her* house? Do stalkers wear cowboy boots?

"Oh, hey, Arturo," Evie answered "Um, how did you know where I lived?"

MORE

"Your address was on your file card," he explained "I'm sorry to just drop by,
but you forgot your backpack" He lifted Evie's bag from the foyer's wooden slat bench.
"You took off so fast yesterday."

Deleted: Arturo

Deleted:

"Oh, yeah. Sorry about that." Evie took her backpack from him. Okay, so he
wasn't a stalker, but he had hunted her down, sorta. "I hadn't even noticed it was
missing."

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

"No," Evie felt embarrassed "It's just been a rough two days." *And I didn't even go to school today*

"Oh. Sorry," Arturo looked down at the floor and then down the hallway. "I
didn't want to make things complicated. I hope I wasn't disrespectful, you know,
about..."

*A so
cl*

"No, it was okay," Evie said.

*didn't
notice*

"Just *okay*?" Arturo winced playfully.

"No, I mean, it was nice." Evie lowered her voice and looked down the hall. She didn't want her mother overhearing what was up with her.

Was it really nice? It seemed so at first, but not worth it.

"I meant all those things I said," Arturo told her. "I don't want you think that you were some kind of rebound or anything. I have always been, I don't know, sorta *intrigued* by you."

"Intrigued? By *me*?" Evie couldn't quite believe him.

"Yeah, why not?" he asked. "From that first day I met you, I thought you were really cute, but I didn't know what to do. I was still with Josephina, and I knew you were with someone."

"How did you know I had a boyfriend?" Evie asked. "I don't think I ever mentioned it."

"That shell necklace," he said.

Evie raised her eyebrows.

"It looked homemade," Arturo explained. "And seemed sorta special to you. Girls usually don't wear the same necklace, every day."

Deleted: Well, i

Deleted: a

Evie smiled. "Sure they do, that is if the necklace *is* special."

"My point exactly," Arturo said. ~~He~~ ^{She} looked around Evie's house. ~~She felt that~~ she should ask him to hang out for a while, but she really didn't want to ask. She ~~just~~ wanted to ~~get over to~~ Raquel's as soon as possible.

Deleted: . H

Deleted: . Evie f

Deleted: find some way to

"So are you gonna be at the reserve on Wednesday?" Arturo asked.

"I don't know," Evie said. "I mean, my best friend is going away and—."

"Back to Mexico?"

how to dress, but he was really a sweet person. How could she have gotten into a lip lock with Arturo? She had made a big mistake. She wanted Alex. She had to get Alex back. But how?

Chapter 28

"I *knew* something was up with Raquel," Dee Dee told Evie ~~the next morning.~~
They were both on the Diazes door step ^{It was} 7 am. "Didn't I tell you?" ^{she} Dee Dee continued
as she rang the bell again. "Remember in the counseling office? That day we were
looking for a job for you?"

Deleted: later on the phone that night

"I know," Evie agreed somberly. She remembered that day very clearly. She had
also felt that Raquel was going off a little on the deep end, but ~~had hoped~~ that maybe
Alex was right ~~when he had said that~~ perhaps Raquel was just going through a phase.

Deleted: thought

Deleted: when he had said that

"No wonder she had so much money lately," Dee Dee said. "~~Oh My God~~ Do
you think she used drug money to buy my purse and your gown at Decade?"

"Ew," Evie winced. She didn't like the idea of wearing a dress that came from
some ~~successful or, (depending which side you were working for) blotched~~ drug deal. "I
didn't even think of that."

^{but}
"I ^{still} can't believe her parents are sending her to Isla. I mean, don't you think that is
a little severe?" Dee Dee clicked her tongue. "Oh, God, poor Raquel, ~~I would just think~~
~~that her mother --~~"

Deleted: ? We have to go see her tomorrow, before she leaves

Deleted: , " Dee Dee clicked her tongue.

^{Kitty answered}
"Hi Kitty," Evie looked up as the Diazes front door opened. "Um, sorry it's so
early, but we hope you don't mind. We just wanna see Raquel before, you know, she
leaves today for the, um, doctor."

"Lo siento, girls," Kitty Diaz shook her head at Evie and Dee Dee. "Raquel's still sleeping."

"What time is she leaving for Isla?" Evie asked

"We're gonna leave around ten," Kitty answered. She looked tired. Very tired

Her eyes each had a half moon of darkness under it. Her hair, cut in a bob style, was flat on one side.

"Can we wait until she gets up?" Evie felt anxious. "Or maybe you could wake her up and tell her that we're here?"

"No, Evie, I can't," Kitty yawned, forgetting to cover her mouth. "You girls go to school. You'll be able to see Raquel soon enough."

"Ay, Kitty," Raquel's father came to the door. "Let them see Raquel. They are her best friends, her amuegitas."

"Charlie..." Kitty looked up at him

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

When Evie and Dee Dee got to Raquel's bedroom, her door was slightly open

The window shades as usual, were pulled down, and only the computer's screen saver, a photo of the three girls on the hood of Raquel's Beetle, offered light.

"Raquel?" Evie whispered through the darkness.

Dee Dee pushed open the door, and both girls peered in. Raquel lay on her side in bed, under an array of black clothing, her Black Molly Monster, and a couple of *Kerrang!* magazine scattered about.

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

Deleted:Page Break.....

Chapter 29 ¶

Deleted: Raquel's mother was standing in the doorway of the Diazes house. It was early the next morning, just around 7 a.m.

Deleted: Diaz

Deleted: Each eye

Deleted: Diaz

Deleted: on her computer screen

the collected mess on top of her

"Wait," Raquel turned over under ~~her comforter~~

Dee Dee looked at Evie wide eyed. They both wanted to see Raquel, but neither of them had ~~actually rehearsed~~ ^{known} what they were going to say to her. They walked into the room towards her.

Deleted: bed.

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

"How do you *think* I'm doing?" ~~Raquel answered dryly~~ "My parents are trying to get rid of me." Her head was ~~on it's side~~ on the pillow.

Deleted: Raquel answered.

Deleted: , turned sideways

Deleted: Dee Dee

"Raquel, your parent's aren't trying to get rid of you," ~~Evie said~~ "They just want you to get better. We all want you to be ~~in a better place~~."

^{I can better} "And ~~a better place~~ is some friggin' ~~psycho~~ hospital?" Raquel asked. "Why don't they just send me to Hawaii for a few months? Yeah, I could hang with that."

Deleted: the best place

"Why?" Evie found herself asking. "You have connections there?" The words ~~had~~ slipped out before she knew it. She felt angry. Raquel had ~~fucked~~ ^{screwed} up, big time and she was trying to be all funny about it.

Deleted: up from her pillow

"What's that supposed to mean?" Raquel looked at Evie.

"Raquel," Evie started. "~~Why~~ were you dealing? Is that how you bought my dress? With your drug money?"

Raquel rolled her eyes and clicked her tongue. "Oh, come on. You don't have to be all dramatic, ~~drug money~~. I put your dress on my credit card. Dee Dee's purse, too. I don't deposit ~~cash, torta~~. Is that what you are so concerned about? That your two ~~6~~ gown didn't come from the right kind of money? Please.))

Deleted: .

Deleted: thousand dollar

Formatted: Font: Italic

"Where you selling with Mondo?" Dee Dee asked.

"Mondo?" Raquel rolled her eyes again "Hell, no. And I wasn't doing anything major, just peddling some pot now and then for Davey."

"*Davey?*" Evie exclaimed "Raquel, you have *got* to get a grip. I mean, why the hell are you helping *Davey?*"

Raquel put her head back on the pillow, closed her eyes and sighed

"Raquel," Evie started. "I don't get it. I mean, we can all go off the path once in a while, but what's going on?"

Raquel still didn't answer. She pulled her blankets up to her neck and ~~and although~~ ^{even though} her eyes ~~were~~ ^{were} closed, Evie could see that they ~~were starting to~~ tear up. "You guys wouldn't understand," ~~she said~~.

Deleted: even with

Deleted: started

Deleted:

Deleted: Raquel

Deleted:

Evie felt another one of those moments coming on. Hadn't Sabrina just told her the same thing last week? Why did people, people whom she *thought* she was close with, think she couldn't possibly understand ~~anything that they were going through?~~

Deleted: them

"Raquel..." Evie started

"No, I mean it," Raquel interrupted. "You guys are all into your own things. Dee Dee's with Rocio, and you've got your surfing and horse thing. I don't have anything. Before I used to have Jose, and we were Flojos, and we used to hang out and it was fun. But now I don't even have that. And, I don't know, sometimes I really miss Jose. I miss being Jose's girlfriend."

"Jose?" Evie asked. "How could you possibly miss him? He was a *jerk*."

Raquel looked at her. "Don't you think that Alex was a jerk at times and don't you still miss him?"

"Yeah, but..." Evie started.

"Yeah, nothing," Raquel said. "I'm not saying how I feel makes sense. I'm just telling you how I feel. I don't know. Jose just made me feel good. Not all the time, but a lot of the time he did."

"And so now selling dope makes you feel good?" Evie asked. "Don't you think that's a little too stupid ~~barrio~~, Raquel?"

Deleted: ghetto

"Evie," Dee Dee looked at her. "Give Raquel a break. We came here to be supportive, not to be judgmental."

"I'm not being judgmental," Evie tried to defend herself. But in a way, she knew that she was being critical. She looked at Raquel. "Yeah, I guess you're right, I guess I don't understand."

"It's sorta like how Sabrina is depressed and she just sleeps a lot," Dee Dee tried to explain. "But maybe with Raquel, she had to do something different, something that's more Raquel, I don't know, more shocking."

Deleted: scandalosa."

Formatted: Highlight

Deleted: don't think I was

Formatted: Font: Italic, Highlight

Deleted: scandalous

Formatted: Highlight

"I wasn't doing anything ~~that~~ jaw dropping," Raquel defended herself. "I mean, who doesn't sell pot once in awhile?"

"I don't," Dee Dee said.

Deleted: said

"Yeah, and neither do I," Evie added. "Raquel, you were getting out of control."

Raquel frowned and shook her head.

"Raquel," Dee Dee started. "I wasn't gonna say anything about this either, but my dad got really mad that night you called our house and you were drunk."

"Oh, well, yeah," Raquel looked awkward. "Of course, but I apologized to him. Remember I called the next day. He was cool about it."

he may have sounded cool
“Yeah, but I mean, he was really put off and I wasn’t gonna say anything but he and Graciela had a dinner party for Rocio and--” Dee Dee seemed unsure if she should continue.

“And what?” Raquel asked. “What’s the big mystery?”

“They had this dinner for Rocio and his parents and my dad, he didn’t want you to come. He was afraid that you would make a scene or something.”

“What?” Raquel’s eyebrows raised. “Your dad thought that? That I would make a scene?”

“Uh, huh,” Dee Dee admitted

“Was Evie invited?” Raquel looked over at Evie. *“Did she go?”*

“Well, yeah,” Dee Dee answered

Ray
~~“I’m sorry, don’t be mad”~~ Evie told Raquel. “I didn’t want to hurt your feelings.”

looked around her room.
“Wow, I feel like shit.” *Raquel said* “I always thought your dad liked me.”

“He *does*,” Dee Dee *emphasized*. “But he doesn’t like the way you can act sometimes. It didn’t help that you were spending so much time with Davey.”

“Yeah,” Evie said. “He hasn’t been the best influence.”

“The lady I was talking to at Isla said that I should also stop making boys the priority,” Raquel confessed. “But I mean, I *like* boys, why is that a problem? Giving up boy booty would be like Evie giving up her flojos.”

“But flojos aren’t my life,” Evie said.

“They *aren’t*?” Raquel looked down at Evie’s feet. She was wearing brand new silver Trovata flip flops. The straps were braided with straw like fabric and encrusted

Deleted: Did she go?”

Deleted: ,

Deleted:

Formatted: Font: Italic

Deleted: said

Deleted: .

Deleted: ,

Deleted: I guess,

with tiny white seashells. Evie loved them and had to have them the second she saw them at A Shore Thing, one of her favorite downtown shops.

Deleted: flip flops

Evie looked down at her flip flops. "Okay...I see what you mean. But it's one thing to love flojos and another thing to be consumed by them."

Deleted: Tilly's

"I don't know," Raquel smirk. "I've seen you get all crazy at Walden's surf shop whenever their new shipment from Roxys comes in."

Look, so
"Okay, okay," Evie laughed. "You know, what you're saying, about that lady at Isla saying that you cut boys from the menu for a while? It's sorta like what Sabrina was telling me."

Deleted: sat up slowly. She

"Suprema?" Raquel propped her pillows up and sat up slowly. "She's talking now?"

Deleted: leaned against them

"Yeah, and she's taking a break from boys," Evie said. "Well, I don't know about boys, but definitely from Robert. He wanted her to move to Massachusetts with him 'cause he's gonna go to grad school out there. That's why she broke up with him."

"Really?" Dee Dee looked over at Evie.

"Yeah, but she didn't want go with him," Evie continued. "He got all mad at her. And now she's just taking a break from him and just about everything. She says she needs to focus on who *she* is and what she wants."

"Which is?" Dee Dee asked

"I dunno, I guess being a good president for her sorority, doing better on the tennis team, stuff like that."

"But that's easy for her," Raquel said. "But I'm not good at anything. I mean, what could I possibly focus on?"

"Okay," ~~Evie looked at Raquel and~~ exhaled. "We better go. We'll call you the very first day they let us," ~~she~~ leaned in to hug her goodbye.

"The ~~very~~ first day?" Raquel asked. Her eyes ~~suddenly~~ had a profound look of fear in them

"The very first day," Evie said "Promise."

"Okay," Raquel sighed.

Dee Dee and Evie ~~both continued with long~~ good byes ~~and then~~ reluctantly left.

^{she's} "I hope Raquel is gonna be okay," Dee Dee said ~~to Evie~~ as she got into Jumile. "I mean, she seems okay to me, making little jokes and stuff."

"Yeah," Evie threw her backpack in the back seat and got into the passenger seat.

"I just hope she takes things seriously."

"So, I don't understand. Why wouldn't your sister just move with Robert?" Dee Dee started Jumile. "I thought she loved him? I just always imagined they were, like, the college sweethearts that would get married and living happily ever after."

"I'm sure Sabrina wants to live happily ever after, but she wants to live happily right now."

"Hmm... interesting," Dee Dee headed towards the main exit gate of Rio Estates,

As she drove past the gate, the morning mail truck was just entering. Evie looked after it. She wondered if this would be the week she would receive her quality check. Dee Dee hadn't even started her essay and and she had yet to turn in her hours to Vasquez-Reyes Alarcon. She calculated the calendar days in her head. If all was on schedule, and

Deleted: Raquel,

Deleted: Dee Dee

Deleted: "I

Deleted: Evie

Deleted:

Formatted: Font: Italic

Deleted: She seemed a bit more at ease.

Deleted: said

Deleted: and

"That's what worries me."

if the inept student intern working in the counselor's office was on top of things, this week she'd be getting her quality check.

"Hey, Dee Dee," Evie asked. "You still like to write a lot, right?"

"Yeah," Dee Dee answered. "I told you When I was in Mexico Rocio and I were always writing each other back and forth."

"In Spanish and English, right?" Evie aksed

Deleted: both

"Right," Dee answered.

Deleted: Both

"Good," Evie said. It was time to put Dee Dee to work.

Chapter 30

On Wednesday, Evie skipped working at the reserve and asked Dee Dee over after dinner.

"You have to help me write this," Evie said as she ~~pushed aside~~ her mother's clothing and kitchenware catalogues and placed a bag and some pens on the dining room table

Deleted: moved

Deleted:

"*Help* you?" Dee Dee placed her ~~new~~ *"absolutely favorite"* vintage quilted bag on one of the dining room chairs. "I thought I was going to write the whole essay for you." She looked at the pens. "And we should be at your computer. I'm not doing it by hand"

Deleted: beloved

Deleted:

Formatted: Font: Italic

"No," Evie pulled out two flat boxes from the Lautzenhauser's bag "Didn't you get my text?"

"Yeah, why do you think I am here?" Dee Dee took a seat.

"No," Evie shook her head in frustration. "Dee Dee, I need to write a letter, to Alex."

"A letter? To Alex?" Dee Dee's eyes widened "*What? In Reinq de text is actually going to write?*"

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

"Yes, Dee Dee," Evie answered. *Is that so hard to believe?"*

Formatted: Font: Italic

"An actual letter? *Sm* abbreviation?" Dee Dee teased. "*How* are you going to manage?"

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

"I'm going to manage quite nicely, thank you," Evie retorted. "*Since you are gonna help me* You said you used to write all those letters to Rocio when you lived in

Formatted: Font: Italic

Deleted: "¶

"Yes," Evie suddenly felt awkward. "

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Mexico, and this is my last hope. Alex won't answer my texts, or my IMs, or my phone calls. I'm thinking I could write him a letter and tell him how sorry I am and what a stupid mistake I made. I don't know, I just need to tell him everything that I feel badly about."

"But what about your extra credit essay?" Dee Dee asked. "You have to give me adequate time if you want a good paper."

"I know, I know," Evie said. "But I'm sure you'll be able to just whip it out, you're good like that."

"I know but—" / But right now you gotta help me write this letter to Alex. I haven't had a decent night's sleep since he broke up with me."

Evie interjected

"Are you going to mail it?" Dee Dee asked. "*That's what Rocio and I did*"

"I don't think so," Evie said. "If for some reason he doesn't get it, I would never know. It would just *kill* me. And then what would I do? Ask him if he ever got my letter? That would just defeat the whole purpose of wanting to do something so unexpected and personal. I think I'm just gonna slip it in his locker."

"*Oh*," Dee Dee's mouth formed a syrupy, pouty smile. "This is so romantic." She looked over the boxes of stationary. "This is the paper you picked out?"

"Yeah," Evie showed her the two different styles. "This one," she pointed out one box that had a border of pineapples and mangos, "is like the 'fun Evie.' It'll remind him what he's missing out on."

"Or make him crave fruit salad," Dee Dee mused.

Evie ignored her. "And this," she held up the other box. "This is, like, the 'romantic side of Evie.' I know guys don't go for all the pink girly stuff, but I don't want him continuing you to think that I'm just his bud, like, another dude dropping him a note."

Dee Dee laughed. "I don't think *dudes* write each other, Evie."

"Dee Dee," Evie frowned. "Quit making fun! This is serious to me!"

"Okay, okay," Dee Dee put her hand on Evie's shoulder and squeezed it. "So sorry, ADA."

"So which one should I use?" Evie asked.

"I say use a sheet of paper from your spiral," Dee Dee said. "It's more you."

Evie took Dee Dee's hand off her shoulder and slumped back in her chair.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" Dee Dee raised her hands in protest. "I couldn't resist. Besides, Raquel isn't around. Someone has to keep up with the yuk-yuks."

"Well, not at my expense," Evie sat ~~back~~ up in her chair and started to open both boxes. "So, what kind of stationary did you use when you wrote to Rocio?" she asked.

"Oh, I wrote him on parchment-like paper. It was peach colored and scented."

"Scented?" Evie asked. "Like what?"

"Like peaches, *dub*," Dee Dee said. "And then I would spray some of my own perfume in the air and wave the paper through it."

Deleted: strawberries

Formatted: Font: Italic

"Ew," Evie grimaced. "How do you think it smelled after a few days in the mail?"

"I guess it smelled very *enticing*," Dee Dee smiled, "because he *always* wrote back."

Evie decided on the stationary with the fruit border. Just as she and Dee Dee worked on composing a letter that would lure Alex back to her, Evie's mother and Sabrina came into the kitchen.

"Hello, Dela," Evie's mother called out from over the counter.

"Hi Vicki," Dee Dee looked over. "Hey, Sabrina,"

"Hey, Dees," Sabrina helped herself to some pan dulce from a box on the counter.

"Long time no see."

"Yeah," Dee Dee smiled, somewhat nervously. "So how's Stanford?" She appeared to Evie to be "Sabrina struck."

"I love it," Sabrina said simply. "I love that it's far away right now."

^{So} "But who's running your sorority while you are out here?" Dee Dee asked.

"Oh, we got a VP to take care of that," Sabrina crinkled her nose and waved her hand aside. "As the president, you pretty much just delegate. It's nothing like when I was a Hermana. We were all running around doing everything on our own – fundraisers, workshops, community services. Now *that* was a lot of work, but all so worth it. I loved those times."

"Dee Dee's going to be a Hermana," ^{Evie's mother} Vicki Gomez said

"Really?" Sabrina's face lit up. She started towards the dining room table. "Wow, congratulations! Wait, when did you get nominated?"

"Well, I haven't, yet," Dee Dee admitted.

"And you can't be nominated if you're living in another country," Evie said.

Okay, just a *little* jabby.

"What do you mean?" Sabrina took a bite of her sweet bread and looked at Dee Dee. "Are you going somewhere?"

"Well," Dee Dee started timidly. "I might have to go back to Mexico."

"What?" Vicki's ^{jaw} ^{opened} mouth dropped. She joined them at the dining room table.

"You're moving back to Mexico City? I just saw your father at the country club today, and he said nothing about this. *Nothing.*"

Deleted: Gomez's

Deleted: Graciela

Deleted:

Deleted: she

Deleted:

"No," Dee Dee said. "My whole family wouldn't be moving. It would just be me."

Evie tilted her head and looked at her sister. "Dee Dee wants to move back to Mexico so she could be closer to Rocio, her *boyfriend*."

"What?" Vicki let her mouth drop again, this time lower. "Dela, *mi'la*, you're only sixteen years old. You can't move-in with your boyfriend."

Deleted: Gomez

"No, I wouldn't be living with him," Dee Dee explained. Evie could tell that she was getting frustrated. "I would live with Graciela's family in Coyacan."

"You might as well be living with him," Sabrina shook her head and casually took another bite of her pan. "Because if you're going to another country to be with a boy, you're basically gonna be living *with* him and *for* him. You're not gonna be a *Hermana*?"

Dee Dee sighed. "I don't know. Everything is just so confusing right now. Rocio's gonna be going back to Mexico soon, and I gotta decide."

"I would really give it some thought, Dee Dee," Sabrina told her. "I mean, if it doesn't work out in Mexico with him, what's his name?"

"Rocio."

"Okay, if it doesn't work out with Rocio, you can always come back and you'll always have your family here, but you definitely can't be a Hermana. Not if you don't get nominated in time."

"I know..." Dee Dee said reluctantly.

"I would really think about what Sabrina is saying," Vicki Gomez said to Dee Dee. "If it's meant to be with Rocio, he'll still be there. But with Las Hermanas, they have a deadline."

"I know..." Dee Dee repeated.

Evie's mother looked over the stationary on the table. "What is all this?"

"I'm writing a letter," Evie announced, "to Alex." Her mother's and sister's line of questioning to Dee Dee ^{had changed} relax the mood at the table. At least for her. Evie ^{Made Evie hope that} hated to think about losing Dee Dee again. ^{hoped they convinced Dee Dee to think a bit}

Deleted: , she felt, seemed to

Deleted: She

Deleted:

"A love letter?" Sabrina teased as she picked up one of the boxes.

"No," Evie glanced over at her mother. "Just a letter."

"Oh, I used to love writing letters to your father," her mother picked up the other box of stationary. "But the best was getting letters back from him. That's something you kids don't have nowadays. You exchange your little texts that have no soul, no heart."

"Soul?" Sabrina laughed. "We're writing messages, not composing some RB jam!"

"So which stationary do you think I should use to write my letter to Alex?" Evie asked Sabrina.

Deleted: what

Deleted: →

"I think," Sabrina eyed both boxes as she took another bite of her pan dulce. "You should just use a piece of scrap paper," she teased. "It's so much more you."

Chapter 31

By the time Evie arrived at Duke's she was already feeling like a princess. In her hot pink halter gown, hot pink jeweled flojos, and, perched on top of her head, an elegant, but understated tiara, how could she not? A hot pink toe and hand job completed her royal look. Halter gown

And to top it all off, her father had rented the copper convertible Camaro (ANGELS) that was used in a Go Betty Go video just to drive Evie, Sabrina and Dee Dee to the party. When all three girls got out of the car at Duke's valet station, Evie caught a glimpse of herself in one of the restaurant's glass doors. Forget princess, how about rock star?

As she, Dee Dee, and Sabrina made their way through the lobby's entrance, Evie really did feel like a rock star as the throngs of people—friends, family (Even A through

Deleted: She was wearing

Deleted:

Deleted:

Deleted: was

Deleted: .

Deleted: job

Deleted: the

Deleted:

Formatted: Highlight

Deleted: they

Deleted: the

Deleted:

Deleted: b's

Deleted: car windows

Deleted: -- She smiled at her reflection

H^{ow}, how did ~~he~~ get in?)—crowded around her, ~~tugging on~~ her arm and wishing her

Deleted: was in attendance. E

Deleted: touching

happy birthday. People had to scream over DJ Chancle's bass driven surf music just to be heard

"Mahalo! Eves!"

"Feliz Cumpleanos!"

"You look *hot!*"

"Happy Birthday, *mi'ja!*"

Evie looked over and saw the tiny white-haired lady in a cream colored pantsuit among a mob of Hawaiian print shirts and short ~~dresses~~ *Mui Mui style*.

"Grandma?" Evie was caught off guard. She couldn't believe that Grandma Chablis would take a break from college lectures and her *quintana* lifestyle just to attend a grandchild's birthday party. "What are *you* doing here?!"

Grandma Chablis frowned. "That is no way to greet your *abuelita!*" She pushed past Big Bulge and Jared Leto to give Evie a tight hug. "I was ~~in~~ going to miss my own granddaughter's quinceanera."

Deleted: There was no way that

"Uh, Grandma," Evie started. Did her grandmother really think she was turning 15, and that's why she had made the trip down from Davis? "This isn't my quinceanera. I never had one, remember? I'm turning sixteen. This is my Sixteenera."

"*What? You're sixteen?* Then how old does that make *me?*" She glanced over at Jared Leto. "Not too old... for *some* things."

"Grandma!" Evie leaned in to hug her grandmother tighter. Maybe she should hook her up with A through H?

Evie felt a nudge. Her grandmother had slipped a small, white envelope into her hand.

"Grandma ..." Evie knew what was in the envelope. Sabrina looked over at her and arched one eyebrow knowingly.

"Take it," her grandmother insisted as she patted the small envelope in Evie's hand. "But do something *fun* with it."

~~But~~ Evie didn't need a birthday check to have fun at her own party. She could barely catch her breath for all the people wanting her attention. She was pulled by one friend from one side of the dance floor only to be yanked by another friend to the far other side of the restaurant. After all that had happened in the last couple of weeks, it was just so ~~refreshing~~ to have an ~~entire~~ evening just devoted to dancing, laughing, and of course *eating*.

Deleted: n't

Deleted: nice

Deleted: and

The buffet was out of control, a mad fusion of *lechon*, Huli Huli chicken, Mango BBQ pork ribs, and pineapples filled with Mexican rice.

Even Sabrina couldn't resist. ~~She was the first guest to help herself to a plate~~

"Damn," ~~she remarked, looking over the spread,~~ "I think I've gained, like, ten pounds just *looking at all this*."

Deleted: Sabrina was the first guest to help herself to a plate

Deleted: .

Deleted: it

Later, Evie danced in ~~the middle of the dance floor~~ in a circle with Dee Dee and some other friends from school. ~~The dance floor~~ *room* had become so hot that Evie's curls were limp and stringy ~~even though Dee Dee had her curls would retain their perfect spiral all~~ *right*

Deleted: , fanning her face with her hand.

right and her back and neck ~~became~~ drenched with sweat. Every now and then, she'd grab her ~~gown~~ by the back zipper and tug ~~at the silk~~ fabric a bit, hoping to get some circulation going, but it just wasn't cutting it. She glanced down and noticed Mango BBQ

Deleted: . Evie's

Deleted: were

Deleted: and e

Deleted: dress

Deleted:

Deleted: air

Deleted: barbeque sauce, from the

~~sauce~~ spattered ~~snack center~~ on her ^{pricey} ~~precious~~ silk gown. Oh, my God, how long had that ~~mancha~~ been there? She was formally defeated. She ~~had~~ to take a break from dancing.

Deleted: pork ribs,

Formatted: Font: Not Bold

She left the dance floor and grabbed a cocktail napkin from the bar, dipping it into one of

Deleted: and t

the many glasses of water that lined the bar. ~~She~~ then worked on the splotch ~~but~~ it only

Deleted: . B

spread out into a bigger and darker stain. Oh, well, Evie figured. Just add a dry cleaning ^{tab} bill to her already growing debt.

Evie ^{surveyed} ~~looked~~ around her party. As the birthday girl, she had taken the first whack at the custom made piñata, cut the two-foot high mango and whipped cream birthday cake (from her father's bakery, *daro*), and introduced the line of sexy Polynesian dancers ~~and she~~ still had to unwrap the pyramid of gifts piled up on one of the large banquet tables. She dampened another napkin and wiped her neck as she headed outside to the balcony. Some fresh air was in order.

Deleted: . S

"Where are you going, Evelina?" Lindsay asked. She was sitting with her husband Alfredo at one of the small booths.

"I need some air."

"~~Are~~ you okay?" Lindsay looked alarmed.

Deleted: Ar, a

"Oh, yeah, Linds," Evie started. "Don't worry. Oh, also, don't worry about the car ~~bill~~. My grandma gave me the money for--"

Alfredo turned away from looking at the dance floor and looked up at Evie.

Deleted: her

"Okay, Evelina," Lindsay ~~interrupted as~~ she directed a sharp glance ~~towards~~ her husband. It was clear that she didn't want him to know what had happened ~~a month and a half earlier~~. Perhaps she never told him that she had paid for body work at Williams.

Deleted: with her eyes

~~"Pues, enjoy the sea breeze!"~~

Deleted: Well, have a nice break!"

the balcony, just like Tori and skater boy. Now, Alex was nowhere near the balcony, and she was, obviously, nowhere near his thoughts. He never responded to her letter. He hadn't even acknowledged its existence, ~~even~~ after she had poured her entire heart onto paper? Paper lined with mangoes and pineapples?

Deleted: . And

She looked back at her guests through the picture windows of Duke's. She had so many cool friends, yet not one of them really knew how she was feeling. Evie turned back to look out over the balcony's ledge. She folded her hands, rested her head on them, and took a deep breath. It was great, awesome, to have the sixteeners of her dreams, but the fun she was having just made her more aware of the party's two big, gaping holes. Alex was not with her, and neither was Raquel.

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

Go away Mondo...

He whistled again.

Evie pushed up from the ledge. She got ready to throw him a smirk and a smart remark, but when she turned around, she couldn't believe who was standing in front of her.

It was Alex.

Evie's stomach flipped, and then it flopped. And then it flopped again.

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

"No, no," Evie started "*I'm* sorry!" She wanted to reach out and embrace him but wasn't sure if she should. He just stood there and she just stood there, as if they both really didn't know what to do.

"Please, Alex," she continued. "You have to know that it was nothing with Arturo. I know that sounds cliché, but really, I was just stupid and maybe I was a little mad about that night with Mondo and the night--."

Alex held up his hand. "No, no. I haven't been the best boyfriend. Really. And *I'm* sorry."

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

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

Alex reached for Evie and put his arms around her shoulders. He held her tight, and Evie was overwhelmed with how good he felt. His hair was slightly damp, and she smelled the tiniest hint of cologne (fresh and sea breezy!). He was wearing an oversized sports jacket and dark slacks that had that painfully stiff band new look to them. Evie glanced down and saw he was wearing flojos, brand new O'Neills. *Cute*.

"Oh, Evie," he whispered into her ear. "I got your letter. I have never gotten anything like that before. I mean, all the things you said, what you wrote. I couldn't believe it, and I didn't know how to respond. I mean, I didn't wanna just call or send a stupid text. I wanted to see you in person, I guess I wanted it to be perfect, and I wanted" he paused, "to give you this."

Deleted: in my life

Deleted: just

He reached into his jacket's pocket and pulled out a small white box. His neck instantly turned pink. Evie knew that shade of nervous pink "I think this would *really* go with your outfit." He looked ^{*man,*} her over. "Wow, Evie. You look *so* beautiful. Really."

Deleted: Evie

Deleted:

Evie now felt as though *her* neck was turning nervous pink. Alex had never called her beautiful. He had called her cute and, one time in a text, he had called her sexy, but never beautiful. She loved hearing him say it. She took the box from him, and when she opened it, she couldn't believe what she found – set on a blue velvet backing was a single gold charm - two miniature flip flops, one slightly over the other, and each topped with a small pearl where the straps connected. The charm was attached to a thin gold chain.

Deleted: it.

“Oh, my God, Alex,” Evie’s mouth dropped open. “This is so cool. I can’t believe it. I’ve *never* seen anything like this.”

“I was hoping you’d say that,” he scratched the side of his face nervously. “I drove down to LA after I got your letter, and I was looking through all the shops on Roberston, trying to find the right thing. I know you’ve been into horses lately, and I wasn’t sure if I should have gotten you a horseshoe or something.”

“No, I *love* it. And I’m glad you didn’t get me a horseshoe or something. I mean, I love horses, but flojos are, like, *our* thing.”

“Yeah,” Alex said as he removed the necklace from the box. “I found it at this place called Dakine. It was totally a cool shop. Even Mondo thought so.”

Deleted: , you know like Hawaiian for cool

Evie smiled, “Mondo went with you? To shop for me?”

Deleted: Wait, but

“Yeah, but he’s never gonna be with us,” Alex explained quickly. “Like when we are together on a date or something.”

She looked at the charm. “Will you put it on me?”

“Totally,” Alex moved behind Evie and fastened chain around her neck. “I wanna be your boyfriend again, and I want to be the boyfriend you deserve.”

Deleted: Of course

“I would like that,” Evie smiled at him. “No, I would *love* that.”

"Evie?"

Dee Dee had pulled the sliding glass door open. "I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" She looked at Alex and seemed unsure of how she should react.

"No, not anymore," Evie looked away from Alex. "Look!" She held out the necklace for Dee Dee to see. "Look what Alex gave me!"

"Oh, my God," Dee Dee looked at the charm. "That is the cutest! It goes perfectly with your gown."

"I have to admit," ~~Alex told Evie~~ ^{said} "Mondo was trying to talk me into getting you a flip flop navel charm,"

"Friggin' Mondo," Evie laughed. "~~But that's~~ a charm Raquel would wear."

Raquel!

"Dee Dee, what time is it?" Evie suddenly felt panicky.

"That's why I came out," Dee Dee said. "We should get going if we're gonna make it back in time for you to open presents."

"What, you're bailing on your own party?" Alex asked.

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

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

"Since last week," Evie answered somberly. "We *have* to see her, tonight."

"Uh, can I go with you?" Alex asked.

Evie looked at Dee Dee. She didn't know how to answer him.

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

"Come on, Evie," Alex asked. "Raquel's my friend too. Can't you make it, like, a Flojo thing?"

Deleted: Alex told Evie.

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Deleted: T

Formatted: Font: Italic

Deleted: 's

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

*I specially want
her to
see that
I'm
wearing
the
gown*

"Hey, but then *I* wouldn't get to go," Dee Dee said.

"Okay, Okay," Evie laughed. "Let's all just go, but let's go *now*." She took Alex's hand and headed back into the restaurant.

"Yeah, we better hurry," Dee Dee checked the time on her cell phone as they pushed through the crowd. "We have just about an hour."

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

"Yes, we will," Evie yelled over the music. "We gotta at least try."

Evie, Dee Dee, and Alex sped north in Junile on Pacific Coast Highway towards Isla del Mar.

"God, I hope we make it." Dee Dee said.

"We will, we will," Evie said.

"So," ~~Dee Dee asked~~ *caution* "Do you think that Cherry Bomb will be waiting for you when you get back to Duke's?"

Deleted: d

Deleted: Dee Dee asked.

"I have no idea," Evie said. "I haven't even been able to think. I mean, I just can't believe I still got *my* party."

"Why?" Dee Dee asked. "You worked your *nalgas* off. You did your work and you wrote, well, most of, your essay *and by the deadline*. That was the deal, right?"

"I dunno," Evie said. "Just everything has been crazy and it was such a last minute sprint to *get* this party. My parents were so stressed."

"Well, you could have turned your work a bit earlier," Dee Dee said.

"I know, I know," Evie. "But you know how plans can get rearranged at the last minute."

"Oh, yeah," Dee Dee raised her eyebrows in agreement. "I mean, I can't believe I didn't go back to D.F. with Rocio."

"You were gonna move back to Mexico?" Alex asked from the backseat.

"No," Dee Dee looked at Evie. "Not really it was just a thought that I thought through."

"And I," Evie smiled. "Like when you think things through."

"Hey Eve," Alex started. "So what's the grand total from Grandma Chablis?"

"What, am I gonna be, like, your sugar mama now?" Evie opened her macramé bag and ripped open the envelope. There was no check, but rather sixteen one hundred dollar bills.

"Wow, *pretty* nice!" She held up a fan of bills. "Sixteen hundred buckaroos"

"That's a lot of *lana*," Alex said. "What are you gonna do with it? Down payment for private driving lessons?"

"Lifetime bus pass?" Dee Dee teased

"Ha, ha, very funny," Evie said. "Well, first I gotta pay Lindsay back, like right away, and then," she paused. "I think I'm gonna donate the rest of the money to the reserve."

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

"No, not really," Evie answered slowly. "I mean, I hate that there has to be places like horse rescues and stuff because there are people who don't care about animals, but there is this one horse that I know and five hundred dollars could really help him out."

Deleted: , i

Deleted: .

Formatted: Font: Italic

Deleted: have

Deleted:

Deleted: know how to

"You are gonna give five hundred dollars to a *horse*?" Dee Dee asked. "But I overhead your grandma tell you to do something fun with it."

"I know," Evie looked at Dee Dee. "But it's not like Grandma Chablis is the only one giving me money. I saw a few envelopes on the gift table. I'll survive."

"Well, dang that's a pretty generous gift," Dee Dee said.

"~~Yeah~~, I don't know..." Alex started.

"You don't know what?" Evie asked

"I'm not into the idea of you working at the reserve again with ol' what's his name."

"Who? You mean Chamuco?" Evie asked playfully.

"Huh?" Alex asked.

"If you're talking about Arturo," Evie turned to look at him "He most likely won't even be at the reserve by the time I start up again. He'll be starting UC Davis this spring. But Alex, you have nothing to worry about."

"Hmmm..."

"Alex," Evie looked into his dark eyes. "Nothing."

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

"What?" Evie asked.

"Alejandra de Los Santos tried to get into the party!"

"*What?*" Dee Dee was right. Evie could not believe it. "When? Where was I? Did someone get it on camera phone?"

"I don't know where you were," Dee Dee said, "maybe dancing or eating more Huli Huli chicken or something. But she showed up with her three little *a-migas* and, of

course, she was denied access. Denied! In front of everyone, and was she so embarrassed!"

"Ha!" Evie laughed. "Okay, okay, birthday or no birthday, now *that's* the best gift ever!"

Dee Dee turned down ~~RED~~ on her CD player. "I was just thinking I have no idea what to expect at Isla." *I hope I don't freak out*

Deleted: P. Mosh

"It's really not as bad as everyone makes it to be," Alex said. "I know this guy, through Gorby, and he had actually gone there. He said the staff was really cool and he got a lot of help. A lot."

"Well, that's a relief to hear," Evie said. She looked out the window at all the "Beach Access" signs that lining Pacific Coast Highway.

"Alex," she asked. "Do you think we can go surfing out here sometime? For, like, a change?"

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

"Exactly," Evie said. "Why not?"

² Evie read another sign on the highway. "Oh, hey, this is Leo Carrillo," Evie said *she mentions*
¹ as Dee Dee drove by. "Do you know I used to come here as a kid? My family used to go camping here."

"Oh, yeah," Dee Dee chuckled. "I remember that, but didn't you always come home to sleep?"

"Yeah," Evie laughed with her. "Hey, can you slow down just a bit, on the shoulder?"

"Evie, we don't have time for a little memory lane trip."

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

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

Dee Dee slowed down, and Evie looked ^{out} near Leo's main entrance kiosk. There were two wooden posts on the opposite sides of the dirt road. Each post was about four feet high and had a row of circular, yellow reflective lights attached to one side.

② The bottom two lights ~~on one of the posts~~ were cracked, and the post ^{also} had a gash on the side. ~~it's~~

The cracked lights and the gash had been courtesy of Sabrina years ago, when she and Evie were still kids. Evie remembered sneaking out with Sabrina when Sabrina was fifteen and ^{she} ~~Evie~~ was eleven. Sabrina desperately wanted to take their parents' car for a little spin around the campground and had convinced Evie to go with her. They hadn't driven more than a few campsites away from their own before Sabrina hit the post. She was horrified. She had placed her head on the steering wheel and cried. It took Evie's urging to finally get her to wipe her tears, get the car in gear, and get it back to their own campsite before their parents found out. But they did find out. Their father was angry at Sabrina, but then calmed down as she continued to cry. Evie remembered how her father had put his arm around Sabrina and told her that taking his car without permission was wrong, but that she had to get over the fact that she had made a mistake. It wasn't the end of the world.

Deleted: Just like Lindsay had said, Sabrina was a horrible driver, nervous and timid.

Deleted: She was embarrassed and ashamed.

Deleted: what she had done,

Deleted: ,

"You have to forget about what's in the rearview window and just keep forging ahead," Evie remembered her father saying. "Just focus on what's in front of you, what's ahead."

Deleted: But Sabrina, being Suprema even back then, liked to do things perfectly. She liked to do things perfect the first time.¶

"You know," Evie said, remembering her father's words. "I think I know what to say to Raquel when I see her."

"You think?" Dee Dee asked *drove back on to Patti*

"Yeah," Evie nodded. "I think so." She looked at the time on her cell. "Oh, man, we're totally gonna be late getting back to my party, my mom is gonna be totally stressed." *presents*

Deleted: W

Deleted: pissed

"Not as stressed as she was trying to get that vanity plate in time," Dee Dee remarked.

Deleted: Not even," Dee Dee said. "

"Huh?" Evie's stomach flipped. "What?"

Deleted: It'll just give her and Graciela more time to make the bow."¶
"The bow

"Oh, my God!" Dee Dee covered her mouth.

Deleted: "

"Dee Dee," Evie grabbed her arm. "Tell me."

Deleted: For w

Deleted: demanded as she

"Dee Dee..." Alex shook his head *stut*

"Evie, stop it," Dee Dee pulled her arm from Evie. "I'm driving." *you're gonna
boise
my arm*

Deleted: her

Formatted: Font: Italic

"Tell me, Dee Dee," Evie was not going to let up.

Deleted: said

"I'm sorry, Evie!" Dee Dee exclaimed. "It was supposed to be a surprise. But your mother didn't even know if you were going to have your party or not and now, oh, she's going to kill me!"

Deleted: Your mother is

"Are you serious?" Evie shrieked. "I'm getting my car? I'm getting Cherry Bomb?"

"I'm not saying anything else," Dee Dee ran her thumb and index finger across her closed mouth like she was zipping it closed.

"You don't have to," Evie's stomach continued to tingle with excitement. "If I'm supposed to be surprised, I will be."

She pulled down Jumile's sun visor and looked at herself in the small mirror. She was officially sixteen years old, but really couldn't tell the difference. She raised her eyebrows, widened her eyes and stretched her mouth as wide as she could into a giant O. The look on her face was a cross between sheer astonishment and sheer shock. She could definitely look surprised. No problemo. no?

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Deleted: opened

Deleted:

Deleted: terror

lies could tell stories - break up heartbreak
a change
loss.

Thing her mother
had said me
always experience
in life.