

she was all blonde, one hundred percent Honey Blonde. Maybe it was too early in the morning and too early in the process to embrace change?

As she came out of her bathroom, she could hear that Monday morning life had started as usual for the Gomez household. *El Mercadito* was on the kitchen radio and she could hear her mother downstairs, talking to Lindsay. This was going to be her mother's first chance to see Evie. Last night, after Dee Dee had dropped her off at home, she went straight to her room. Thankfully her mother and father were catching up on TiVo. What would her mother say this morning?

"Well," She yawned, "Here goes nada." She threw on some sweat pants and headed to the kitchen.

Lindsay, pulling pan dulce out from the toaster oven, was the first to see Evie. Her face **became** a composite of surprise and confusion. "Evelina!"

"Hey, Linds," Evie said confidently as she took over a stool at the counter.

Evie's mother was still in her pool robe, her hair wet from her morning swim. She looked over at Evie. "Evie!"

Here it comes -- the Gomez fury.

But to Evie's surprise, her mother's initial shock was not followed with criticism, but rather curiosity. "When did you fix your hair?" Her mother got up from the counter to look over Evie.

"Oh," Evie timidly fluffed the top with her fingers. "Last night at Dee Dee's." Then quickly added. "It was her idea."

"I like it." Her mother sipped coffee from her mug. "Dee Dee did it? I'm impressed."

Which were the golden words? Evie wondered. ‘Dee Dee did it’ or “It was Dee Dee’s idea?” Nonetheless, Dee Dee seemed to be the gold child with the golden touch and do no wrong. She would definitely make a note of that. *Dee Dee thought it would okay to go to the party in L.A. and get a hotel room in Malibu so we wouldn’t have to drive home drunk on the Pacific Coast Highway.*

“You know,” Evie’s mother smoothed her own damp hair. “I used to be blonde.”

“I remember Dad saying that.” Evie yawned again. “I don’t think I’ve seen any pictures of you with blonde hair.”

“Evie,” Her mother said. “Cover your mouth when you yawn.” She went on. “Yeah, it was during my Teena Marie phase, just for a short time. God, maybe I should go back to blonde. What do you think, Linds?” She looked at her reflection from the kitchen cupboard’s glass door

“Oh, si, Senora,” Lindsay agreed as she brought Evie a small glass of orange juice. “You would look even *mas linda*.”

Evie threw Lindsay a look. *God, can you be anymore mas mentirosa?*

But Lindsay just innocently smiled back.

With her mother’s nod of approval, Evie felt unsure about her new look. Her mother liking her hair was not a good sign, not quite the stamp of coolness. She wanted to have her own look herAs she went through her closet in search of clothes to match her new hair, what better day than a Monday to showcase independence?At Villanova Evie’s always been known as Raquel’s little shadow or, as of late, the freaky Flojo with the blue hair.

“What did you do to your hair?” Alex asked Evie, as Dee Dee uncovered his eyes with her hands. She and Evie had walked up behind him at his locker. His face was crinkled in disapproval when he saw Evie. Not the reaction she had hoped for.

“*Que quapa, no?*” Dee Dee put her hand on her hip like a game show model and displaying Evie as if she was a brand new car up for grabs.

. “I dunno,” Alex looked Evie over. He wasn’t so sure what to make of the new hair color. “But if that’s the look you were trying for.”

Trying for? As if Evie was attempting to do something but didn’t quite accomplish it?

“It *was* the look I was trying for,” Evie snapped. “And the one I achieved.”

“Whoa, don’t trip, Eves.” Alex frowned. “Dee Dee just asked me a question.”

“And I just gave you an answer,” Evie was embarrassed.

“What’s up with all the changes?”

“You know, Alex, you can be so dense.” She linked arms with Dee Dee. “Come on Dela. He’s obviously not *en la moda*.”

Dee Dee giggled. “Sorry you don’t **approve**, Alejandro.”

As Evie left Dee Dee and walked down the hall, she vowed that Alex’s opinion wasn’t going to ruin her morning, but, in reality, it did. His comments clung to her between first Spanish. Why was it that she was so concerned about what *he* thought? She wondered as she translated **the parts of the house into espanol**. What did he know about fashion or style? Him, in the same ol rubber flojos he’s worn since last year. His feet

must stink, that's for sure.

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"Oh, what do we have here?" Mr. Galvan, her Spanish II teacher smiled when she entered class. "I almost didn't recognize you."

"Oh, yeah," Evie smiled. "I went under the bottle."

"En Espanol?"

Uh, **Yo...**"

Some students around laughed.

"You said, 'I slept under the bottle.' What your baby bottle?"

Actually, you wouldn't have a direct translation. You would say, "I colored my hair (spanish.)

I colored my hair.

No, en espanol.

Evie repeats

"Well, good enough. You know, I moment I thought you were your friend."

"My friend?"

"Si, Dela de LaFuentes.

Evie thought as she took her seat. So much for individualism.

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After 4th period Civics, Evie headed toward the cafeteria to meet up with Dee Dee for lunch. As she walked **by ()** she was thrown off by a long, slow whistle, coming from

behind her. She turned around and was surprised to find Jose with Mondo.

It seemed like forever since any of them had exchanged words. Actually it had almost been two weeks since the three of them had really talked. A big change from how they used to be. Even when she was grounded, she still rode to and from school together. And of course, every lunch at Juniper's Tree.

But there they were now, just the three of them in front of the PE building.

"Hey, Blondie," Mondo half smiled as he pulled up his shades for a better look.

"Oh, hey," Evie answered timidly.. Was Raquel around? She didn't know if ready she was to face her just yet.

"Nice hair," Mondo went on.

"Alright..." She waited for a cutting remark, Mondo style. "Go ahead and say it."

"No, I mean it." He got closer and looked her over like he's never looked her over before. "You look hot."

Hot?

"Oh, thanks," was all she could say. She looked around. Raquel wasn't anywhere near.

Jose came up on the other side and stretched his arm out against the wall, blocking her path. She was caught between the two, Mondo behind her and Jose in the front. Just a *slight* uncomfortable. As Flojos they've shared tight space together, in the front seat of Mondo's car and even in the mosh pit of the last () show they all went to at the Fairgrounds. But this felt different. The energy was, well, felt too close for **comfort**.

"So," Jose lowered his head and moved closer into her. "Have you found out?"

"Found out what?" Evie asked. *Jeez, are you sniffing me?*

“If blondes have more fun?”

“Jose, stop it!” She pushed his arm away. “Quit being stupid.” She wanted to sound tough, but deep down she felt awkward. What had she told Dee Dee? To just ignore him? “So,” Evie looked down the hall. “Where’s Raquel?” What she meant to convey was: where is your *girlfriend*?

“Dunno,” Jose arm dropped and he shrugged his shoulders casually. “My hip ain’t tied to hers.”

“No, but your dick is,” Mondo quipped.

Evie let out an unexpected chuckle.

“Hey,” Jose looked at Evie. “At least I’m not the one dumping my best friend for some Sangro slut.”

“Dee Dee’s not a slut.” Evie snapped. “Is that what you think or is that what Raquel programmed you to think?”

But before he could answer, Raquel was already coming towards all three of them.

“Hey, **Jose!**” she called out. “I’ve been *waiting* at the tree. Where have—” She didn’t recognize Evie at first, but when she got closer and saw her hair, you can bet she let loose.

“You have *got* to be kidding!” Raquel’s mouth was wide open in disbelief. She came up to Jose and nudged him in the ribs. “Can you believe this?” She looked over Evie’s hair. “What are you? Some Pseudo Sangro now?”

“Yeah,” Jose half smiled. “We were just saying that.”

Actually, Evie thought, you were not “just saying” that.

“Oh, *my* God, Evie,” Raquel went on. “You have *totally* lost it. Totally.”

She actually circled Evie. “Who do you think you are trying to be?”

“I’m not trying to be anyone,” Evie brushed back the sides of her hair. “I just changed the color. It’s no big deal, Raquel.” Evie tried to stand up to her but it was something she definitely needed more practice with.

“What, was this Dee Dee’s idea?” Raquel asked.

“No, not at all,” Evie answered.

“Yeah, I’m sure it was. She’s always had you wrapped around her little finger. Even when we were kids.”

Evie was getting pissed off. Raquel was having a field day in front of Mondo and Jose, again, at her expense.

“I think she looks hot,” Mondo tilted his head and caressed his chin. He continued looking at Evie. “I definitely approve.”

“*Hot?*” Raquel questioned.

“What, you jealous, Rocky?” Mondo asked. “Maybe you should think about lightening up. In more ways than one.”

“Oh, shut up.” Raquel pushed her hands into Mondo’s chest. “Come on, Jose.” She put her arm around his waist. “There ain’t nothing to see here.”

And with her hand tucked in the back pocket of Jose’s cords Raquel led Jose from Evie and Mondo followed. But as they walked away, Jose looked back and over his shoulder he winked at Evie. This caught her off guard. Was it just more flirtation? Morse code to signal that he was still her friend? Either way, Evie can’t help but feel a bit triumphant. She finally had a little something over Raquel.

* * *

By the time Evie reached the Sangro table, the **heaviness** of the confrontation with Raquel had slightly lifted.

Ay!” Alejandra twirled Evie around in an exaggerated dance move. “Now we just have to do something about your chancas!”

Evie looked down at her flojos and pursed her lips. Hmmm, not any time soon likely.

“No, I know,” Alejandra said. “We have to celebrate. She looked at the other Sangros. “Celebrate, big time.”

Basilio?”

Basilio.”

This Friday. I’ll see Basilio today after school and plan everytyhing. Alejandra looked at Evie. “Don’t make any plans this Friday night, Chica. We are going to have some fun.”

When Friday night came, Evie had her Weekender night bag, all ready to go. Who was Basilio, she wondered. Dee Dee seemed to know, but everyone kept it hush hush. Was her a stripper? Oh, no. Was that it. They were gonna have a dorm party and out Basilio would jump from a cake and swivel his g-string to Reggatron? Evie was hoping that the Sangros hadn’t ordered a cake and some male stripper was gonna pop out and swivel around to Reggatron. Gee-ross.

Ew.

Evie's cell rang. Dee Dee running late? But it was Alex.

"Hey, you wanna head out to Sea Street tomorrow?" He asked. "It would just be you and me."

"Oh, *tomorrow*?" Evie felt conflicted. It was going on the second month of her owning her new Hanson board and she had yet to get it wet. "I can't."

"We don't have to do DP," Alex said. "We can go later in the day."

Evie hesitated. Alejandra had said to keep Friday night and all day Saturday free. She didn't want to back out now. She'd be letting everyone down. Besides, she was interested to meet this Basilio.

"Mmm," Evie clicked her tongue. "I really can't, Alex. I'm all tied up. Sorry."

"So, I thought you wanted to surf." Alex said. "But every time I ask you, you can never go, or you don't wanna go. What's going on?"

"Nothing." Evie looked at herself in her closet mirrors. "Nothing is going on and I *do* wanna surf. It's just, it's not a priority right now"

"Oh," Alex tone dropped. "Not a priority. O-*kay*."

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

"Nothing, I'm just agreeing with you, Evie."

But Evie could tell he was annoyed. "Oh, you know what, Alex?"

"What?" he asked.

"Can you call me by my proper name? From now on?"

"Your *proper* name?" Evie could sense a smirk forming on Alex. Was he now laughing at her?

“Yeah,” Evie said defensively. “Evelina.”

Alex got quiet on the other end.

“Alex,” Evie asked. “Uou still there?”

“Yeah,” he let out an exasperated sigh. “I’m still here. O-*kay*, Evelina. I’ll talk to you *later*. ”

And he hung up before Evie could even say good bye.

What the hell was that about? She looked at herself again in the mirrors. God, didn’t he know that sand and sea water were a lethal combo for chemically treated hair?

Friday night, Dee Dee came to pick up Evie.

“Hola, Vicki,” Dee Dee waved to Evie’s mother as she entered the foyer.

“Hey Dee Dee,” her mother came over. “How are you, mi’ja?” She hugged her. Evie tells me you are doing just great at school.”

“Mom,” Evie tilted her head. “Her name is Dela.”

“Oh,” Evie mother looked embarrassed. “ I’m sorry.”

“It’s no big deal, not with you anyway.” Dee Dee put her arm around Evie. “But oh, yes. Evelina’s been a big help at school and I’ve already made a ton of new friends. otras chicas from Mexico, too.”

“Oh, how wonderful.” Evie’s mother was reacting as if she heard. “Is that who you are watching videos with tonight?”

“Yeah,” Dee Dee said. “But it’s gonna be an early night, because they live on campus and they have to be in by 10pm. But they are still going to come over to watch some with us.”

“How nice.” Evie’s mother looked completely charmed. “Is Raquel going to?”

“Oh, definitely,” Dee Dee said quickly. “Right Evie?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“And Gracie’s gonna order from California Pizza Chicken,” Dee Dee added.

“Now that sounds like a nice night,” Evie’s mother looked tremendously pleased.

As Evie and Dee Dee had left the house and got into the Beetle, Evie turned to Dee Dee.

“Why did you tell my mom that Raquel was coming over?”

“Oh, that was just to throw her off,” Dee Dee lit up a cigarette. “Don’t you want her thinking everything is good and regular, like the old days?”

“I guess. So, are we going to the Alejandra’s dorm? Are we gonna hang out there?”

No,” Dee Dee said. “Didn’t you hear Ally? Weren’t you paying attention? She wants to celebrate, something special.”

“Which is?” “You’ll see.” Dee Dee smiled slyly as her car went on the on ramp to the 101 North.

The next thing Evie knew, they were on Ventura Road, but as they got closer to Villanova. They passed right by it.

“Now this is getting exciting,” Evie said. “What’s with the secrecy?”

“You’ll see. It’s gonna be fun,” Dee Dee said. “I’ve only went one before with the

girls. The other time was for a birthday, but we didn't stay the night."

"We're staying the night?" Evie asked. "Wait, where are we going? I thought everyone had to be in their rooms by 10pm?"

"God, you are the square."

The drive into Ojai meant more home and a few cutesy Bed and Breakfasts. Manufactured Artist retreat.

Ojai Valley Inn.

The pulled up to the front where their were valets, nicely dressed guests getting out of their cars. Bouganvillea.

Hola Basilio," Alejandra practically purred. "Que onda, chulo?"

Chulo? Basilio was old, wrinkled, missing a front tooth and half of his grey hair.

Bueno, bueno, he nodded in excited nervousness.

You have a room for us?

Si, si," He wiped his forehead. "Pero, we can't have any problems. Like last time."

Basilio," Alejandra gave him a sideways glance. That was not my fault. It was one of ours fault. But I told you my father would pay for it and didn't he? Didn't he pay for the entire ()?

Si, si, senorita, pero, mis jefes, I don't want any problems.

Oh, Basilio," She smoothed the few strands of white hair that lay across his forehead. "Am I a trouble maker? Do I cause problems? Should I just go home now?"

Basilio looked alarmed. "Ay, no. No, here, follow me. I have your room ready..

He got in a golf cart and Alejandra followed him, past the rooms, the pool, the

tennis courts, the traditional Chumash Indian mud/hot room, till finally they reached the end of the Ojai Valley Inn. The last building.

Basilio got off the cart and walked over to Alejandra.

"Mira," he handed her a set of keys. "Here are the keys. Two extras for your sisters. He looked over at Fabby and Areceli.

Oh, you are a doll, Alejandra cooed. "Too sweet for words.

Oh, one last thing, can you make sure we not just one, but two buckets of champagne?

get a late check out.

Evie couldn't believe it. "Is this the honeymoon suite?

"Better," Dee Dee threw her bag on the leather love seat. "It's the suite el presidente!

Alejandra. She went over to the main sliding glass door. It opened unto a balcony. Below was a view of ().

Fabby flopped on one of the beds, "I'm gonna get me an in room massage and pixie tangerine body scrub.

. We're already in October They don't have the Pixie Tangerine."

Oh, so what do they have.

"Melon Pumpkin, duh."

The Sangros flirted with one of the janitors at the Ojai Valley Inn. Unlike Villanova, it *was* a Spanish styled five star hotel. This poor guy, () was a day janitor with a ring that boasted access to the presidential suite of the the Ojai Valley Inn, the most

expensive suite at the Inn.

Pablo's had said his family hailed from Zacatecas and Alejandra immediately played into that.

Ay," she looked down at him from her car, "You family is from Zacatecas?" She coyly placed her hand on her chest. "Mi familia estan de Guerrero? Ay, como like family!"

Chumash mud

"Oh, yes it does," Denise smirked.. "My father owns two **Suenos** in D.F. and because of me, I could get us all facials for nothing, whenever we wanted.."

"Yeah, well a lot of good that does us now," Charlene picked at her skin in front of her compact. "I need a seaweed."

"I got some left sushi from lunch." Denise playfully shot back. "Why don't I rub some on your face?"

Champagne is ordered

Fabby pulls out some pot.

Mondo Corral has the best mota, no?"

Mondo?" You get this from Mondo?"

Yeah, everybody does."

Evie wondered if Raquel knew that Mondo dealt business with the Sangro. Well, business is business, and dealers, like many, don't discriminate. She was sure the Sangros had the money to burn.

EVIE FELL ASLEEP. THE GIRLS GIGGLING. THE ROOM WAS ROMANTIC. TO SPEND WITH SOMEONE.

As Evie was falling asleep on her plush king sized bed, she heard a music tone from her cell. God, she hoped it wasn't her mother. She looked and saw it was Alex. He had sent her a text message. What, more guilt tripping about her not going surfing?

U up? He had writtern.

She wrote back. Ys.

Srry abot 2nte. U mad? Alex asked.

She responded: No, nt really.

How can I make it up 2 u?

Evie was confused. What?

i wnt to mke it up 2 u, Alex texted again.

No worries, She texted back. No problema.

Yr not mad at me?

Why was he so concerned? Evie wondered. But before she could text him back, he sent her another message

I cldn't sleep Whr r u?

Was Evie misinterpreting his text. She typed back.

In bed.

Me 2, he texted back.

Me 2? Like under the covers, *in bed*? And if so, what was he wearing? Boxers? Briefs? Naked? Evie didn't know what to write back. She felt strangely excited. Alex was her friend, but it seemed, at least to her, he was flirting with her. He was in bed and she was in bed and he was thinking of her. Not in a crass, icky Mondo kind of way,

but...well, it seemed, just nice.

He texted again. R U still there?.

She was obviously taking too long. She wanted to write something alluring.

But all she could think of was a simple: yes

Thout u fell aslp

She wrote back: No.

No? Can you be a little bit more creative?

Alex: I dn't like fighting w u

Evie:Me 2.

Alex: Wish u were going tmorrw

Evie: Me 2, srry.

The feeling across Evie's chest felt stronger, warmer and more tingling. She felt a bit nasaus. It was like Alex was right in the bed, with her. Secretly. It felt shameful, naughty and so nice. God...Alex. She had no idea her body, her head could react this way towards him,, t. Alex.

Alex: I'll try in after DP

Evie: O K

Alex: Sleep sweet.

Sleep sweet? Alex had never, ever, said anything like that to her. Was it just the security of a text messaging? The safety of the simple number and letters from his cell phone? Had he been drinking? He usually doesn't' before he goes surfing.

Evie was excited. Her stomach was tingling and her mouth felt dry. Alex? Could she be with Alex? She started to think about him. **Examples.** As Charlene continued to

sleep beside her, She turned to her side and placed her head and her cell under the covers. The back screen of her cell lit up and glowed under the blanket. She went through the message history, reading and re-reading what he had just typed. Sleep Sweet. I want to mke it up 2 u, In bed. *Bed*. Was she just imaging his innuendoes?

She wasn't imagining it. Alex *was* into her. She reread his last text, Sleep sweet, What if Alex wasn't just being silly? What if he really had meaning? She was beginning to think, as she turned to her side and held her phone to her chest. Tha tmaybe she could be into him too.

* * *

The next day Alex did phone, just as promised. It was in the afternoon and Evie's cell rang just as she was coming up the steps to her house. Dee Dee had just dropped her off after initiation night at the Ojai Valley Inn.

"Hey," she said, holding the phone between her cheek and left shoulder. She was juggling her Weekender, a bag of items from the gift shop and her house keys. She wanted to sound calm, like her usual calm self. Yeah, right, as if the exchange of sexy texty hadn't happened.

"Hello?" Alex asked.

"Alex?"

"I can't hear you," he said. "You keep fading in and out."

Great. After checking and rechecking her phone all morning and afternoon her finally calls and he can't even hear her.

"Let me call you from the house line," she told him as she started to unlock her

front door.

“Okay,”

Evie went inside and ran upstairs to her room. She shut the door behind her

“Evie, are you home?” It was her mother.

“Yeah, mom. I’ll be right out.” She threw her **things** on the carpet and searched for her cordless phone..

“You know,” Evie’s mother was now coming down the hall. “It’s Lindsay’s birthday tommorrow.

“Did you know that?”

Nuh-uh.” She yanked up her vintage Senor Lopez and P. Kitty jumped out from under it, crying in fright.

Ooh, sorry, P.”

“Your dad and I want to take her dinner tonight,” her mother continued. “You need to come.”

“Okay, mom,” Evie frantically rummaged through her clothes strewn about her bedroom floor. “I’ll be there.”

“Evie,” her mother stood at the closed bedroom door. “Why are you being so evasive? Did you color your hair again?”

“Mom, no. *Please*. I have to make a call,” Evie called out.

“Make a call? You’ve been with all your girlfriends all night. You could you possibly need to call so urgently?”

“Mom,” Evie was on the verge of an panic attack. She could not find the landline and Alex was waiting. “Where is my cordless?” Evie went into the bathroom and looked

around

Her mother came in. "Evie," she started. "How can you find anything in here?"

Evie came back out and looked under her pillows and blankets. Both on the floor.

Her mother finally helped and lifted some school notebooks. The cordless was under them.

Of course," her mother smirked."It would be here. You never touch these."

Evie grabbed the phone. "Okay, mom. I have to make a call."

"Okay, okay, Evie. I just want you to know to make no plans tonight. Lindsay's husband and sister are coming also."

"Okay, okay." She held the phone to her side and walked her mother out. As soon as she was out of her bedroom, she shut the door.

Evie kicked off her flojos and grabbed her pillows off the floor. She propped them against her headboard and leaned back on them. She wanted everything to be perfect when she returned Alex's call. Their first conversation since...the confessional of feelings. Yes. She speed dial his number. But now his line was busy. *Busy?* On a cell? Maybe he was calling her?

When she clicked off, she saw he had just left her a message. She called immediately called him back, but she got his voice mail. Grrrrr! And cell phones were supposed to *assist* with communication? Now, normally, not reaching Alex wouldn't be such a big deal. They would just catch up at school on Monday, but now Alex had planted a seed, and oh God, Evie wanted to dig his seed out and find out exactly what was gonna sprout from it. It was driving her crazy.

She listened to his voice message.

Hey, Eves, I thought you were gonna call me right back. Anyway,, but I have to leave with my dad. So...I guess I'll try you later.

Later? As in that night? But she had to go to dinner with her family. Maybe he meant, later that weekend? Way later, as in Monday, at school?

She felt dizzy with agony. She tossed her cell phone on her bed and turned to her side. She desperately wanted to talk with Alex. But. She didn't want to call him *again*. she didn't want to appear so needy. So, she would wait, and wait until he called back.

But all the rest of Saturday she thought about Alex.

Get this from earlier text.

Could he be her boyfriend. Her first boyfriend? What would he be like? How would he kiss? She hadn't kissed, well, really kissed a boy. There was so and so at the party, but it was a quick pat on the lips. Not much romance there. Nothing that sent excitement across her chest. Now she knew what Raquel must feel, and Dee Dee. It was agonizing. Maybe later meant like five minutes later? She looked at her cell and guessed not.

That night her parents took Lindsay and her family to the Elephant Bar. It was hard to concentrate. Seeing the couples, hands intertwined, sharing slices of chocolate mud pie and romantic glances with each other. Lindsay was happy. Her husband, Jack, had his arm around often and even brushed cake crumbs off her sweater.

The waiters came to sing happy birthday.

Evie," Her mother said. "Put your phone away. You are being rude."

Evie reluctantly put her phone back in her bag. But she didn't turn it off. She simply put it on vibrate and simply placed it between her legs.

* * *

The next afternoon, Sunday, Evie, Dee Dee and the four Sangros were at Dee Dee's laying out by the pool. It was late October, still enough time to get a tan.

"What did you do last night?" Dee Dee asked Evie.

"It was Lindsay's birthday. We all went to the Elephant Bar."

"Who's Lindsay?" Charlene asked

"She's our housekeeper," Evie said.

"You went out with her maid?" Alejandra frowned. "On a Saturday night?"

"Yeah, why?"

Alejandra looked at Charlene.

"I would not be caught dead with my criada on a Saturday night," Alejandra said.

"Maybe on Sunday morning...if she picked me up at church, after mass"

"Or from your **anamate's** house."

"Well, she's not a maid," Evie said. "She doesn't live with us and you don't even have a maid."

"Yeah, I do," Alejandra said. "Back home in Mexico. But my mother is always having to fire them and then get new ones. They always fuck up her clothes. So when I go home for vacation, I never which two new Indians I'm gonna meet."

"Ally," Dee Dee said. "You don't have to be so harsh."

"Well, it's true. Am I lying Fabby?"

"No, your mom is totally **finicky** about her clothes."

"That's because she has nice ones." Alejandra sat up and checked her tan line.

“Oh you should see what she’s sending me for the Dia de los Muertos dance.”

“The Dia de los Muertos dance?” Evie had forgotten about it.

“Yeah, it better be good,” she said. “Last year? Que boring. My mother’s having my costume flown in from Mexico.”

“Really?” Dee Dee asked. Evie could sense a competitive tone in her voice.

“What are you going as?”

“Maria Felix.”

“Ooh, que sexy!” Denise said. “You are gonna look *hot*.”

“Yeah,” Dee Dee agreed reluctantly.

Despite the larger than life announcement on Villanova’s main marquee, Eve hadn’t given much thought about the dance. Ever since the night Alex texted her, nothing else had been on her mind. The dance was now just a week away, the first Saturday of November.

“But isn’t that Fabby’s birthday party?” Evie asked.

“Nuh uh,” Charlene said. “That’s the night before, on Friday.”

“Yeah, and don’t be all *coda* and not bring a present,” Fabby held her right elbow up and hit it with her left hand a couple of times. The Sangros laughed.

Evie didn’t get it.

“Hey,” Denise frowned. “My family’s from Monterrey and we are *not* cheap!”

After the Sangros had left back to their dorms, Evie confessed to Dee Dee that she still didn’t have a costume for the dance.

“No worries,” Dee Dee. “I already have our outfits for the dance.”

“*Our* outfits?” Evie asked.

“Mmm, Hmm,” Dee Dee said. “Ally’s not the only one with connections. Graciela has all this great stuff from Mexico, all these fancy embroidered clothes, crinolines, hats and jewelry. She used to be an actress in the Mexican soaps.”

“Really?” Evie wondered if Lindsay would know who she was. “Which one?”

“Oh, just about all them,” Dee Dee said. “But you know how the stories just run for a limited time and they were just a minor roles. She was always the seductress and I guess she was good at it, because she was given a lot of the left over costumes and that doesn’t always happen.”

Graciela a seductress? Imagine that! What until Evie told her mother.

“Anyway,” Dee Dee continued. “You, Alejandro and I *have* to go together.”

“Alex? When did you talk to Alex about this?” He hadn’t mentioned anything to Evie.

“I haven’t talked to him...yet,” Dee Dee said. “But he’ll do it.”

Oh, like you got him twisted around your little finger.

“I got it all figured out,” Dee Dee went on. “You’ll dress as Frida Kahlo, Alex can be Diego Rivera and I’ll be Cristina, Frida’s sister. Que cute, no?”

“Uh, *no*.” Evie said. “Dela, I don’t want to be Frida.” She caught her reflection in the car window and tousled her blonde bangs. Truth was, she didn’t want to look all ugly in front of Alex, unibrow, moustache and all.

“Evie, *yes*,” Dee Dee said. “But you have to, to make it work.”

“Dela,” Evie tried to explain. “Frida is so played out. Everyone goes as Frida.”

“Yeah, but I bet nobody here knows how to do her right,” Dee Dee insisted. “You

should see the stuff that Gracie has. You won't believe it. We'll be different than anyone at the dance. Even Alejandra."

"No, *you*'ll be different. Nobody ever dresses at Cristina. What does she even look like?"

"Oh, she was very beautiful," Dee Dee said, knowingly. "Evie, look, you *have* to go as Frida. Nobody will know I'm Cristina unless there's a Frida and a Diego."

"Dela, nobody is gonna know anyway. It's not that kind of dance, or school for that matter. Why don't you dress as Frida and I'll go as Cristina?"

There, a compromise.

Dee Dee got quiet

"Dee Dee," Evie suddenly felt badly. She hated making Dee Dee upset. "I'll at least think about it."

"Well, I hope you do," Dee Dee said softly. "I already have the outfit for Cristina to fit me and the dance is a week away and I still have to tell Alejandro."

Why, Evie wondered, was Dee Dee so eager to have **Alex** always in the picture? He had been her personal escort at school, her private swim instructor and now her date for the Dia de los Muertos Dance? Why *even* have Evie along? Then she remembered, didn't Diego have an affair with Fridas's sister, Cristina? Hmmm.

14

ShaggyMA: Plans tonight?

RioChica: Party, again.

ShaggyMA: You are the butterfly!

It was Friday night, Fabby's birthday party. The whole week at school had been a blur. She finally, finally got to speak with Alex. It was a tension, but no one was ever said of the text messages they shared. Maybe she imagined it? She didn't want to be the one to bring it up. But, she could see Alex's neck turn pink.

He text messaged her that evening.

Hve fun 2 nite

Evie: Thx

She closed her phone. Was that it? Where they losing what they might have never had? Why didn't they just talk about it. What was up with the texting?

Although Evie conveyed a confident Honey Blonde chica on the outside, she still had the deep roots of insecurity to deal with on the inside. It took her nearly an entire hour just to ready for Fabby's birthday party.

"Clip or no clips?" She asked Dee Dee, as they elbowed each other for mirror space in Dee Dee's bathroom.

"Either," Dee Dee said, not even looking over at her.

Evie held up two different ones barrettes. "Green or grey?"

"Neither."

"You're a lot of help." She sarcastically complained. "I thought short hair was easier."

"Beauty is never easy," Dee Dee sighed. She didn't really seem to care how Evie wore her hair. She was absorbed with her own appearance as looked at her side profile and sucked in her stomach. She had removed her navel ring for the evening and replaced

it with a thin gold belly belt. She had also put on her blue contacts. Something, Evie noticed, that Dee Dee did for special occasions.

As soon as Evie figured out what to do with her hair, (more volumizer, no clips) she had a new problem to tackle. She sat on top of the toilet seat and looked down at the silver sandals that Dee Dee suggested she wear. They were already clenching into the sides of her feet. She had thought that she and Dee wore the same size, but it didn't appear so. Does size 7 Mexican narrow translate to size 7 American wide? Yes, *wide*. That's the problem with wearing flojos all the time. The feet, they expand mucho.

"I still don't about these," Evie referring to the slinky slinks. "Don't you think they're a bit too much?"

"Of course they are!" Dee Dee agreed as she sprayed more perfume in the air and walked through it. "Remember when were kids? You always talked about wanting to wear your sister's heels all the time. I don't understand what the problem is now."

"The problem is I think they *are* my sister's heels." Evie crossed one foot over her thigh and inspected the spike heel. "You don't think they're little dated?"

"*What?*" Dee Dee was surprised. "Evie, they're retro. You of all people should know that." Dee Dee held a cord up to the front of her neck and turned her back toward Evie. "Here, can you help me with this?"

Evie stood up and clasped the black silk cord around Dee Dee's neck.

Dee Dee then turned around to show the pendant off to Evie. "Cute, huh?"

But when Evie looked, she saw that it was no mere pendant. It was a piece of shell. A small iridescent abalone shell, just like the one Alex had found at Bard Beach. Did Alex give Dee Dee the shell he found back at Bard Beach? How could he have done

that? Evie's heart dropped. What *was* going on between them?

"What's wrong?" Dee Dee frowned. "You don't like it?"

"Oh, no," Evie looked away. She wasn't about to admit jealously and she definitely couldn't go into feelings she hadn't even sorted out yet. "It's just these sandals," She brought her foot up. "They really hurt. I think I'm gonna change back into my flojos."

"Evie, *no*," Dee Dee looked down at Evie's feet. "They look so sexy on you. Here," She opened up the bathroom cabinet and pulled out some Band-Aids. "I'll bring supplies, just in case."

As Evie wobbled what seemed the long journey from Dee Dee's bedroom to her car in the driveway, she still couldn't take her mind off the necklace. When Alex had found the shell at Bard beach, he had promised to "polish it up real good" for Evie and, at the time, she thought it was a sweet gesture. She didn't even wear necklaces, but now, more than anything she wanted to be the wearing the shell. How, how could Alex have given the shell to Dee Dee?

As they approached Rio Estate's downtown area, Evie was still surprised to learn that Fabby was actually serious about celebrating her 16th birthday at La Pantera Negra, a Mexican restaurant and lounge on the main boulevard. It was in the heart of the "historic" downtown district, so named, her father joked, because the city didn't want to pay for an architectural or beautification upgrade. La Pantera boasted a bar with a kidney shaped counter, a mirrored splash back and red leather tuck and roll booths with red velvet tables topped with ancient Mexican coins and protective glass. On every wall hung ornate gold

framed black velvet paintings of sleek looking panthers, lounging on leafy tree limbs or perching on ledges, poised and ready to pounce at any moment. It had been years since Evie had even set foot in La Pantera and, according to her father and mother, it wasn't the place it used to be. It was now just a dive where cholos hung out (gasp!) and the cheese was no longer the white crumbling fresca from Mexico, but rather the standard orange kind from Cost Co. (double gasp!). Evie thought it was ironic that the Sangros, like the Flojos, found intrigue in all places off limits.

When she and Dee Dee finally arrived to La Pantera, it was already close to 10 PM and as Evie got out of the Beetle, she braced herself for another long painful journey from the car to the front entrance of the restaurant. Damn, she should have brought her flojos as back up.

"God, when's the last time you been here?" Dee Dee asked, as they walked up to the front doors.

"Not since I was a kid." Evie wasn't really in the mood to talk, especially to Dee Dee.

"When I was younger," Dee Dee said. "I couldn't think of a place more glamorous in than La Pantera Negra. I even fantasized about someday having her wedding reception there."

But Evie said nothing. She just wanted the night to be over with as soon as possible. She pulled out her cell phone. No new message from Alex.

When they walked in the lounge area of La Pantera, it was already packed and Evie and Dee immediately found Fabby at the head of long table. She was surrounded by fellow Sangros, friends, and a mountain of wrapped gifts.

“Feliz Cumpleanos,” Evie kissed Fabby on the cheek.

“Thank you, chica!” Fabby was high from all the attention. She wore a pearl studded tiara, a smashed purple bow was taped to the side of her head and her face was covered in red and pink lipstick kiss prints. She was obviously the adored girl of the evening. “You know I’m having my real birthday party in Mexico. A big bash at my parent’s ranch!”

“Oh, really?” Evie smiled.

“Yeah, we’re all flying back for the three day weekend. You should come!”

“When?” Evie asked. But Fabby was pulled in another direction before she could answer.

Soon after Evie and Dee Dee was introduced to some of guests near Fabby, Dee Dee asked, “*So que quieres tomar?*”

“Uh,” Evie looked at the bar sign. “What do they have?”

“Oh, anything!” Dee Dee started swaying to **the music** that instantly came on.

“You know how La Pantera is with their drinking policy.”

And it was true. Pantera did have a lax ID check.

Dee Dee disappeared into the thick of the party, towards the bar and Evie suddenly found herself feeling uncomfortably alone.

Within a short time, the crowd got deeper and with the extra body heat, it felt to Evie as if all the oxygen from La Pantera had been sucked out. The guests were soon fanning themselves with the plastic menus or wiping their foreheads with the thin cocktail napkins. Everyone was talking quickly over one another and there were so many people Evie didn’t know. No one made attempts to get to know her and she soon began to

feel even more out of place. Just about every Sangro -- Fabby, Denise, Charlene -- seemed to be engaged in an exclusive conversation. Even Alejandra, Evie noticed, was nowhere to be seen.

Evie finally saw Dee Dee again, wedged tight between two unknown revelers in a small booth, laughing and looking like she was having a grand old time. Even from the distance, Evie could make out the abalone shell, dangling precariously from the thin cord around Dee Dee's neck. It upset her all over again. She would definitely rather be alone than be with Dee Dee, that's for sure.

That was something, Evie wistfully remembered, that Raquel never did -- just take off and not come back. Whenever she went out with Raquel, it was always the two of them, side by side, meeting, or rather listening to Raquel make fun of, people. But at least they did it *together*. And, Evie thought, Raquel would never wear a necklace that she knew Evie wanted.

Evie walked around the dark lounge, trying to not look so aimless. She focused on her slice of Fabby's birthday cake; meticulously picking from the sides with her fork. As long as she made the one slice of chocolate cake last, she rationalized, she would not be alone. However, when she was finally scraping the side of her fork across the desert plate for crumbs, she knew it was time to find a new focus for the evening. Fortunately, that's when she saw it - the old jukebox in the far back corner of the lounge. To her, it looked like the same grand gaudy jukebox she remembered as a kid. A bit smaller, of course. But that's what happens when you grow up.

Evie went over to the jukebox and flipped through the choices that covered everything from Vicente Fernandez to Green Day. **The old juke had been updated with CDs rather than the vinyl 45s that once slid out onto a turntable.** She finally found something she wanted to hear. She put in two coins and pressed down on two separate buttons, G and 4.

“What did you pick?”

Evie looked up and found a boy looking over her shoulder. He looked down at the selections with her.

Oh,” She glanced at him, making sure she didn’t appear to be looking him over. He looked appealing enough. Short dark hair, dark eyes, yellow tennis shirt, a small mole on the left side of his chin. Okay, maybe she was looking him over. “G 4,” she said. **SHE FLIRTS WITH HIM THE WAY A SANGRO WOULD.**

“Oh, right,” The guy said dryly. “G 4. I just downloaded them.”

“No,” Evie laughed. He was funny. She had to speak louder as **another song**, definitely not her choice, started to blare through the stereo speakers overhead. “No, I mean, Audio Slave. But it’s not gonna play for a while. You know how these things work.”

Evie got a better look at him. His dark eyes were nice, approachable

Her asked her something, but Evie could not hear over the music.

“What?!” Evie raised her voice. “I can’t hear you!”

“Are. You. From. D. F.?! ” This time the boy spoke slower, but still yelled.

“No, I’m *not* deaf!” She shouted back. “The music. It’s too loud!”

The boy motioned they go to the other side of the lounge, away from the bar and

the jukeboxes crackling speakers. Evie followed him as heavy techno beat, *definitely* a Sangro choice, took over La Pantera's lounge. At one point he took hold of her arm to lead her through the thick of the party. It was nice to finally have some attention. Was anyone noticing? Hello? Dee Dee?

"I said!" Evie started to shout again, "Oops." She lowered her voice as soon as she realized she didn't need to. "Sorry," she laughed, embarrassed. "Oh yeah, I can hear so much better."

"Yeah," the guy pulled out a cigarette. She could detect a slight accent. "So, what's your name?" He asked.

My name?"

Uh, yeah, he smiled. "I don't see anyone else around."

Ev," she started. Evelina.

"That's pretty.

"Thanks." She looked at his cigarette. Oh well. No one is perfect.

"I couldn't imagine living here," The guy looked around. "It's Hicksville. What do you do for fun?"

"Oh, there's lot's to do." She looked at him. His warm eyes suddenly felt cool.

"Like what?" He asked.

"Oh, me and friends-" Evie started.

"My friends and I..."

"What?"

"My friends and I," he corrected her English.

"Oh," She caught on. "Yeah," Why is it that many new language speakers always

feel the need to correct others with their newly discovered text book knowledge? “We go to the beach.”

“And?” He asked.

“To Sea Street. To surf and ... stuff.

He didn’t seem impressed.

“Have you been there?” she asked.

“I think so,” He blew his smoke from the side of his mouth. “Is it near a Holiday Inn?

“Yeah,” Evie said. “Exactly.”

“Yeah, people always talk about the beautiful beaches in California, but I don’t get it.” He rubbed his temple.

“Where are you from?” Evie asked.

“Not around here.”

She only felt worse and more out of place. The arrogance of this guy! Was she or her life *that* boring?

“You know,” He looked over at the main table. “I’m gonna go talk to Charlene, do you mind?”

“Not at all. Go ahead. I see someone I have to talk to anyway.

She felt rejected. She pulled out her cell phone. No messages.

Evie made her way back through the crowd as the slinky slinks pinched the top of her feet more. Even through the dim lighting of the lounge she could see a large blister beginning to form on her right foot. She remembered the Band-Aids that Dee Dee had brought, but now she was nowhere to be seen. Evie decided to head to the restroom

where she could at least get some toilet paper to cushion the throbbing. But on her way, when she passed by La Pantera's retro photo booth, she caught a look of herself in the outside mirror. *Ugh*. No wonder that guy could care less about her. **No wonder Alex hadn't called.** Blonde or not, she looked horrible! She'd definitely have to go to the restroom to freshen up. Was she that uninteresting?

But the pain on her right foot worsened. She bent down to loosen the strap and she couldn't believe what she discovered. There, on the other side of the photo booth's curtain were two pairs of flojos. A pair of faded suede Sanuks and a pair of small brand new red Roxys. She *knew* those flojos. At least, the ones on the male. They belonged to Jose. Evie could barely believe it. What was *he* doing at La Pantera? Anywhere, she guessed, there might be access to easy booze and La Pantera *was* known for its lax policy. But still? She looked closer and yep, the feet were definitely Jose's. Who else had a beaver's tail tattooed on the outside his ankle? And whom else would he be with other than Raquel?

At that moment, Evie felt it was almost like a sign that they were both at La Pantera. Evie craved attention and upon seeing their flojos, she felt an immediate pull of familiarity. After all, hadn't Jose thrown a wink the other day to say that everything was possibly okay, cool? And Raquel? She would never insist that Evie wear shoes that hurt and Raquel wouldn't allow some snot ass boy to talk to Evie that way, either. **And more importantly, Raquel wouldn't accept an abalone necklace that she knew rightfully belonged to Evie. Yes, under her rough exterior, Raquel was a friend.**

Before she could even think about it, Evie pulled the curtain open, and all, but topples right into Jose. Damn those slinky slinks!

“Whoa, whoa,x Blondie,” Jose looked up in surprise. He leaned over from the booth’s stool and helped Evie up. “Someone’s had a little too much to drink?”

Evie helped herself up, “No, no, I just...” She tried to recover from her embarrassment. But to her horror, she discovered that the girl enveloped around Jose was not Raquel. It was Alejandra de los Santos.

“Evie!” Alejandra exclaimed. “Take a photo with us!” She moved over on Jose’s lap to allow more room and started to pull Evie in the photo booth.

“Yeah,” Jose patted his free knee, indicating Evie should sit on it. “I’m down for a *ménage trois*.”

Alejandra lifted her feet up to show off her flojos. “Look, look what Josito bought me! *Muy chiste, no?* And it’s not even *my* birthday!”

Evie tried to remain in the doorway of the photo booth. She looked at Alejandra’s flojos. “Yeah, cool.” Was all she could say.

Both of them looked disheveled, Alejandra’s always perfect hair was tousled and the top buttons of her blouse were unbuttoned. Jose’s shirt was also rearranged.

Evie looked behind her at the crowd. Were people oblivious that Jose and Alejandra were practically having sex in the photo booth? Didn’t any of the other Sangros see that Jose, who they all knew was Raquel’s boyfriend, was with Alejandra? Is this how guys can be? Friends can be? Jose with someone else? Dee Dee after Alex even though she haa boyfriend. Alex not returning her text message.

She stepped into the booth.

“Yeah,” Jose smiled and patted his left knee. “Sit down and tell me what you

want for Christmas.”

She positioned herself on knee the best she could. Alejandra took over his right one. It was a tight fit for all of them in the booth.

“Let’s take a picture,” Alejandra put coins in.

Jose had his hand around Evie, then under her side and underarm. She could feel it inching closer to her chest.

The timer went off.

The first smiled,

The second one goofy

Okay,” Jose said. “Now the last one I want you ladies throw papa a kiss, right here on each cheek.

Alejandra put her arms around Jose and was already puckering up and getting ready. But when the flash went off, Jose turned his head towards Evie and pressed his lips into hers. He slid his tongue into her mouth. It was soft and warm. She felt a dangerous tingle shoot across her body.

“Jose!” She pulled back.

He laughed. “Don’t be such a prude.”

The feeling was weird. Naughty, new, exciting, but wrong. Terribly wrong. Right?

“Hey, that wasn’t the plan!” Alejandra pouted.

Evie got up.

Where you going?” Jose held on to her hand.

Um, “I’ll come right back.” Evie didn’t wanna come across as some prude. “I

still have to use the ladies room.”

“Ooh, and what are you gonna do?” Jose smirked. “Anything you need help with?”

“Alejandra started to close the curtain and put her skinny arms around Jose again. “Take your time.”

“Hey, Evie,” Jose poked his head out from the closed curtain.

Evie looked back. “Yeah?”

“You be a good,” He looked at her firmly. “Okay?”

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean.”

And unfortunately, she did. She wasn’t to say anything to Raquel.

stood outside the photo booth and waited for the picture to come out. As soon as it plopped down, she immediately grabbed the evidence DESCRIBE and ripped it up and stuck the remains in her purse. It was only then she felt truly safe to Evie leave the grinding, slobbery couple to themselves, and she made her way to the back exit of La Pantera. She needed the fresh air, a lot of it. She couldn’t believe what she had just did. And that Jose, with Alejandra de los Santos. How long had *that* been going on? Did Dee Dee know about them? Did Raquel know, or even suspect? No, there was no way Raquel would put up with such crap. *No way.*

Evie paced the back parking lot. It was already close to midnight and most of the shops and taco bars on the main drag were shutting down, giving the whole downtown a

bit of a ghost town feel. Evie felt even lonelier and to be honest, a bit frightened. She wasn't used to hanging around the downtown area alone. She wanted to be home, immediately. But how? Ride back home with backstabbing Dee Dee? Arrogant Boy? Two timing Jose? Looks like she was running out of options.. It did cross Evie's mind to call her mother. Her mother always told Evie that if there was ever an emergency, any type of emergency, she could always call home and she would go and pick her up. No questions asked. Was this an emergency?

Evie figured it really wasn't, so she flipped open her phone and dialed 411. She was surprised to get an actual live person.

"Can you connect me with a taxi service?" she asked the operator.

Living in a three auto household and having friends with cars, Evie never had the opportunity to use a taxi in Rio Estates. The only time she used a cab was when the whole family visited Sabrina at Stanford and they made trips into San Francisco. Her father, always overwhelmed by the one-way, vertical streets, would, to Evie's delight, spring for a taxi as they shopped around Union Square and Embarcadero Plaza.

"I'm sorry," The operator didn't sound so sorry. "We can't recommend a business. You have to give us a name."

"Okay, um," Evie thought out loud. "How about Yellow ... Yellow Checkered Cab? Service?" An obvious business sounding name. There had to be at least one listed in all of Ventura County.

"Do you have a street address?" The operator asked impatiently.

"Uh, do you have anything downtown?"

"I'm sorry, but I need an address."

Evie clicked off. She looked at her cell. She was losing time. Should she just call her mother? She walked back in La Pantera and peered into the back lounge area. Guests were still **dancing** and Evie saw more orders being taken by waiters. Nobody looked like they were ready to leave. She checked the time on her cell phone. It was nearly midnight. The had thirty minutes to get home.

She went back outside and she realized that if she wanted to get home, right away, there was only one person she could rely on and that was Alex.

She sped dialed his number.

“Hullo?” His voice sounded groggy when he answered. She had clearly woken him up.

“Alex, it’s me, Evelina.” Evie felt embarrassed. “I hate to bother you. But do you think you can you come get me? I’m stuck downtown.”

“Evie,” his voice already sounded apologetic. Not a good sign. He was getting ready to turn her down. “I’ve already crashed. I’m doing dawn tomorrow.”

“Please?” Evie begged. “I don’t have a car and I, I just saw...”

“You just saw who?” he asked.

“Just please, Alex...”

“Evie,” Alex sounded more awake. “Are you okay?”

“No,” Evie’s voice started to crack.

“Okay, Evie,” Alex yawned. “I’ll be there.”

Evie waited in the front of La Pantera for Alex and as she walked back and forth on the sidewalk, she felt even more embarrassed that she had called him. The abalone

necklace issue was on the back of her mind. Why, why, why did he give it to Dee Dee?

MORE

When Alex finally pulled up, Evie got in the cab of his truck and couldn't bear to look at him. It's almost as though she was afraid he could read her thoughts. She felt horribly ashamed.

She flipped open her cell and looked at the time. 12:13 am.

"Alex," she said. "I only have 15 minutes to get home."

Alex looked over at her and tilted his head. "Don't I even get a thank you?"

"Oh, no. Of course," Couldn't she do anything right? "Thanks, Alex. I mean it. I'll make this up to you." She started to take the slinky slinks off her feet.

"Don't worry about it."

No, really," Evie said. "Let me take you out or something. Like the **Coastal Cone** or something."

Alex frowned. "What would I get at the coastal Cone? You know I'm lactose intolerant."

"Oh, yeah. That's right." Evie looked out the window. *Tonta!*

Alex yawned as soon as they were at a red light at the intersection. "So, what's this all about?"

Evie titled her head into her hand. "It's just been a bad night." All of a sudden she felt reluctant to mention what had happened over the evening, especially the part about Jose. God, what if Jose tells him? No. That would suck, big time.

"That's *all*?" Alex was exasperated. "First you cancel on me, twice, you don't answer my texts and then you drag me out of bed 'cause you're having a bad night?"

"No, it's just..." Evie trailed off. "Wait, what texts?"

"I send you three text messages. You never replied."

"What? Alex, I didn't get any messages. " She pulled out her phone and checked.

"No, nothing."

Well, I sent them.

What did they say?

"Nothing. It doesn't matter."

"Alex," Evie looked out his truck's window. "I'm having a really tough time here.

It's like I just don't know who my friends are any more."

Alex was quiet for a long time before he spoke up. "Maybe they don't know who you are."

"What is that suppose to mean?"

"I dunno, Evie. You tell me."

"I have no idea what you are talking about." Evie was offended.

"First you try to be a badass," Alex started. "With your blue hair and everything, then you hook up with Dee Dee and Alejandra and that crew and then you try to be like them."

"I'm not trying to be like them!"

"Oh, really?" He looked over at her hair and then at her sandals. "You could have fooled me."

"Alex," she pulled on her blonde bangs, "This was my decision."

"It would be cool if it really was, but I don't think it was. Like I've said before, I don't care what you do with your hair, but I don't get it. You're a smart girl and one of

the coolest girls I know and I don't know why you are letting everyone lead you around."

Evie sat back in her seat and crossed her arms. Why was Alex lecturing her? Who gave him the authority to issue reality checks? What does he know about being a good friend? Look what he did with the abalone shell he had promised to give her. Yeah, nice friend. She looked out the window and could feel her eyes begin to well up. Do not cry. Do. Not. Cry

"I mean, when's the last time you've even been out to Sea Street?" Alex continued. "Have you even tried out the new board I helped you picked out? You were going on and on how you wanted to surf and I took all this time to help you pick out —"

"Oh, sorry if I wasted your time, *Alex*."

"No, it's not that. I'm just saying I spent the time helping you because I was actually looking forward to doing something with someone, with you." He shook his head. "Maybe you need to take a long good hard look at herself in the mirror."

"I need to take a good look at myself? What about you, *Alex*?"

"Me? Evie, just remember who is driving you home. Just remember who *you* woke up in the middle of the night and who *you* called to get up and come out and drive *you* home. I really like you Evie, but sometimes you can be so self absorbed."

"Self absorbed? You know what, *Alex*?" She unsnapped her seat belt. "Don't do me any favors." She motioned to a Pollo Loco up ahead on the boulevard. "Just drop me off here."

"Oh, Evie, come on. I'm not gonna leave you here. Don't be silly."

"No, I mean it." Evie was near a breaking point. "I don't need a fucking lift from you. You call yourself a friend? Giving things you promise to me to someone else!"

"What?" Alex looked confused. "What are you talking about."

She couldn't even start about the abalone necklace.

"Alex! Let me out...*now!*" Evie actually yelled.

"Evie," Alex was perplexed. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Alex!" She yelled louder. "Let me out!"

"Evie, come on..."

"Okay, okay," He finally slowed down and pulled into the parking lot. "Have it your way."

He parked his truck and looked around the lot. The interior lights were on in Pollo Loco, but the eating area looked vacant. "Are you gonna be okay?"

"Like you really care." She grabbed the sandals and slammed the car door.

Alex let his truck idle a bit as he waited, or hoped, for Evie to change her mind and get back into his car, but she didn't. She stormed to the other side of building to get out of his sight.

But when Evie got to the side entrance, she discovered that Pollo Loco was closed. Only its Twenty-four hour drive thru service was open, as a lone cook indicated to her from the kitchen and by that time, Alex had already driven away. *Crap.* She sat grimly on the concrete curb near the poorly lit, unattended order window.

She looked down at her feet. She now had at least three blisters. How could this night have gone so wrong? Why does it seem, lately, that every night goes badly?

She flipped open her phone. The time was 12:23 am. She would never make home in time for her curfew. She punched in her home phone number.

"Mom," She said as soon as the other end picked up. "Can you come get me?"