

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? Parchment ^{the} ~~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.

"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. ^{of course} All three of them always got the same thing: A gauc dog, which was a grilled hot dog smeared with guacamole and wrapped in a tortilla, and one large chocolate frostie each.

"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} ~~said~~ she had the classic "California Look".

"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 ^gLeto be in attendance?"

"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}

"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 covered her face in 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?"

^{The boy known as}
"Okay," 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 sixteener. 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."

Chapter 18

Later that evening, Dee Dee called Evie on the phone.

She was

"I need you to keep something on the DL," she told her.

"Sure," Evie lowered her voice and her iPod. She loved playing the confidante.

the volume on

"What's up?"

"Well," Dee Dee started, "You know how Rocio is here, and his parents are coming out in a few days, right?"

So

how

"Right."

"And this is all a big deal for him, to find a school out here," Dee Dee said. "I mean, he's basically doing this for me, for us to be together."

"Uh, huh," Evie answered. Could it also be that California had some of the best *business* *universities* schools to offer, better than say, Mexico?

"So anyway," Dee Dee continued. "My dad and Graciela want to have a little dinner party for Rocio and his parents and," she paused, "I really want to invite you and Alejandro."

"Oh," Evie was taken off guard. She was expecting some big grand announcement. Like, maybe they were ~~engaged and were~~ *Dee Dee + Rocio* going to run off together, and maybe Dee Dee wanted her to make crepe paper flowers for their getaway car. But it was just dinner, a dinner party, at the de LaFuentes. Cool enough. Very adult-like. "We'll definitely come," Evie said. "I can't wait." *Sounds nice*

"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. I just...” Dee Dee searched for the right words. “I just don’t want to feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. You know how Raquel can be coarse and make a scene. I can’t have anything go wrong at this get together.”

“But can’t you just tell Raquel that?” Evie felt awkward. 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 to expect from her anymore.”

It was true. Davey Mitchell had passed Raquel’s two-week mark. They had been going out for a full month, and neither Dee Dee nor Evie had even been introduced to him. *That* was very telling. All Evie knew about him was that he drove a big white truck with tinted windows 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.

“You know,” Dee Dee said. “I wasn’t gonna say anything, but Raquel called our house, drunk, twice last week.”

“Are you serious?” Evie asked.

“Uh, huh,” Dee Dee said. “And I’m not taking about dialing 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."

hang up phone mother in
room
to you won't say anything about
what?
cassidy.

I won't say a thing

Chapter 19

"I'll make sure your father get off early."

"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.

"Mom, it's not a party," Evie tried to explain for the umpteenth time. "It's just a
little get together for Rocio and his parents."

"But 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} Vicki Gomez's cattiness
belonged less in the ^{Evie's room} Gomez's foyer and more near Alejandra de los Santos' scratching
post.

"Mom," Evie ~~checked herself in the foyer's mirror before heading out to meet~~
⁹ Alex. "It's not even about or for the parents. I'm just going for support. For Dee Dee."

"You know, Evie," her mother started in ^{that} a tone that Evie knew indicated that she
^{same} had an idea. And it would probably be a lousy one. "Why don't you take Sabrina with
^{most likely} you to the dinner?"

Dee Dee is tan

"What?" Evie stopped ~~at the front door and~~ looked at her mother. The last think she wanted was mopey ol' Sabrina barging in on her date with Alex. "Why would I take her?"

"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."

~~For one thing Dee Dee hates~~

"We don't know that yet," Evie found herself feeling oddly jealous. Sabrina was a pain in the butt, but still, she was *her* pain in the butt. Also, what *was* so great about being a Hermana anyway? "Dee Dee still has to be nominated."

~~so Dee Dee was an only child you didn't~~
She Rachel

"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?"

Her jumping thru hoops just for Sissty love.

"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."

QC

~~Are you go~~

She's feeling pressure?

"Mom, I've got it under control," Her mother was getting under her skin. "And I ~~gotta go, Alex is waiting.~~"

The phone rang. She saw it was Alex.

“I hope you got it under control, Evie,” Vicki Gomez said. “It would be a shame if we didn’t get to have your party. But if we do have it,” she raised her eyebrow, “I just *hope* I don’t forget to send Frank and Graciela an invite.”

Chapter 20

"You look really nice," Evie told Alex as they drove to the de LaFuentes house. She ^{feels} ~~was~~ into the brown cords and the 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. ^{cholo} Too cute.

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."

^{- Gomez?}
Evie put up the armrest and snuggled close to Alex. So far, so good.

"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?"

<sup>she called me
look he is
called
Gomez</sup>

9
Evie grimaced. "Ugh. How could I forget ~~that~~? I showed up thinking it would be just you, me, and Dee Dee, and you're, like, in the swimming pool, drooling all over 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.

Go Koi
"They aren't going to have *sushi*," Evie playfully pinched his side.

"Evie," Alex frowned over at her. "Let it go, will you?"

"I was just messin'." Evie cuddled up closer to him.

"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 —"

wanted her +
"I don't flake," Alex interrupted. He 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."

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

"Uh, *no*," Alex looked at her, puzzled. "We asked you to go to the party with us. You were totally invited, but you *chose* not to go."

"Oh, so let me get this straight," Evie started. "You and Mondo were kind enough to invite 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 + surf} 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 ~~the hell~~ could you say something like that? You know what happened that night. Jose attacked *me*! You know that's what happened, and now for you to use it against me is complete shit. God, Alex," Evie leaned to the far side of the seat. She crossed her arms and shook her head. "I thought I knew you. I thought I really, really knew you, but I guess I don't."

"That makes two of us," Alex bit back.

Evie could not believe what was happening. Tonight was supposed to be such a special night, a make up night for the Saturday evening before. She looked up at Dee Dee's house. The Malibu lights on the front lawn showcased the de LaFuentes' three tier stone fountain. Water cascaded down to each 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} ~~was~~ tired. She was tired of arguing with Alex. She took a breath as she reached around her neck and unhooked the clasp of her abalone necklace. "Here," her hand was shaking as she gave the necklace to Alex. "Just take it."

Alex looked at the necklace, then at her. "Evie..." he started. ^{slowly}

"No, just take it." She didn't look him in the eyes, but rather at the necklace itself. The knots that held the pieces of abalone shell in place were hand twisted and looked like a third grade attempt at high fashion. How could she have *worn* something so hideous?

"Obviously, it's too hard for you to say or do nice things for me anymore," she told Alex. "Obviously, it's too much of a challenge. Here," she held out the cord. "Just take it."

Alex took the necklace. "So what is this supposed to mean?"

"I don't know," Evie said. "Maybe we should just take a break."

"A *break*?" Alex asked

"Yeah," Evie said curtly. "Time off."

"Okay," Alex looked out his side window. "Then why don't you just give me back the ~~the~~ headphones? I gave those to you, too."

"Fine." Evie's heart sank. The Bose headphones? Ouch. "I *will*"

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

Is this what going out w/ someone meant? Always arguing? depending accusing

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 ~~can~~ plan to carry it out!"

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 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, ^g He's always calling me Gomez ^{+ stuff.} and ~~sometimes~~, I just burn out. Is that so wrong?"

"Of course not," Dee Dee handed her more tissue. "You are the cutest girl, and you deserve a guy who is going to treat you like a princesa."

Princesa.

"You know, Josephina?" Evie wiped her nose. "At the reserve? The senior 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 ^g ~~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 wey!* 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 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?"

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...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 ~~her dentist~~, Dr. Mizrahi, lined up every shiny, important looking instrument on the dental tray, ready to tackle any problem.

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."

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.

"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?*"

"*Si, si,*" Rocio took Evie's hand and actually kissed it. "*Estoy encantado.* You are even lovelier in person."

Lovelier? Evie couldn't ever remember being called lovely. Did people, boys, even talk like that? She guessed in Mexico City they did. And they kissed hands too? Wait until she told Raquel. Oh wait, she couldn't. She glanced down at her hands, relieved that her hand job from Michael Kelley still looked good.

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

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

Dee Dee looked over Rocio's shoulder and into the great room. "Where are your parents?"

"Listen, they're already out in the backyard," A large grin continued to expand across Rocio's face. "There was immediate respect. I felt it, first thing."

"Really? Oh, Rocio," Dee Dee linked arms with him. "I am so happy you are here." She linked her other arm with Evie's. "I couldn't be *mas feliz*. My two favorite people *en el todo mundo!*"

As the three of them headed outside, Evie couldn't help but wonder where Raquel fit in between Dee Dee's 'two favorite people in the whole world.' She felt a bit ashamed, as though being at this dinner party was betraying Raquel. But, 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?

who determined
what
made
a girl
scandalous?

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 Distrito."

She wore a sleeveless black linen dress suit, accented by a dramatic red silk *rebozo* that Evie recognized from Studio Tres Rios. Her wavy dark hair was pulled back into an elegant bun and secured by a large simple silver barrette.

raw

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 ^{near} 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 ~~sat and~~ ^{g g} watched Rocio and Dee Dee and couldn't help but notice how perfect they seemed 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! ^g

"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 said, ^{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.

"Now, Graciela. *Stop* it," Frank de LaFuentes 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?"

could she feel more
"Right," Evie smiled meekly. She felt like an ugly American being accused of trying to ruin the authentic Mexican baking.

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

* * * * *

As the dinner plates were cleared and the three couples continued to reminisce about the fabulously wonderful city life in D.F., Evie found comfort by retreating to the kitchen. She figured she could hang, at least for a little while, with Marcela and the helper that the de LaFuentes had hired to help her prepare and serve food. Evie pulled out a kitchen stool and sat down to check 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, Evie had gotten to know Marcela better. Marcela was a lot younger than Lindsay, almost thirty years to Lindsay's sixty. Evie sometimes felt Marcela'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. ^{Evie} ~~Whew.~~ She had done a good job with the cutting. No one would suspect that she had indulged in therapeutic snacking.

"Oh, *this is just wonderful*," Rocio's mother raved as the helper set the tray down. "The whole dinner was *excelente*." She put her hand over Graciela's. "And the *bolillos* you served? *Muy blandito!*"

"Gracias, Herminia," Graciela smiled as she poured hot water from a small teapot into delicate teacups.

"So, tell us, Rocio," Frank de LaFuentes started. "How has it been looking at schools? You know, I have to say," he ribbed playfully. "I'm a little offended you haven't looked into Channel Islands."

"No, no, sir," Rocio placed his fork on his dessert plate as though a long 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. He ^{Rocio} was also moving away from his family and home

~~had moved~~

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 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 ^{voice} 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} Alex still hadn't called or texted ^{her} Evie. Well, ^{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."

"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 ~~started~~ ^{turned the corner} down the hall, towards first period. As good as ~~it~~ ^{a day in L.A.} 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 -."

"I promise, you won't get caught," Raquel said confidently.

^{you gonna}
"How ~~can you~~ promise that?" Evie asked.

^{shrub paper 2x4}
Raquel opened her binder and flaunted a wad of slips. They were official Villanueva slips. There was a slip 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.

"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 ~~Shrine~~ ^{MUD}, 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 to change that. ^{there,} She had first dibs on where they shopped and she picked Decade.

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

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

She hit the buzzer near the front glass doors of Decade and ~~someone~~ ^{a clerk from} 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

moode that you just didn't find, at say, Forever 21. Decade on Robertson supposedly had an ample ^{supply} inventory of designer vintage couture 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 retail therapy would definitely get her mind off Alex. ^{a little}

"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 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 ^{my long hair} ~~hat~~ ^{felt}. "I'll be right with you."

"Oh, thanks," Evie smiled at him and pulled the hood of her 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 ^{Tillys?}

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. Dee Dee 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. (She felt like pulling her hair out.) Dee Dee and Raquel were talking like *grand tias*, deciding between themselves what was best for her, and she didn't want any of it. "It's like the both of you think that all I *need* is some boy to make things all better," 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?"

"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," Raquel said. "And besides, we don't even know if your parents are gonna let you have the party."

"Right," Evie's mood dropped again. Her quality check was coming out in a little 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. No, she was not going to stress about her party right now. She was going to have fun.

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

"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. *Lindsay Incident* 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
"Yeah," He looked over Evie. "We have quite a large collection of petite sizes."

. "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 Otto 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?"

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

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

of course
"Sure," the clerk said. "I'll be back shortly." He left for another room in the back of the shop. *put hair behind his ear.*

"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."

"And then you just gotta finish your horse credit. Speaking of which, how is that *turd* whipped ass Arturo doing?" Raquel asked.

"Has Josephina said anything about me?" Dee Dee asked.

"You mean, Horsa-phina?" Raquel asked. "She's such a Sangro in horse clothing. I pegged that the minute I met her."

"No," Evie answered Dee Dee. "Josaphina hasn't said anything, yet. But don't even sweat it, Dee Dee. You don't need ol' Josephina. You'll totally be nominated for Las Hermanas on your own."

"Yeah, and when you do," Raquel laid a yellow shift with a hemline of bright yellow boa feathers flat against her body. "That's one celebration party I best be invited to."

As soon as Raquel spoke Evie couldn't help but feel guilty. She knew that Raquel would be hurt if she knew about the deLaFuentes dinner party ~~that she wasn't invited to.~~ How could Dee Dee not have invited her? But worse, how could Evie have promised to never say anything about it? She hoped that Raquel would never find out.

The clerk came back with three dresses enveloped by clear plastic garment bags.

"I thought you said you had a lot of small things," Raquel looked over the bags.

The clerk looked at her blankly. "Yes, we do have an adequate stock of petite evening ^{wear} dresses; however, these are couture. They can be very delicate pieces. They are nothing that can be thrown over my arm and lugged out."

"Oh, right." Raquel looked embarrassed and took a seat in a large, Lucite egg chair.

Evie took the three dresses from the clerk and went into the dressing room.

The first dress that caught her eye was long and hot pink. It was 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 Senor Lopenz and slipped on the gown. She came out of the dressing room and walked over to the three way *sided* mirror.

"Man, you look *so* cool," Raquel said.

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

vn well
"Well, I don't know if I want to be so aware of my body," Evie started modestly

as she 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.

it never ends
"Oh, excuse me ~~one moment~~," the clerk said as he went to release the front door. *frowned*

"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. *Q 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." Evie 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.

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

"Raquel!" Evie exclaimed ^{when she saw} ~~looked over~~ at her wallet. "You are *crazy*. You are *so* not buying me this dress!"

"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 that 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. *I miss line*

When she heard her cell phone ring, she fumbled in her bag looking for it. But before she found it, it stopped ringing and ^{*home*} her bedroom’s landline rang. ^{*to the*} She ~~zipped up~~ ^{*then*} ~~her gown just as she answered the home phone.~~ 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. *zipped up.* She looked herself over in her closet mirrors.

“No, don’t say that,” Dee Dee laughed. “I would hate to have to return my ^{*purse*} bag.” God, don’t you just love your dress?”

“I’m wearing it right now.” *Evie confessed.*

“Are you serious? ‘*sta loca*,” Dee Dee said. “So why do you think Raquel has all this extra lana?”

^{*g*} “It’s 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*} Evie could be a bit of a control freak when it came having first run information on either ^{*Evie asked.*} friend. “Remember? Raquel was always paying for him when he ran out of his trust money.”

I guess
“Oh, yeah,” Dee Dee said. “I mean, I didn’t know him when they were going out,
on the side
but she had said he was pretty chido. I’m taking my ~~bag~~ *nurse* to school tomorrow. Wait until
really
Alejandra de los Santos sees it.”

“Yeah” Evie started. “Wait until –.” She stopped. She had no one to impress with
not pink halter gown
her dress. Alex might not even *be* at her party.

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

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

well sorta
“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
Rocio....
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.”

I yeah right
“What?” Evie laughed so ~~hard that she almost choked on her guava juice.~~
Dee, you are *so* not moving back to Mexico City. You’re crazy.”

“No, I’m not,” Dee Dee asserted. “I already talked to Graciela about it. She said I
could stay with her family in Coyacan.” 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...” Dee Dee’s voice got soft. “I, I just don’t want to get into it right *now.*”

Dee Dee practically hung up on Evie, who fell back on her couch. 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."

~~It was the next day and~~ Evie was still in a bit of a daze. Dee Dee announcement was 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 subject. It was a long day at Villanueva for Evie. Raquel didn't go to school and ~~Evie~~ ^{she didn't} 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 for a quick little ~~right~~ *spin*."

"You mean to *ride*?" Evie asked.

"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 ~~turned off~~ *she pulled* ~~the hose~~ *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," ~~Evie~~ *she* told Arturo. *Evie* She 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 that.

"Why don't we take Chamuco out?" she ~~asked~~ *scratched*

"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," she patted Chamuco. "Let me just go get my pullover and I'll be ready."

"We can take Sprinkles and Panchito out," Arturo said. "They could use the exercise. ^{Actually} 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.

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

^{she} When Evie 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

Epic
kick down

Panchito. Arturo looked *nice*. He looked somewhat manly and definitely in charge.

Maybe there *was* something about a boy in cowboy boots on a horse.

Evie felt a little nervous as she ^{started to} walk towards Sprinkles. She hadn't been on a horse in years. She lifted up her left foot, stuck her sneaker in the stirrups, and clumsily hoisted herself up onto him. ^{sprinkles} She flopped ungracefully onto poor Sprinkles' back. ^{After} She immediately sat up in the saddle and took hold of the reins. ^{walk her her talk}

Arturo looked at 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."

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.

^{you didn't give me a} "Wait, Turo," Evie called out. "I wanted a gentle horse. Not a ^{you gave me a} ~~dead~~ one."

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

"Kick? I don't want to hurt him," Evie said.

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

Evie nudged Sprinkles ^{sidi} a bit harder, and he suddenly got himself (and Evie) ^{her} into gear.

"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 to} moved in 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*?

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. ^{that is} How long had she lived by the river, in a neighborhood named ^{main of the county} for the river, ^{and a street} on a street with the Spanish equivalent of river in it, and yet she hadn't spent anytime at the ^{near} actual river [?] that ran through the whole county?

(Even though it was mid-winter, Cacti tunas were in bloom and Evie caught a family of cottontail rabbits scurrying across the dirt path.)

"Oh, my God," Evie marveled. "I love it out here. I can't believe I've lived so close to the river all my life, and, not once have I've never come up here." ^{here} ^{this way.}

Arturo looked around. ^{yah,} "A lot of people forget what's in their own backyard. Especially," he ^{with her} 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."

^{isn't you can help where you spend yr time.} "Yeah, besides, I think because I'm not from around here, I make it a point to explore more than the average person." Arturo ⁹ looked around. "Sometimes, after my shift, I come up here on Princesa and take a sunset ride."

"Princesa?" Evie asked. "And who does Josephina ride?"

"Oh, Josephina won't go horseback riding. She's never been out here."

"What?" Evie asked. "You are *not* serious."

"Yeah, I am," Arturo said casually. "I'm the one who takes Princesa out for exercise. ^{Josephina} She 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. ^{cool} They don't realize how much work they are. Oh, hey, check it out." He pointed out a

^{he looked away}

grassy field they were just riding up to. "Hey, see where it's all matted down over there, in the middle of the field?"

"Uh, huh," Evie looked over.

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

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

"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} we'd have to worry, and besides, I'd protect you."

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

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

"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?"

"My necklace?" Evie asked. She didn't think Arturo would notice ^{so} something she *about a volunteer's accessories* *such details*

"Yeah, the shell one," Arturo said.

Even 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 *Someone* Arturo, who was in a solid steady relationship and wouldn't understand the gloominess *of a singido* *she was feeling*. It had been about four days since her argument with Alex, and his *Sudden* absence from her life had become painfully apparent. She missed the little conversations *Singidom* they'd have on their way to school and *Villanvera* she missed how he'd always take her to the *dropher off at* reserve. It was, really, very sweet and considerate of him to always ask how she was getting home from work. *He 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. I can relate." *Arturo said to the Shaker*

"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.

"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 give it back to me. "She just gave me back her bracelet," Arturo said. "Again."

"Oh, no," Evie said. "I'm sorry." really?

"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."

— Evie's Thoughts - 2 lines?
"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'."

she said,
"Good," Arturo nodded. "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. w/ Panchito + Sprinkles — She saw Chamuco

... catro...
"So hey, what's gonna happen to Chamuco?" Evie asked.

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

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

9
“Oh, he’ll just have to stay at the reserve longer...until the next clinic. We have them four times a year.” *Arturo said*

“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.”

The info bothered the
Evie felt bothered by this news. “Well, at least he was the reserve.

“Yea, and we all take care him. *The blue mainstay* 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.”

“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 she 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. “Oh *wow* my God, congratulations!”

yea, “Thanks,” Arturo smiled. “I’m not starting until the spring, with early enrollment. *but* I’m really looking forward to it.” *I already looked into working into another*

“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 *could help but feel* *horse rescue.*

was bailing or had bailed on *her* Evie. What was the weekly total so far this week? *At least \$400*

“And when you start working at the reserve you can learn more about horsemanship,” *mae* her said. *Four? + Soda to be here*

“I know about horsemanship,” Evie defended herself.

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} ~~reserve~~, the sun ^{had already set} ~~was already setting~~. Evie remembered she hadn't seen the sunset from the ridge Arturo had mentioned.

"I'll show you next time," ^{he} Arturo promised. "I was sorta getting worried that it was gonna get dark on us and, you know, *the coyotes*." ^{Spanish?}

Evie rolled her eyes.

"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. "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 ^{cool} so sweet 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.

Evie started to dismount from Sprinkles and as she swung her left leg around, she *lost her balance. She grasped for the horn but* stumbled a bit. *couldn't help but*

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

9
"Oh, how embarrassing," Evie fell back into his arms. She quickly stood up on her own. *I guess I need a lesson in 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 felt the oddest sensation in her stomach. *No, this could not be happening.* *she straightened her skirt + bulged up her low rider*

"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. *It was new territory*

"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 Arturo's kisses ^{was} were deep and long, different than Alex's ^{was} who gave quick, but gentle kisses. Evie instantly felt that vaguely familiar light-headed feeling. (As soon as she felt it, she realized it had been a while since she had experienced the sensation.)

"Evie?"

Both Evie and Arturo looked up.

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

"Alex," Evie immediately pulled back from Arturo. She wiped her 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.

"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.

and Alex. How had their relationship shifted from "Nite, QT" to "Nvr Mnd" in just a matter of days? Of course, she knew how. One word, Arturo.

After Lindsay had been picked up from the reserve, 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, ^{earlier that day} 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 --

✓ Alex ~~was~~ 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 driving test (fear, major fear). Then some of the players changed, but the theme continued: Dee Dee (worry), Raquel (confusion), and, of course, ^{The} her driving test (fear, ^{more} major ^{of her emotions} ~~fear~~). Alex and Arturo, of course, were floating around in the background. Evie ^{finally} tucked ~~hid~~ her cell phone under her pillow, ^{and} turned over and closed her eyes in determination.

She *had* to sleep. Her driving test was in less than four hours. - She ^{and} ^{confront} the fear!

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. ^{thing in the morning} No, you put on your seat belt. Stop it! You need rest. Fall asleep already! ^{after a good night's sleep.}

Arturo, Alex... Arturo. Argh!

Evie turned on her other side and hugged another pillow when she heard what ^{her other} sounded like Davey Mitchell's truck. ^{that truck,} (She ~~knew the staccato rumble of his 4x4~~). She pulled her cell phone out from under her pillow and checked the time. Could it really be him ^{rumbling} coming down Camino del Rio at 1:30 in the morning? ^{she} Evie pushed away the sheets, ^{and} got up from her bed. She looked through her bedroom shutters, ^{and} yes, it was Davey. ^{already}

He was bringing Raquel home from God knows where. Evie crossed her arms and watched Raquel step down from his ⁹high, lifted 4x4 and sneak around the side of her house.

Evie immediately texted her:

Cn I cme ovr?

To which Raquel replied:

Now?

Evie:

ER

Raquel:

K. Ktch dr. Shh!

Evie quickly threw on some sweat pants, a hoodie, and her Juicy Couture flojos. She crept downstairs and ^{lift}went through the side door of the kitchen ^{before cutting}and cut across to the ^{her}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 ⁹Southwestern green chili and cheese tamales and ^{shoveled them}popped them in the microwave. ^{tossed}

"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 ~~salad~~ ^{paper} plate. "But I'm starving. Do you mind if I eat? It *is* my house."

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* ~~masa~~ looked good, but she was far from hungry. "Nothing really. I mean, we were just kissing, sorta."

"*Just* kissing?" Raquel's mouth dropped. Evie could see the mouthful of corn ~~masa spread~~ *smear* 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~~ *spot* under her breath as she opened her mouth and let a wad of *masa* drop unto her plate. "*It's fucking hot!*" She took a quick swig of soda and waved her hand over her opened mouth.) ↓

"Are you alright?" Evie asked.

"*No*," Raquel continued to wave her fingers over her mouth. "I friggin' burned my tongue. *Sheeyat*, that ~~was~~ *spot* hot. But ~~whatever, go on.~~"

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

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

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

"Evie," Raquel ^{chewed} 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?" ^{where?}

"We were kicking it, at the Hobo Jungle."

"Hobo Jungle?"

"Yeah."

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, she'd bend her neck in vain, hoping to catch a glimpse of a hobo ^{says} roasting a hot dog ^{or something} pierced by a twig or eating beans out of a can. But Evie's father told her and her sister ^{some} that Hobo Jungle was not a 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.

And now here was Raquel, going to *parties* in the Jungle.

^{kicking it}

flab
Evie looked at her as she scarfed down the rest of her tamales, and it was then 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.

stuffy
“Raquel,” Evie started. “Are you okay?”

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

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

“Well, it’s almost two in the morning, Evie. And to be honest,” 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.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

she did not just say that.
"Yeah, you sure showed concern with Alex," Raquel scraped the remaining melted jack cheese from her plate and crammed it into her mouth. "Okay, you want to be so honest, all things in the clear?" she asked with her mouth full of *masa*. "Well, I wanna know something, the honest truth."

"What?" Evie ~~asked~~. *demanded to know*

"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.

"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*."