

Chapter One

First once Evie Gomez finally felt free. Not that ^{week as} ~~pid~~ sense of freedom she feels when she's done showering and waltzes around her bedroom with only her favorite hot pink fuzzy ~~terry~~ towel wrapped around her waist. And it certainly wasn't that pseudo sense of liberation she experiences when the call of nature decides to give her ring when she's surfing and she has no other choice but to relieve herself, right there in the middle of pacific ocean in her wetsuit and all. On this particular Saturday afternoon in mid January, Evie felt free due to the simple metal ring that dangled from the fingers ^{fact it} ~~of her~~ ~~right hand~~. It wasn't just any ol' ring she carried to Lindsay's, the Gomez's housekeeper, ten year old sedan. This ring had the car keys attached and Evie was more than ready for a little joy ride. Not that she actually stole the car keys, ^{please,} ~~and~~ if she was truly going for a joy ride, she wouldn't be boosting Lindsay's rickety *ranfla* that's for sure, but Evie was desperate. She was just five weeks away from taking her California state driving test and she had yet to master the challenge of three point turns and the ins and outs of parallel parking. Thus, the resilient begging ^{to borrow} ~~for the keys to~~ Lindsay's ~~Q~~ sedan had ensued just minutes earlier.

"Oh, come on, Lindsay," Evie had ~~begged~~ ^{right}. With her parents away on an afternoon mission -- the never ending search for the ~~perfect~~ shade of forest green place mats to match the deck furniture's forest green cushions -- it was the perfect time to indulge in a little practice spin

"I don't think so, Evelina. ..." Lindsay shook her head as she stepped down into the den. The latest installment of *La Cueva Sucia*, her favorite soap opera, was just starting. "Your mother said you have to be with a driver. A licensed driver."

"I *know*," Evie exhaled impatiently. "But that's only if I'm gonna be out driving out on the street and everything and I'm not. I'm ~~totally~~ gonna stay on the drive-way, just in front of the house. Nothing's gonna happen."

"I dunno..." Lindsay was still hesitant.

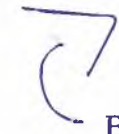
"Lindsay," Evie followed her down the ^{two}~~one~~ step that led into the den. "We live on a cul de sac. It's not like cars go speeding by all the time. I'll be ^{totally} safe." She **leaned** her head forward and to the side, fashioned after the infamous **tilt** learned from her best friend, Dee Dee de LaFuentes, who usually, ^{after} ~~having~~ ^{ne} letting her left side ^{of her head} go soft, got her way when she wanted something. "And the more I practice," Evie continued. "I'll be sure to get my license and then I can drive myself anywhere. You won't be having to cart me around anymore. Don't you want a break from being a chauffeur?"

The ^{magic} words for any housekeeper. *Don't you want a break?*

"Well, I guess... maybe... it would be okay." Lindsay pushed Meho, Evie's grey tabby, aside and made room for herself on the den's smooth leather sofa. She had now been lured into her habitual trance by *La Cueva*'s leading man, **Leonardo Phillipe**. "Get the spare key," she told Evie. "And ~~only if you~~ ^{that you'll} promise me to stay ~~within the cul de sac~~ ^{dead end}. Do *not* leave Camino del Rio."

"I will, promise!" Evie sprinted as fast as her Havaiana flojos could take her towards the kitchen. She didn't find the spare key, but no worries. She snatched a key ring off the kitchen's metal key holder, grabbed her iTrip, (a boast of over 1100

downloads), her wallet (an even better boast -- a freshly issued drivers permit) and sprinted out of the house.



But once Evie got out to the drive way her ~~honest to God~~ plans of taking Lindsay's sedan immediately fell wayside. There, parked to the left of Lindsay's car was Evie's mother's brand new Mercedes. Actually, not *brand* new, but definitely new to her mother, Vicki Gomez. The Mercedes was a good thirty years old, a classic by anyone's standards especially with it's high gloss ^{black} paint job, detailing by ^{west coast} ~~Interiors~~ ^{Interiors}, original leather interior, glistening chrome and the cali de la cali, a ^{fuel} conversion by LoveCraft's BioFuel in Los Angeles. ^{where Diesel had been} Evie's father had the Mercedes converted to run on vegetable oil. It seemed to be *the* thing to be done to cars in south Cali and now Vicki Gomez's ^{Merz} ~~Merc~~ was the talk of Rio Estates and, of course, she just loved, *loved*, the attention.

Evie looked at the gleaming Mercedes and then at Lindsay's nondescript four door sedan car, which **suddenly** seemed dull and lifeless. Not to be superficial, but Evie wondered, what *kind* of car *was* Lindsay's? Was there even a question of which ride she should choose ^{on} such a sunny Saturday afternoon?

'nough said. Evie opened ^{the} driver's seat of her mother's Mercedes and got in. She inhaled the aroma of the vintage white leather. Her choice had clearly been made. She pulled out her cell from the front pocket of her Senor Lopez pullover and immediately called her boyfriend, Alex. How grand would that be, she thought as she sped dialed his number, to swing by his house and, for once, be the one in control of a ^{such} ~~grand~~ ^{luxury} automobile? But alas, the dreaded voice mail.

Duuude...leave a brief. Not a bio.

She had remembered that Alex had gone to Sea Street with Mondo that morning and felt slightly disappointed. It was almost 1 pm and he *still* wasn't back from the beach? Ever since their old clique, the Flojos, which had consisted of herself, Alex, Mondo, Raquel, and her former boy, Jose, had pretty much disbanded last semester, Alex still surfed at Sea Street and Mondo still tagged along ^{with him} sometimes. ~~And~~ while Evie no longer considered herself a "Flojo", in the true sense of the definition that she strived to maintain the chill chica mindset and just hang at the beach all day, she did continue to wear flojos (aka flip flops) 24/7/365. Flojoism may not have been a way of life for Evie, but flojos were definitely a surviving style statement. Reg
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Evie sighed and decided to leave neither a brief message or her autobiography, thank you. ^{she merely hung up +} She speed dialed best girl, tied for first place, Raquel Diaz.

After a few beeps, she was met with Raquel's infamous Bullwinkle yawn on the other end. "What up?" Raquel answered sleepily.

~~had the car keys, And her passage this afternoon was one that led to the nearest beach. Maybe not Sea Street, but The Shores would do. Any beach, actually, that had a cruising lane with close proximity to the shore. Evie definitely wanted to cruise, cali beach style, with her seat reclined, her iTrip blaring and the convertible top all the way down. Actually, nix the last part. Lindsay's four door sedan wasn't a convertible and it was far from being a g-ride, when you actually put it in pimp ride terms, but there was no way Evie was gonna roll out her mother's beloved Saab. So really, the only joy in this ride was that it was available.~~

“Not you, obviously.” Evie switched from, **her mother’s favorite Oldies station** to Dios (Malos). Nothing like brown boy emo bumping the speakers to calm one’s novice nerves. She was ready to go.

“Hey, I’m coming to pick you up,” she announced to Raquel. “Let’s cruise The Shores.”

Raquel lived next door to Evie, a mere 800 yards away and really didn’t need to be picked up to go anywhere. Raquel could just as easily walk over, but still, the thought of saying “I’m coming to pick you up” made Evie feel mature, adult-like. Unlike Raquel and their other bestfriend, Dee Dee de LaFuentes, Evie didn’t have her own car and had to shotgun it everywhere. From parties in Spanish Hills to surfing at Sea Street, the high school production of Driving Miss Evie was outgrowing its rehearsal space. She needed to expand her wings.

“You ain’t picking me up to go anywhere,” Raquel’s voice was throaty and harsh. “I ain’t even awake.”

“Well, get up.” Evie ordered. “I got my mother’s ^{Best Merc.} Merc.” *Can*

“What do you mean, you got your mother’s ^{car} Merc?” Raquel asked. “How did you swing the g ride? Ol’ Vicki Gomez must be out of the country, ‘cause there’s no way you’d risk taking her precious veggie grease mobile out.”

“She’s not out of the country,” Evie mused. “But the next best thing. She’s at the factory outlets with my dad. They’ll be gone all day.”

^{And} “Where’s Lindsay?” Raquel ^{La}asked. *inquired.*

“Oh, she’s so far away in novela-vela land.” Evie adjusted the seat closer to the gas pedal and positioned the rearview mirror so she could see all things slow and less important behind her. She turned the key in the ignition. “Come on, the day’s almost over.”

The day was actually far from being over. It was barely one o’clock in the afternoon, but to a party puta like Raquel, the day was just starting.

“And,” Evie explained. “You know I need a licensed driver to really go anywhere.”

“Nuh uh,” Raquel said quickly. “*No* way. Don’t you know that’s the number one leading cause of teen fatality? Teaching a newbie to drive? You best find yourself another tutor, Eves. I’m outs.”

“Raq, come on,” Evie pleaded. “We’ll have fun.”

“And who says I ain’t already having fun?” Raquel laughed, actually a low muffled giggle. Evie suddenly heard another voice in the background. A male voice. She suddenly felt the effects of third party damage.

“Who’s that?” she asked.

“I can tell you who it ain’t.” Raquel laughed softly again. “It’s ain’t Jose, that’s for sure.”

Ever since Raquel had caught Jose sneaking around with Alejandra de los Santos las semester, her Buddy List of bad boys was being utilized to the max. It didn’t help Raquel’s ego that Alejandra headed *de los Santos* the Sangros, a foursome of *fresas ricas* from Mexico City. There had always been a clash between the Flojos and the Sangros, so of course, Raquel felt completely humiliated and betrayed when she discovered that

Joke

~~her boy~~ had cross pollinated and had been with one of *them*. Evie and Dee Dee had

actually been foolish enough to become sorta friends with Alejandra last semester, *but That*

was

when they didn't know better. Not only was Alejandra a *puta*, plain and simple, but she wore the scarlet letter P on her chest proudly.

~~(Now here it was winter semester and Jose no longer went to Villanueva Prep,~~
having got kicked out for his poor grades, but he still ran in a similar **party circuit as Raquel and she** needed to teach him that she could be just as scandalous, if not more, than him.) Whereas any cool girl at Villanueva (which Raquel claims there are only three – she, Evie and, of course, *la otra*, Dee Dee) would gain cred (say, a hottie shortboarder with major label sponsorship or a member of a local neo-nardcore band) to inspire jealousy in an ex, Raquel was hooking up in the polar region opposite of north. She was dating down, *way* down. Evie had no idea who the owner of the background voice was and she didn't bother asking. If she knew Raquel, the voice and the male attached to it wouldn't last more than a couple of weeks.

“Where are you?” Evie asked.

“I can tell you where I'm not,” Raquel continued to play *games*. “I ain't home, that's for sure.”

As Evie started to back out of the drive way, she looked up towards the Diaz's house. Between the *towering* ~~ancient cypress~~ trees that divided the properties, she saw that the window shades to Raquel's upstairs bedroom were pulled up. *A sign That* Raquel was definitely not in her room. She kept her shades closed until she, and only she, decided it was time to finally start her day and make the grand decision get out of bed and *pull* ~~open~~ the blinds. Evie wondered where Raquel had gone the night before that led her to still be away from

home. Whenever Raquel took off somewhere **scandalous** for the evening, Evie would get a call to cover for her. However, last night Evie didn't get 'the call.'

"O-kay, Raquel." Evie said **D** "I'll let you go do whatever, with whomever. Just call me later." *Shifted from reverse to 1st gear.*

"Yeah, yeah. **Fo sho**" Raquel said before hanging up and after playfully slapping "stop it!" to the unidentified boy with her.

Evie looked at the clock on the dashboard of *her mother's Benz* ~~Lindsay's~~ car. *La Cueva Sucia* was a one hour program, which meant she had only 52 minutes to roll. She quickly dialed Dee Dee.

"Hi Evie!" Dee Dee practically chirped on the other end.

Evie smiled to herself. Dee Dee was the ying to Raquel's yang. Little Miss Sunny Delight to Raquel's Little Miss Understood, Dark and... Delight-less. Dee Dee would definitely be up for a drive.

"You sound in a good mood," Evie observed.

"Oh, I just got off the phone with Rocio," Dee Dee's voice got light and dreamy.

"Oh, Evie, I love him *so* much."

Rocio was Dee Dee's long lost boyfriend who she had to leave behind in Mexico City once she and her family returned to Rio Estates. She talked to him every day, every night. And every day and every night, Evie and Raquel had to hear about her conversations with him.

"Hey, so I've got the Mercedes," Evie bragged as she slowly entered Camino del Rio and cautiously looked both ways down the street. "I thought I could come over and pick you up."

~~Dee Dee also lived in Rio Estates just a few blocks away on Camino Cortez.~~

"Right *now*?" Dee Dee asked. "I can't. I have a meeting with Eileen Cervantes."

"Eileen? Who's that?"

"She's connected with Las Patronas," Dee Dee explained. "And I'm meeting with her at four PM."

"At four?" Evie re-checked the time on the dashboard. "Dee Dee, it's barely one o'clock."

"I know. I'm totally running late. I'm just so nervous. I've already smoked three Caribbean Chills this morning."

"No," Evie started. "I mean, why are you getting ready now?"

"Evie, it's for *Las Patronas*," Dee Dee said as if Evie was crazy for even asking.

"I have to make the right impression. This is my first meeting with the former director and she's going to give me some hints. I have only one more year before I can be nominated. *This is the year I will be a Patrona by junior year.* And I need to make sure all my duckies are in row."

Duckies?

Ever since Dee Dee was a little girl she always talked about being a La Patrona debutante. Her mother was one, her grandmother was one and, of course, Dee Dee not only wanted to be one, she *had* to be one. La Patronas was the oldest and most respected debutante society in the county. It was started by the wives of the early Southern Californian landowners, all of them wealthy and many of them Hispanic. Dee Dee's father didn't have such regal connections to early Ventura County, but Dee Dee's mother, the late Margaret de LaFuente, ~~family~~ sure did. Her family had owned multiple ranches in

the area long ago, when the area was still Mexico. You ^{couldn't} ~~can't~~ get more regally connected than that.

Between Dee Dee's calculating pursuit to obtain the key to the city, Raquel jonesing for a key to the nearest mini bar, and she, herself, most desirous of the keys to an available automobile, Evie sometimes wondered how all three girls could each be so unique and remain best friends. But then again, no matter what kind of keys they each longed for, the three of them had once been three little girls in tight *trenzas* with *respado* juice dripping down their chins. It was nostalgia (or embarrassment?) that kept their bond strong. **MORE**

"You really don't need anyone to help you," Dee Dee flattered Evie. "You're a good driver already. Really."

"If I'm so good," Evie was not buying it. ^{she struggled to shift into 3rd gear.} D. "Then why don't you ever let me drive Jumile?"

Jumile was the name of Dee Dee's VW Beetle. Sailors christened boats, socialites attached pretenious tags on pet Chihuahuas, but in South Cali it was in proper order to conjure up a cutesy names for one's car. To own a nameless vehicle? *Unthinkable*.

Jumile was **also** the name of a particular tree beetle found in the hills of Taxco, Mexico. Dee Dee had informed Evie and Raquel that on the first Monday after *Dia de los Muertos*, it was a tradition to hike into the hills of Taxco and search for the little green beetles so the locals could roast and grind them up to make salsa **and celebrate** ^{the new season.}

"*sta loco, no?*" Dee Dee gloated to Evie and Raquel after she had shared that she had been adventurous enough to partake in the beetle eats. ^{As if to prove,} ~~It was clear,~~ **that under** ~~her styled hair and immaculately applied make up, that she needed to prove that~~

she could be loca in her own way. So when Dee Dee got her lime green VW Beetle, she instantly **baptized** him Jumile, in honor (or remorse?) of the green little beetles in Taxco. *she sobbed up*

But now here was Dee Dee, again, insisting that it was her father's fault that Evie couldn't drive Jumile.

"Evie," Dee Dee started. "You know I ~~would~~ *Id* let you drive Jumile if I could, but it's all about my dad. He's so uptight about my insurance and everything. Really."

"Uh huh. I *love* that story." Evie **said**. "Well, *soon* ~~hopefully~~ I'll be getting my car and I won't have to count on poor little 'uninsured for additional drivers' Jumile." *Evie* She was now heading south, down the eucalyptus lined street of Calle Bonita and towards the main gate of Rio Estates. **She was ready to gun the engine and make a run for it.**

Oppressive....

"Oh, Evie, please, there is *no* way your dad isn't going to get you a Beetle for your birthday," Dee Dee *insisted*. "He just *has* to come through. We have to have the complete set."

It was Dee Dee's plan that Evie and Raquel get a VW Beetle just like hers. She believed the three girls were a team, a dynamic trio, and not having a similar mode of transportation would be like the three musketeers not having, well, identical moustaches.

"Never mind MPV Latino," Dee Dee **had rolled her eyes** to Evie. "Me, you and Raquel are the *real* Tr3s!"

The flower holder in Jumile held incense sticks and a large sticker of Dee Dee's favorite band/soap opera's crest, RBD, was on the back window. Raquel's parents had just bought her a Beetle a month ago. Hers was black and named B.J., as in Beetle Juice,

for Christmas

not the *other* thing. B.J.'s flower vase held cigarette butts and adhered across the top of the front window's visor was 'So-Cal' in white, old English script. Both Dee Dee and Raquel had vanity license plates that clearly stated their Beetles' pet names, JUMILE for Dee Dee and BTLE JCE for Raquel.

Evie wanted her Beetle to be red, cherry bomb red with a sunroof, Bose speakers, freshly cut hibiscus flowers in the flower holder and the quintessential decal that identified Evie totally – a white outlined pair of flip flops, stuck smack center of her back window. She had already purchased the decal months ago at the Ventura Surf Shop and now all she needed was a brand new car to attach it to. Simple enough, no? ~~But unlike JUMILE and BTLE JCE, Evie's Beetle was going to be fabulously sexy and fun, CHRY BMB, and it was her dream to drive away from her birthday party in Cherry Bomb.~~

In about a month and a half, on February 29th to be exact, Evie was going to turn sixteen and this particular birthday was special for two reasons. One, is that there was actually going to be a February 29th on the year's calendar. Being a leap year baby, Evie had to celebrate her birthday either on the 28th of February or the first of March. Not to be all *sentida* about it, but it sorta sucked not to have your birthday party on your actual birth date. And two, this birthday celebration was going to be **extra special** because Evie's mother was going to throw her a Sixteenera, more Sweet Sixteen, way less *quinceanera*, which only meant one thing in Southern California -- A Mexican style luau. Evie was planning to have her bash thrown at Duke's in Malibu. Could she *even* keep count of all the *Seventeen* magazine tear-outs that lined the inside of the locker door of all her favorite *Laguna Beach* and *O.C.* stars lunching and "canoodling" at Duke's? Duke's was **super fab** restaurant that overlooked the Pacific and was named after the OG Hawaiian

surfer himself, Duke Kahanumoku. So, ~~of course~~, it only made sense that Evie would celebrate her sixteenera in all of Duke's Polynesian atmospheric glory. Her reputation, as a surfer **flojo wearing** chick, depended on it.

As Dee Dee claimed, Evie's sixteenera party was the talk of Villanueva Prep and how could it not be? After all, her father had already secured DJ VHS ^{who?} to spin nothing but classic surf and **power pop**. There was going to be Polynesian dancers and ~~even~~ **lechon**, roasted pork, ~~but~~ Hawaiian style with the pig's head intact and everything. Evie's mother had planned to make gift bags filled with disks of Mr. Zog's Sex Wax, Roxy Mariachi flip flops, sunblock and a customized sun visors with the ^{Evening w/ Evie} ~~date, 2-29~~, **stitched on the front**. But the main attraction at Evie's sweet sixteenera? She, Raquel and Dee Dee were going to perform a *hula auana*, a slow Hawaiian dance complete with grass skirts and faux coconut shells that they somehow were going to secure over their chests. For weeks, all three girls had been practicing to learn, in sync, the graceful hand movements and hip swaying by following an instructional video and CD, *Honolulu Now*. Evie had to admit, the hours of practice did leave her to question her patience and rhythm, **but Dee Dee and Raquel's total dedication and support always made her feel better.**

"God," Evie went on about her party, "I just hope it doesn't turn into some mascara running drama straight outta *My Sweet Sixteen*."

"Oooh, I hope so or it wouldn't be good party, otherwise." Dee Dee mused. "So, why don't you take Alejandro or Raquel for your drive?"

"Alex is out at Sea street," Evie said.

"Surfing. Again?"

uh huh
up
“Yup,” Evie turned **Dios**. “I’m gonna hook up with him tomorrow. We might take the boards to Santa Barbara.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Dee Dee’s voice suddenly turned **slo mo** leading Evie to believe that she was applying either eyeliner or mascara or channeling Anna Nicole Smith. “No offense,” Dee Dee continued slowly, “but don’t... you... ever... get tired that... all... you do with Alex is... surf?”

“What do you mean?” Evie asked.

“Don’t get me... wrong. I think ... it’s cool that... you... two have something major in... common, but,” Dee Dee finally **put her vocal** ^{cord} **needle on the right rpm**. “It’s just, I mean, in Mexico, boys take girls out, on dates. You get to dress up and have a nice dinner, go dancing.”

“Dee Dee,” Evie rolled her eyes to the side. “I’m fine with the stuff we do. Alex is my bud and Sea Street is *our* place.”

True, Sea Street had ^{been} ~~been~~ pretty much, **unofficially**, deemed Evie and Alex’s place. Last semester, Evie would kick back on the promenade’s wall with Raquel, Jose and Mondo, while Alex surfed. But now that the Flojos were no longer a clique and she was an official surfer, yes, Sea Street **was their place** where she & Alex went.

Your *bud*?” Dee Dee asked. “Oh, I thought he was your *boyfriend*.”

Evie could sense Dee Dee’s blonde tinted eyebrows (Michael Kelley Salon, 60 dollars a pair) rise in surprise.

“He is,” Evie **felt she had to defend his title**. ^g **D**. “But he’s also my buddy, my friend. And that’s very important in a relationship.”

“*Claro*, of course, it’s important,” Dee Dee agreed. “I was just asking, that’s all. So, what about Raquel? Did you call her to go driving?”

“I already did, but she’s totally out of it.”

“‘Out of it’ or hung over?” Dee Dee asked.

Evie was reluctant to go into the minuscule dish she had on Raquel. While all three girls claimed to love each other unconditionally and, granted, all of them indulged in ad bevs and even Dee Dee, herself, lit up flavored smokes whenever she could, Dee Dee was still more judgmental towards Raquel’s recreational behavior. But even Evie had to admit, ever since her break up with Jose, Raquel’s party patterns have been off the chart.

“She was just tired.” Evie lied. “I woke her up.”

“Woke her up?” Dee Dee exclaimed. “It’s after 1 o’clock! Ay. *That* girl! **NEED**
DICHO HERE

“Yeah, well...” Evie found herself not in the mood for a dose, not matter how small, of Dee Dee dichos. “So listen, just stay on the line with me,” she suggested. “You can be, like, my virtual licensed driver. I guess a Mexico City license is better than nothing.”

“*Mande?*” Dee Dee did not find Evie’s jab funny. She was very protective of Mexico City, her beloved home of four years.

“Nothing,” Evie tried to soft pedal backwards. She knew better than to diss the all mighty D.F. Besides, she was now approaching Calle Aqua Caliente and had to focus. ~~Shifting gears was not her specialty and~~ the transmission of her mother’s Mercedes revved hard as she fumbled into second gear. Damn. Could it be that her father accidentally

filled the fuel tank with vinegar instead of vegetable oil? Evie's efforts made her sound like an amateur barista-in-training, grinding espresso beans to a pulp. She reached the intersection just as a silver sports car pulled up, but she could not remember who had the right away to go first.

"Hey, *maestra*," Evie started. "I'm at a four way stop and I forgot, who has the right away?"

"The car on the right," Dee Dee said matter of factly.

"Uh," Evie looked over at the sports car. "She's not moving."

"~~So~~ wave her to go," Dee Dee advised.

"I just did."

"Then just go, I guess," Dee Dee said.

A horn behind Evie honked. She looked in her rearview mirror and was completely unaware that there was even a car behind her. She shifted from neutral to first gear and lightly stepped on the gas, but for some reason, her mother's Mercedes screeched backward. *Sheeyat!* Evie had mistakenly put the Mercedes into reverse and smacked... right... into... the... car... behind her. She felt a solid thud from the back.

"Oh my God!" Evie screamed as she dropped ^{her} the phone to her lap. She felt her ^{throat} heart plummet to her ^{stomach hole} mouth. Her chest grew numb. She did *not* just hit another car.

"Wha-? --pened?" Dee Dee's phone connection cut in and out. "What -ong?"

Evie picked up her cell. "Dee Dee!" She yelled into the mouthpiece. "I just hit a car! Oh my God, what do I do?"

"What? Oh *my* God. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I think so. I..." Evie looked over her shoulder and saw the driver swing open his car door. He looked *humoungous*.

"~~What the hell?~~" He lifted his arms up in a thug-like '*what the?*' confrontation as he sauntered over to the front of his car to check any possible damage. He was short, stocky with a shaved head and wearing a supersized football jersey throwback. He was definitely someone you ^{*normally*} didn't see behind the cloistered gates of Rio Estates. "If you weren't so busy yakking on that damn cell phone," he ranted towards Evie. "Maybe you'd know how to drive. Pay attention, you pinche *idiot!*"

"Oh. My. God." Evie sunk into the leather upholstery of the car seat. She held her head and "damn phone" down, away from the driver's view and whispered into her cell. "Dee Dee," her voice started to crack ~~and~~ she thought she might cry. "He's *totally* raging at me."

"*Who?*"

"This guy. The guy whose car I hit!" *How* could she have hit a car? If this guy didn't kill her, her mother certainly would.

"Oh my God," Dee Dee was horrified. "Where are you?"

"Dee Dee," Evie pleaded. "You gotta come. *Now!*"

The guy was now at the driver's side of her mother's Mercedes. He tapped on the side of the door with the back of his hand and glared at Evie. "Hang up the damn phone, turn off the friggin' music and get out here and deal. What, you want me to call the cops?

The cops? Oh God, the situation was not getting any better.

"Dee Dee," Evie could still feel her stomach in the back of her throat. "I... I have to go."

“Wait! Evie, where are--”

But it was too late. Evie had already snapped her phone shut. She somehow managed to **unplug** her iTrip, open the ^{Mercedes's hairy} car door, and step out.

“I am so sorry!” She looked over at the driver’s car. It was an older car, ~~but~~ nothing classic or vintage from what she could tell. It was a like a Hondo or Toyota and it was lowered. “Did I ding it?”

“Uh, yeah,” the guy **said**. “You fucked it up all right.”

He walked back to the front of his car and Evie followed him. He crouched down to show her the ~~bumper~~.

“*Mira*,” he said. “Right there.” He pointed to his bumper.

Evie looked. And looked. And looked. She strained to find something out of the ordinary, something concave or ^{indented} ~~O~~, ^{she} but couldn’t detect anything. Then finally she saw it. A small dent, the size of a dime, okay, *maybe* a quarter/“You mean *that*?” She ran her finger across it

“Yeah, I mean *that*.” The guy looked at her in amazement.

Evie looked over his car ^{bumper} and then at mother’s Mercedes. It appeared flawless.

“I’m gonna need your license,” the guy said. “And your insurance info.”

“My license?” Evie’s heart dropped.

“Yes.” He looked at her as though she was some rookie driver, which, of course, she was. “Your *license*.”

“Um...right,” was all Evie could say. She went back to her mother’s car and stretched across the front seat to get her cell phone off the floor which she had dropped in her ~~haste~~. She speed dialed her home number.

One ring, two ring...

Come on, come on! Evie screamed in her head. Leave it to Lindsay to not answer the phone while she was watching her stupid soap. *Come on, Linds! Answer the phone!*

Three ring, four ring.

"Bueno? Gomez residence."

Finally.

"Lindsay!" Evie sobbed into her cell. "I hit a car! I need help!"

"Ay dios mios!" Evie could hear the heels of Lindsay's Aerosoles already sprinting across the ceramic tile of the den. "Are you okay? I'm coming out."

"I'm not in front of the house. I'm—"

"What?"

"I'm over here," Evie said. "On the corner of Calle Agua Caliente and Calle Socorro."

"What?" Lindsay repeated. "Why are you way over there? I told you —"

"Lindsay, I know, I know. Please, just come now." She looked back at the driver to make sure he couldn't hear her. "And, I'm in my mother's car."

"What?!"

"Lindsay, please, just come now. Just, I'll explain later. Just come. *Now!*"

"Evie, this is not good," Lindsay told Evie something she already knew. "Stay *right* there!"

Evie hung up and slowly got back out of her mother's Mercedes.

"Um," she started to tell the guy. "I forgot my wallet, so my housekeeper's coming to bring it. Right now."

“Right *now*?” He pulled out his cell phone and checked the time.

“Yeah, right now. She should be here in a few minutes.” Evie looked down the street. “We live just a few streets down, on Camino del Rio.”

Camino del Rio. Why? Why didn’t she just stay on her street like she was supposed to? Why didn’t she just practice with Lindsay’s car like she said she would?

Evie looked at the guy who was now rummaging through his glove compartment. What if the cops *did* come? **MORE** *Delay her license?*

Evie looked at the time on her own cell and then back at the driver, whose eyes *were angry + impatient.*
phone
seemed to turn a hole into her.
Just hurry Lindsay.

Chapter 2

It seemed like forever for Lindsay to finally show up at the scene of Evie’s **crime**. When she did, she was out of breath and her dark wispy bangs stuck to her forehead from perspiration. Evie couldn’t understand why she showed up on foot.

“Lindsay,” Evie started. “Why didn’t you just drive your car?”

“Because,” Lindsay huffed between breaths, “You took my main set of keys.” She grabbed the key ring from Evie’s grasp. “I *told* you to take the spare. I didn’t have the keys to my own car!” She took a breath and looked Evie over. “Are you okay? What happened?”

“She slammed right back into me,” the guy answered for Evie. “Did you bring her license?”

Lindsay pursed her lips and took a walk around the Mercedes to double check that there was no damage. Evie followed suit and fortunately, there was nothing. Nada. Vicki Gomez' classic veggie ^{Mohave} Merc was spared.

Lindsay got into the driver's seat. Evie opened the passenger door and also got in.

"Evelina," Lindsay started the Mercedes. "You told me you were taking my car and you told me that you were going to stay in front of the house and —"

"I know Lindsay," Evie felt badly and didn't want to hear it. She hated letting Lindsay down. She was often her only ally and now Evie had been purposely dishonest with her. "I'm sorry. I am *so* sorry. I was gonna ask you if I could take my mother's car, but you were watching La Cueva and I didn't want to bother you. I then got on the cell with Dee Dee and—" 

"You were *talking*?" Lindsay tapped the brake pedal and glared at Evie. "On the *phone*? While driving your mother's car?"

Was that steam coming out of Lindsay's nostrils?

"You are lucky you didn't kill yourself!" Lindsay shook her head as she steered the **leather encased** steering wheel with one hand while she made the sign of the cross with the other. "Your parents going to be *very* unhappy about this. *Muy enojado*."

Evie was afraid of that.

"Lindsay, please," she started. "You *can't* tell my parents. It was an accident. I *was* in the drive-way, just like you told me to be and then..." She really didn't have anything else to add to her plea. "Please. They don't need to know and the dent on that guy's car, I can totally pay for it. I will. All of it. I promise."

“Her license?” Lindsay looked at Evie.

“I’m also gonna need to get the insurance info,” the guy repeated to Lindsay. He had already gotten a pen from his glove compartment and clicked it open. He was ready and waiting.

Of course, Evie neither had a license or car insurance. But as any Californian driver knows, it’s not about sweating fellow fender benders, but rather making sure that said fellow fender benders had good car insurance or, at the very least, a good connection to repair any damage they were liable for.

Lindsay had car insurance, but of course she wanted her good connection to just make the dent go away without her insurance company knowing. No one wanted their insurance rates to be raised due to some teenager’s appetite for adventure.

“My brother-in-law works at Williams Automotive,” Lindsay informed the guy ~~as~~ ^{then} she looked over the car’s bumper. “He could fix this in a day. I’ll call him tonight. I’d rather keep my insurance out of it.”

Of course, that was enough for the guy. Everyone in the whole county knows about Williams Automotive, in Vineyard Estates. They fixed all kinds of cars was ‘From Model-As to Orales’. *Orale* was Spanish for “cool,” but at Williams Automotive, *Orale* meant lowriders, which as Evie noticed, this guy’s car practically swept the street, about an inch from the ground. It definitely fell under Williams’ *Orale* category.

Finally, after an exchange of info, the guy and his dime sized dent were on ~~his~~ ^{then} way. It couldn’t be soon enough for Evie.

“Oh, God,” she **caught her breath** as soon as he was gone. “Lindsay, thank you so much. I thought he was gonna kill me. God, talk about a rage-aholic.”

“How are you going to pay for his car?” Lindsay shook her head in disbelief.

“That dent isn’t some little pop out. It could be a lot of money, Evelina. Alot.”

“I can use my birthday money,” Evie offered quickly.

Lindsay looked over at her again. “You got money for your birthday? Already?”

“~~Well~~ ^{Um}, no,” Evie confessed. “Not yet ^{really} ~~actually~~. But you know Grandma Pama always sends a check and now that it’s gonna be my 16th birthday, I’ll probably get more money than usual.”

Lindsay didn’t say anything because she knew it was the truth. Evie’s Grandma Pama, her father’s mother, always sent Evie and her sister, Sabrina, grand checks with a substantial amount of zeros for their birthdays. Could it be guilt that she, a bona fide Mexican *abuela*, never attended her own granddaughters birthday parties? That she preferred studying **grape making** at UC Davis with her fellow grad students than help to fill some Bart Simpson shaped pinata or lead the traditional Mexican birthday chant of *Las Mananitas*? Whatever the case, neither Evie or Sabrina questioned Grandma Pama’s motives or lack of attendance at their birthday parties. They’ve been cashing her checks as soon as they learned what the word endorsement meant.

“I don’t like keeping secrets from your parents,” Lindsay said.

“Lindsay, please,” Evie continued to beg. “It’s not like they have to know every single thing that goes on, good or bad, negative, positive. It would just stress them out. ^{anyway} They don’t need to be more stressed than they already are. You know how bummed out my dad has been, about the fat free pan dulce and everything.”

Lindsay didn't say anything as she drove on Camino Pacifico and turned onto Camino del Rio. It was true that Evie's father, who owned four successful panaderias in the county, had invested a lot of money and time into his fat free sweet bread idea. He then lost a lot more money when it didn't do so well. The subject of money had been a sensitive topic in the Gomez household.

Evie looked out the window. She was already on thin ice for breaking her curfew (again) with Raquel (again) ^{over Christmas vacation} and all she needed was a third strike that could land her in interment (again). In California, 'the three strikes and you're out' law ^{was harsh} ~~could land one in~~ ~~jail, but~~ Vicki Gomez could be just as severe. Would she cancel Evie's sixteenera? Not let her drive? Or worse, would Evie's little fender bender keep her from getting CHRY CHCA? Dear precious CHRY ~~CHCA~~ CHCA with her sun roof, the Bose speakers, and don't forget the single white outlined decal of flip flops on the back window!

"You know, my *Radio Lazar* sticker got scuffed," Lindsay muttered under her breath. "You can't even read what it says. What if the *Radio Lazar* van comes by and I lose my chance to win big?"

"I'll get you new sticker," Evie offered. She then playfully added, "Maybe a Rico and Mambo one?"

"I *don't* listen to them," Lindsay sniffed.

When they finally pulled up to the house Evie was horrified to find her father's Escalade parked in the drive way. What were her parents doing back so early?

"Your mother is going to wonder why we took her car," Lindsay said. Evie noticed she sounded just as reluctant to enter the house

the seat belt.
“I know,” Evie clenched her jaw. “Linds...”

“Yes?” Lindsay parked alongside Ruben Gomez’s Escalade and turned off the car’s engine.

“Nothing,” Evie sighed. She knew it was no use. She would have to face the consequences.

As soon as they went into the house, , Evie had to adjust her eyes, after coming in from the afternoon sun. Lindsay stepped down into the den where the closing credits of *La Cueva* were rolling down the TV screen. She clicked her tongue as well as the television off, in annoyance. Obviously, in her haste, she had forgotten to TiVo her **absolute favorite** show. *novela favorita*

“We were wondering where you two were,” Evie’s father looked up. He was going over the morning mail at the kitchen counter. “The front door was wide open and the TV was left on.”

“Why did you take my car?” Evie’s mother asked Lindsay as she entered the kitchen. She was sorting through a *pile?* mountain of place mats, all them in different shades of green. Forest green. “Is there something wrong with your car, Linds?”

“We were just...” Evie started, not sure how she was going to finish.

“Molesto got out,” Lindsay quickly interrupted. “And I could not find my spare key. *Ay*, we were driving up and down the street, looking for him.” She clicked her tongue again and ran her fingers through her hair in pseudo exasperation. “*That* dog.”

Evie looked over at her, in surprise. *Yes way Lindsay.*

“Oh, no,” Evie’s mother feigned concern. “Did you find him?”

Vicki Gomez actually despised Molesto, the black Labrador that had once been Sabrina’s. It would be her ultimate dream come true to have him to run away and never return to the Gomez residence. Last summer Sabrina had been working for El Mision for the ~~Blind~~ and Molesto (then properly named Ernesto) was training to become a seeing-eye guide. Molesto flunked not just a few, but all of his obedience classes, and Sabrina, feeling empathy and concern what would happen to dear old Ernesto, begged her parents to let her take him in. Of course, they conceded and at the time he was cute as a blind school flunkie pup, But now Sabrina was back at Stanford and Molesto was displaying the true colors of his Spanish nickname– he *was* quite *bothersome*.

“Oh, we found him,” Lindsay lied. “He was just out, chasing the Milne’s cats again.”

Evie looked up at Lindsay and smiled. *Thank you.* She owed Lindsay big time.

“Well, I don’t want him in my car,” Evie mother said. “He’ll scratch up the leather and leave his hair all over. If that ever happens again, just let it go. He’ll eventually come home.” *which I’m sure it will*

“*Si, si, claro,*” Lindsay said.

Evie couldn’t help but feel a twinge of guilt. She didn’t want Lindsay to get in trouble with her mother due to her ~~juvenile delinquency~~ *deliberate* **juvenile delinquency**.

“Well, once Sabrina comes home,” Evie’s mother held up two separate place mats to compare them. “Molesto won’t be bothering the neighbor cats so much.”

"*Si, claro,*" Lindsay agreed again as she gathered old newspapers off the counter and took them to the recycling container outside. She was smart to make an early exit before **General** Gomez got too inquisitive.

Evie had forgotten that her sister was due home the following week. Sabrina had decided to take a short break from her studies at Stanford. Evie didn't know the whole story but she knew that Sabrina was really bummed about the break up with her boyfriend, Robert. Evie ~~felt guilty that she was~~ apprehensive about Sabrina's return. In a way, she liked being the only child in the household. She got a lot of attention. Okay, sometimes maybe too much? But she definitely didn't like being constantly compared to her over achieving sister. Sabrina was nineteen years old, only four years older than Evie, but they were a world of merit badges apart. *who she called Supreme*

"When is Sabrina getting here?" Evie pulled up a stool next to her father.

Considering what had just happened back on Calle Aqua Caliente she felt more relaxed, at least for the time being. She helped herself to some nuts from the ceramic bowl that Lindsay always kept filled.

"Sometime late next week," her mother said. "She's flying down."

"Flying down?" Evie kept the cashews but put the dreadful Brazilians back in the bowl. "What happened to her car?"

"Nothing," her mother said. "One of her girl friends will drive it down later."

It all seemed very odd to Evie. What was the urgency to have Sabrina home so soon? Was the whole drama of having her car driven down really needed? Stanford University was only five hours north of Rio Estates and her sister, as well as the whole

family, relished the long scenic drive along the California gold coast. Why wouldn't her sister just drive home, ^{or} like she usually does?

"I could drive her car down," Evie volunteered. Sabrina had a brand new Mini Cooper, silver with a black stripe down the hood. It was polished, petite and always filled with a tank of premium gas. **What girl wouldn't want to get her hands behind it's wheel?**

"No. You. Can't," her father emphasized each word with a slow nod of his head. "It'll be a while before you can go making trips like that." He opened another business envelope and started to read the contents. "Evie," his casual tone suddenly dropped to *seriouso*. "What's going on here?"

"What?" Evie grabbed more nuts and looked over towards the paperwork he was reading.

"Your quality check," he said.

Sheeyat! How could Evie be *so* careless? QCs came out every three weeks, more or less. This was her first quality check of the new semester. If only she had checked the mail instead of being in such a rush to go out driving, she could have retrieved the incriminating evidence addressed to "The parents or guardian of Evelina Maria Gomez".

"Evie," her mother pulled back her long blonde bangs and looked at the paperwork over her husband's shoulder. "You're getting two Cs, one in English." She underlined the two blaring letters with her manicured ^{polished} beige fingernail, as if Evie couldn't see them for herself. "How can that be?"

"I have no idea," Evie said. Civics and English were not her favorite classes, but she didn't know that she was doing that badly.

If anything, she thought she'd be a low level B.

“Well, you better get an idea,” Her father’s tone turned even more serious. A tone Evie did not want to get used to any time soon. “An idea how to change these grades. We don’t have you going to Villanueva for nothing. Do you know how much it costs us to send you there?”

Evie didn’t say anything, and neither did her mother.

“And you’re already a sophomore,” her father added. “These grades count. You have to maintain a high GPA if you want to get into a good college. How do you think Sabrina got into Stanford? And you know our agreement,” her father said. “No birthday party at Dukes if you can’t keep your GPA up. We discussed this already. You need to keep your average at a good solid B if you want to have your big party.”

“And,” her mother reminded her. “If you average gets below a B, you can’t drive, license or no license.”)

To be honest, Evie had overlooked that particular clause of the birthday ~~and~~ ~~driving~~ agreement between her and her parents. This semester, she had become so wrapped up in having Alex as a new boyfriend, getting her driver’s license, and planning her big Sixteenera at Duke’s in Malibu that she had forgotten about the fine print. She didn’t think her parents could be *that* serious about possibly canceling the party. Her mother, wanting to look VC style worthy for the 200 or so planned guests, had already started a new diet and her father had paid the hefty non refundable deposit for Duke’s main banquet room. They seemed to be just **as excited**, as if the party was for themselves and their country club friends.

“I can do it. I can bring the grades up.” Evie tried to convince her parents and, if only, herself. “It’s only Civics and English. Don’t worry.”

“Oh, we won’t worry,” her father tossed the paperwork on the kitchen counter.

“It’s *you* who should be concerned.”

“And I’m afraid we are going to need to know that you are improving, *in advance* of your party,” her mother said. “We still need to send out the evites and paper invites.”

“What do you mean by ‘in advance’?” Evie asked. She put the remaining nuts back in the bowl. She suddenly was no longer hungry.

“Evie, don’t do that,” her mother ^{formed} said. “Either eat them or throw them away. Don’t pick.” She went on. “What I mean is, your next quality check is in three weeks, the first week of February, so we’ll have to see how your next check is.”

“*What?*” Evie balked. “You want me to have straight A’s in less than three weeks?”

“No, you just need to show us that you are serious about improving,” her father said. “Like your mother said, in advance.”

^{like} As your mother said. Evie really resented when her parents formed a faux united front.

^{just} “But I already started the semester,” Evie protested. “How am I going to tell you *beforehand* what my final GPA will be?”

“So, should we go on this?” Her father held up the quality check. “Are you telling us that these are your final grades?”

“No,” Evie sulked in her seat.

Her mother rolled the paper work and tapped it her under her chin. She softened ^{her} his voice. “Don’t worry, *mi’jita*. You can do it. I know how important this party is to

you.” She reached for some nuts and then stopped herself. Nuts were the forbidden **fruit** on her new So SoCal diet

“Of course you can,” her father agreed. “I remember one time when Sabrina got her quality check and was so upset when a B+ brought her whole average down. Remember that, Ruben?”

Again, with La ~~Sabrina~~. *Suprema*

“Yes,” Evie’s father went back to looking over the mail. “And she was very determined to change it and she did. That kind of focus is in the Gomez blood.” He smiled to himself as if the family bloodline originated from him and only him.

Just then Molesto came prancing up. Evie’s mother’s Bluetooth, covered in complete dog slop, stuck half way out of his mouth.

“Molesto!” Her mother ~~s~~ yelled. “Ruben! Call him! He’s got my phone!”

Evie’s father got up from his stool. “I got it, I got it.” He called to Molesto in a sing songy tone. “Mo-les-to, here...” He pretended to hold something in his clenched hand, high above Molesto’s head. “Doggie treat. *Mira!*”

Molesto’s big dark eyes followed Ruben Gomez’s fist. His tail wagged and his two front legs bowed downward. He promptly dropped the ear piece and barked with excitement.

Of course, Evie’s father had nothing moist nor meaty in his hand. He quickly grabbed the Bluetooth away from Molesto and gave it to his wife. “Ah, sorry young guy,” he said as he rubbed Molesto’s head.

Evie's mother retrieved the saliva saturated Bluetooth delicately with two fingers and went to get a paper towel to wipe off the slobber. She shook her head at Molesto.

"God, he is *such* a dumb dog!"

Evie looked over her quality check on the counter and then at Molesto who looked so utterly befuddled that Evie's father had no doggie treat in his hand. She placed her chin in her palm of her hands and sighed. . *The Gomez blood*. Could it be possible she was somehow related only to Molesto?

As soon as she could pull away from her parents, Evie's ran up to her room and immediately texted Dee Dee and Raquel the 'Rio Estates Emergency' distress signal:

ER/RE! ~~ASAP!~~ *o*

Dee Dee texted back right away:

Cn u cme ~~here?~~ *h*

As did Raquel:

Same plce?

Raquel's quick response surprised Evie. Fun time with rebound **boy** must have ~~ended~~ *concluded*

The ER/RE! ~~ASAP!~~ distress signal signified that one of the three bestfriends had to discuss something of dire importance and that they *had* to get together, immediately. Even as kids, long before the technology revolution of cellphones, texting and IMs, Evie, Dee Dee and Raquel would meet up by secluded area at the far end of the Rio Estates golf course. It was private and safe, that is, unless a runaway golf ball came whizzing by

at 90 miles per hour, which, considering the advanced age of the majority players of the club, sometimes occurred.

Because Dee Dee was still fussing over her precious Patronas meeting, the girls didn't meet at the "same pce" but rather at Dee Dee's house. Raquel picked up Evie and they both drove over for the ER/RE! ~~ASAP!~~ meet up. **When they were kids, Dee Dee lived on the same cul de sac, but now, after her return from Mexico, her father moved to her and her new stepmother to Camino Cortez, a ~~street~~ a few blocks from Evie and Raquel's houses.** *on Camino del Rio.*

As soon as they were loaded up with the regulatory Snapple and pita chips, courtesy of the de LaFuente's housekeeper, ~~Marcela~~, Evie and Raquel settled in Dee Dee's bedroom upstairs.

"Oh, my God," Dee Dee fussed over Evie as soon as she let her and Raquel in. "You're in one piece! What happened?" ~~With~~ that guy? You just hung up on me and I had no idea what to think."

"You won't even believe today," Evie started. "Oh, my God, it was the scariest thing I had to ever deal with. In my whole life. I mean, this dude was so right in my face, with his jersey and shaved head, you just know he was some gangbanger ready to cap my ass or something."

"Please," Raquel crammed some pita chips into her mouth and smirked at Evie.

"A gang *banger*? In Rio Estates? And if he *was* a gangbanger what kind of jersey did he ~~have on?~~" *was he wearing?*

Evie looked at Raquel. It was *so* like her to try and act like she held all the knowledge of street sensibility and cred.

"Raquel, you were *not* there," Evie insisted. "You didn't even see this guy. He was all in my face and just ready to throwdown."

Okay, maybe a slight exaggeration, but Evie suddenly felt the need to enhance her story, at **least for the sake of her pride.**

"Ay, well I'm must glad it's all over with," Dee Dee **checking the heat of her hot rollers with her hands.** "When I got your text, I didn't know what to ^{do} think. What happened to your mother's ^{hem?} Merc? Anything?"

"Nothing," Evie said. "But I dinged, sorta, the other guy's car, but Lindsay's got this brother in law at Williams Automotive, so I think it won't be too much." — *What you're gonna here to pay for it?*

Evie got up from the edge of Dee Dee's bed and paced on the wide loop shag of ^{her} the bedroom carpet. "But that's not the worst part. I got my quality check today and my parents are totally freaking out. They told me that I couldn't have my party unless I bring my average up by the time I get my next quality check. That's in ³ weeks. There is *no* way I could bring my average up in time. We are in the middle of a friggin' semester."

"How bad was your QC?" Dee Dee ~~absentmindedly~~ asked as she held two different blouses over her in front of her vanity mirror. That was the problem when the girls didn't meet on the secluded end of the golf course. Multi-tasking led to a lack of focus. *Evie felt that*

"It was okay," Evie took a sip of her Kiwi Strawberry and felt ~~a little~~ embarrassed. Dee Dee was the brain, without even trying, ^{among} ~~between~~ the three friends. It often made Evie feel inferior. (Has much as she studied, it seemed Dee Dee achieved effortlessly.) "I mean, I got two Cs. One in English and other in Civics."

“How could you get a ‘C’ in English?” Raquel flipped through Dee Dee’s *Elle Girl*. Not quite her **flavor**, but Raquel wasn’t about to waste her time with any of the “moda estylo” ‘zines that Dee Dee subscribed to from Mexico. “Harrison is total kick back. Even I ^{is doing} ~~did~~ good in her class.”

Great. Even Raquel ^{is doing} ~~did~~ better in English. Could Evie feel mas **substandard**?

“Well, I didn’t do so hot,” Evie **admitted as confidently as she could**. “I hate English. All Harrison does is make us write. ‘Write your feelings,’ ‘write your thoughts,’ ‘write to make the pain go away.’ Ugh. I *hate* writing.”

“I don’t. I love writing,” Dee Dee said. She hung up one of the blouses after choosing a femmy pink one with a conservative neckline.

“Since when?” Evie asked suspiciously. She didn’t remember Dee Dee ^{ever} *loving* to write so much when they were little kids.

“*Since*,” Dee Dee answered defiantly, “I’ve lived in Mexico. That was the best thing about going to school there.” ^{she} ~~she~~ suddenly got dreamy eyed. “I got to write and read in Spanish, all the romantic poems and essays by Neruda and Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, and of course, love letters from Rocio.”

Raquel threw Evie an exasperated ‘here we go again’ look. She, and to be honest Evie, had grown weary of the ^{Dee Dee} ~~channel that~~ stayed stuck on Rocio. If ^{she} ~~Dee Dee~~ wasn’t texting Rocio *larga distancia*, ^{Dee Dee} ~~she~~ was gabbing with him in that show offy big city *espanol* of hers on the cell. ^{That engine could overheat} Yes, Evie thought, it’s one thing to claim the love of your life, but another thing to friggin’ **talk** about him “venti-cuarto/siete”.

Raquel turned her attention back to Evie. "So why don't you just do some community service crap or something for extra credit in Civics? Vasquez loves that kind of ~~shit~~."

"Yeah?" Evie took another sip of her Snapple.

"Uh, yes," Raquel said. "How do you think Jose skated through Nueva when he used to go there? All that roadside trash he picked up off the Vineyard Avenue wasn't *always* a court appointed assignment."

Evie laughed. "Serio?"

"Seriously," Raquel smirked with evil pleasure. "*What* a loser."

"And," Dee Dee added. "I'm sure you could volunteer for something like The Surfrider Foundation or Adopt the Beach. Something totally Evie Gomez."

"Yeah," Raquel agreed. "That would be way cooler than being stuck after school with some boring ass tutor."

Evie started to rethink her situation. It might fun to work at local beach events with other ocean minded people like herself. She could definitely get Alex to help her. She started to imagine romantic walks on the sand with him after spending ~~fun filled~~ sunny afternoons of serving lemonade at, say, a surf contest or ~~after~~ a beach clean up.

"Yeah," Evie felt encouraged. "That might be cool."

"Look," Raquel continued. "You could do some community service for **Civics** and then write a paper about your experiences for English. Make it a paper full of hardship and woe, you know how Harrison loves at that 'struggling brown people' stuff."

"More writing?" Evie gawked. "*No* thank you."

“I can write the paper for you,” Dee Dee offered. “You can just basically tell me what to say and I’ll write it up, real good. A+ quality.”

“In English or Spanish?” Evie smirked and Raquel snorted a laugh.

“I could do it in *Francais* if you want.” Dee Dee wasn’t gonna let them get the best of her. “You know I’m already at level III and at the top of my class.”

“Okay, Frenchie,” Evie said. “Just make sure you do a good job. If I don’t get my average up, the Sixteenera is off.”

“And we don’t want that,” Raquel took a swig of her Snapple. “It’s been a friggin’ dry spell around here.”

“You’re telling me,” Dee Dee agreed. “**Totally ()**

“And what language is that?”

“**Chilango.**” Dee Dee said with a smug.

After Evie left Dee Dee’s house with Raquel, she started to feel hopeful. From what Dee Dee and Raquel had said, performing some minor volunteer duties and then having Dee Dee write up a paper was going to be enough to bring her up to sister ~~Sabrina~~ ^{Suprema} status.

As Raquel drove them back to their houses, Evie’s cell vibrated and she saw that Alex had just texted her. She realized that they hadn’t talked all day. Wait until he heard what kind of day she had! Knowing the kind of boyfriend Alex was, Evie knew he would drive over as soon as soon as possible to console her after. Of course, after picking up a Midnight Forest Blended, her favorite, from the Coffee Bean.

But when Evie opened her message file on her cell, she couldn't believe what she read.

NW Swell @ C st. Cnt make 2morw. Srry!

To imitate Dee Dee, *Mande?* There is a northwest swell at the Sea Street break ~~tomorrow~~ ^{tomorrow} and so now he was canceling their plans to go to Santa Barbara? Just so he could go surfing? Again? Argh!

"What's wrong?" Raquel glanced over at Evie's phone. She knew the side effects of text wounds.

"Alex is totally flaking on me," Evie glared at her cell phone's screen. "We had plans to go to Santa Barbara tomorrow, but now he wants to go surfing, *again*."

"That's what happens when you date a man whose first love is following his stoke," Raquel joked.

But Evie didn't laugh. She was about to text Alex back but decided she should talk to him in person, ^{meaning} ~~or at least~~ over the phone. She was overwhelmed with what she had gone through in one day – the car accident, a tongue lashing from a total stranger, her miserable quality check, the possibility that she may not have her birthday party -- should she go on? And Alex, her *boyfriend*, wasn't even around to comfort her during any of the drama. He had been *too* busy surfing at Sea Street and now, their Sunday plans were cancelled because he suddenly wanted to go surfing. ^{and} Did she mention *again*? And to make matters worse, he didn't even invite her to go along! ~~Sup with that?~~ ^{Sup with that?}

Evie re-read his text message again and felt angry, and to be honest, a little sad. She and Alex had only been going out a little over two months. Was he already losing

interest in her? She fondled the abalone necklace her had given her just last November. She wore the necklace everyday, sometimes even in her sleep. It was a sign of his affection towards her. But now, it seemed his text messages on her cell phone symbolized how he really felt.

Chapter 3

The following Monday at school, Alex apologized for the millionth time to Evie for flaking on her. The first nine hundred and ninety nine thousand times were on their way to school when, as usual, he picked her so they could share the twenty minute drive to Villanueva Prep together.

“I’m totally sorry about yesterday,” he said again. “I promise, we’ll go to Santa Barbara. Soon.”

“Don’t make promises you can’t keep,” Evie knew she was being a baby about him canceling the day before, but to be honest, she was getting a little tired of Alex’s flakiness. This wasn’t the first time. There was the time they had plans to go to the new skatepark over on Rose Avenue and he flaked because Mondo’s Maurader was down and he needed a ride to Oakview. Then there was the other time when they were supposed to go to her father’s Christmas party for all the employees at his bakery and, at the last minute, Alex wanted to drive to Santa Barbara for a “super amazing” board sale at Remmies and he wanted to go the night before to ^{curb}camp out so he could be the first in line for the morning sale. **Evie sighed again.** Maybe Raquel was right. Can a girlfriend compete with the internal search for stoke that so many surfers are born with?

"No, but really," Alex said again as she opened her locker door. "I am so sorry."

One million and one.

"God," Alex said as he looked over her O.C. magazine cut outs, taped to the inside of her door. They were primarily of (). "You like this guy?"

"And what's wrong with him?"

"Nothing, if you like dorks."

"He is *not* a dork," Evie slugged Alex on the arm. "He's sensitive and sweet."

"I can be sensitive and sweet," Alex started to gently rub her back. "Hey, I'll totally do whatever I can to help you with this volunteer thing. I don't like seeing you so bummed out." He leaned in to wrap his arms around her.

"Hey!" Dee Dee came up behind them. "*Que pasa*, lovebirds?"

Raquel was in tow, ^{her} listening to her ipod. ^{wheel cranked to maximum.}

"Nothing, *now*," Alex smirked as he pulled away from Evie. ^{light}

"I'm *totally* starving!" Raquel yelled. "Let's go eat, already!"

"Raq," Evie motioned to her ears. "Pull the plugs!" ^{or calm the wheel.}

"Oops, sorry." Raquel took her iPod earplugs out

"When you are gonna get a decent headpiece?" Alex ^{looked over} frowned at Raquel's white plastic ear plugs. "Those are crap."

"Sor-ry," Raquel said. "Not *everyone* has a boyfriend who buys them four hundred dollar Bose headphones." She glanced into Evie's locker, where ^{said} headphones, a gift from Alex, were carefully place in their black pouch, on top of her books and notepads. "You two are such *i-snobs*."

And proud of it. He said - Common w/
Alex.

"Hey, let's leave campus for lunch," Alex rubbed his stomach under his T-shirt.

"I'm jonesing for an O-hi Frostie."

clans
"Yes," Dee Dee smacked her lips. "Sounds **muy yummy**."

Sabroso

"No," Evie felt irritated all over again. "Remember? I gotta go to the counseling office and get some numbers for volunteering. You guys said you would help."

"Oh yeah. That's right." Dee Dee said. "I completely forgot."

Evie mood turned sour as she shut her locker door. How could her own boyfriend and bestfriend not remember the major dilemma she was still facing? Were they that self-absorbed? She couldn't think of anything else the rest of the weekend.

Alex clicked his tongue and he put his arm around Evie. "Aah, Eves. Come on." he smiled. "Let's go find you some volunteer opportunities that will blow paid ones away."

When the four of them got to the volunteer board in the counseling center they discovered, as Evie had guessed, that there were few volunteer options left.

"See!" Evie huffed. "I knew this was gonna happen. I told my parents that there was no way I could get my average up in time. If I don't get rid of those two Cs, my mom is totally gonna cancel the party."

"I'm still not buying that your mom might pull the plug on the party," Raquel said. "Vicki G is all about the hostess with the most mess. She never gives up an opportunity showcase swank."

“Yeah, I’m actually sorta surprised, too.” Evie admitted. “She’s already told all our relatives and even started that new So SoCal diet. All she does is eat, like, one avocado a day.”

“One avocado?” Dee Dee’s forehead creased. “But that makes so sense, they’re totally fattening.”

“These are *Rancho Palermo* avocados,” Evie shrugged her shoulders.

“Oh, right.” Dee Dee nodded. As if organic avocados from a ranch in Somis made such a drastic difference in caloric count.

Alex read the listings from the volunteer board outloud. “Here’s some help needed: ‘Working with the elderly, three days a week.’”

“Eew,” Raquel curled her upper lip. “Working with molder folk? Evie, you do *not* want to do that.”

“Yeah, I’d have to agree.” Alex nodded. He pointed out another listing. “Check out this one, ‘Tutoring Youth at Risk.’” He suddenly smirked. “What youth isn’t ‘at risk’? I mean, aren’t we all ‘at risk’?”

“Yeah,” Evie laughed. “You’re at risk every time you paddle out on that twelve hundred dollar Stewart board of yours.”

“Or you buy some of Mondo’s home blend,” Raquel **complained**. “Which by the way, that dude owes me.” She pulled out her cell phone, ready to speed dial a customer complaint. “I gave him a C note on Friday and I don’t smell the scent of freshly cut lawn.”

Evie felt a little uncomfortable hearing about Raquel’s latest transaction with Mondo. Raquel had upgraded from last semester’s dime bags to this semester’s

bountiful purchases. It was just last semester that Mondo, as well as Raquel's ex, Jose, used to hang out with Evie, Raquel, and Alex. But that quaint quintet who all wore flojos soon lost flavor once Raquel found out that Jose was cheating on her and she immediately dumped him. It's not that anyone took sides, but still, the Flojos just fell apart after that.

To be honest, Evie sometimes missed the days of Flojo past, the carefree afternoons of pot and plasmas -- before Jose became a two timing jerk, before Raquel started partying too much and before Mondo cared more about his business than friendship. But then again, those were pre- Dee Dee and Alex days and Evie really loved, as she had learned, having the double D and Alex, as a boyfriend, in her life. page

"No cell phones," Miss Peterson, the office secretary, sang as she walked by the four of them to her desk.

"I'm only texting," Raquel explained ~~as~~ she didn't bother to look up.

"You know the rules," Miss Peterson pointed to the doorway. "Take it outside or it will be confiscated."

Raquel rolled her eyes and then looked at Evie as if for permission to be excused. "I'm just gonna find out what's up with Mondo. I'll be right back to help you."

"Yeah, yeah," Evie knew better than to really count on Raquel. Once party supplies entered the picture, Raquel became ^{camera shy} unavailable. "Just go."

"I'll be right back," Raquel said. "Promise."

As soon as Raquel was out of earshot Dee Dee leaned closer to Alex and Evie.
“So what’s up with Raquel?”

“What do you mean?” Evie asked.

“She’s been going a little off the deep end, don’t you think?” Dee Dee glanced over to where Raquel was in the hallway. “Do you know who she has been going out with? Did she tell you?”

“Nuh, uh,” Evie answered. She didn’t like to admit she didn’t know something so personal about Raquel. For the four years that Dee Dee was away in Mexico City, she and Raquel had become very tight. And now, here was Dee Dee knowing something about Raquel that Evie didn’t? It didn’t seem right. All three girls should know *The same* something about each other ~~close to~~, if not ~~the same~~, the exact time, *but close to it.*

“Davey Mitchell.” Dee Dee lowered her voice and looked over to where Raquel was now making a call ~~in the hallway~~. *outside*

“Davey Mitchell?” Evie repeated the name. “Whose that?”

“Ronnie Mitchell’s older brother, that’s who,” Dee Dee answered.

Evie knew of Ronnie Mitchell. He was one of the Bard Boys and had been kicked out of nearly every public school for causing kinds of chaos. However, she didn’t know too much about his older brother, Davey.

“He’s practically twenty two years old,” Dee Dee said of Davey. “And he did time at the CYA.”

“Really?” Evie couldn’t believe it. The California Youth Authorities housed inmates between ages thirteen to twenty four. It wasn’t just a probation agency or juvie. Kids housed at the CYA had done some **hard, hard, things.**

"Yes," Dee Dee knowingly raised her eyebrows. "Raquel told me. She was actually bragging about it. She's become such a *leva*."

"Okay, *tias*," Alex put his hand on the backs of both Evie and Dee Dee. "'nough gossiping by the clothesline. Come on, Raquel is your friend."

"We're not gossiping," Dee Dee said. ^{*IAS: 8/21*} "Raquel *is* our friend and we are just concerned. You should talk to her, Evie. She'll listen to you."

"Listen to me? Say what?" Evie asked. There was no way anyone could ~~dim~~ ^{*lower*} Raquel shine when it ^{*determined to stay*} ~~was set on ultra high~~.

"Anything," Dee Dee insisted. "Just say something."

Evie looked over towards the quad where Raquel had now found Mondo and was talking to him in person. She wondered if Dee Dee was making a bigger deal about ~~it~~ ^{*Raquel*} than it actually was.

"You know," Alex started, as if he was reading Evie's thoughts. "We all go through phases. Maybe that's what Raquel is doing. Just give her time. She's a smart girl. She'll figure it out."

"I sure hope so." Evie took a deep breath.

Just then, the door to one of the counselor's office opened. None of them could help but hear the voice, that thick Spanish accented voice of Alejandra de los Santos ^{*that*} ~~that~~ ^{*It*} monopolized the whole hallway. She was just concluding her session with her counselor, Counselor A through H, ~~whose real name was Mr. Login~~. There were only three counselors at Villanueva and each one assisted students based the the first letter of their last name. There was Counselor A-H, Counselor I-Q and Counselor R-Z. Because their

last names started with G and D, Evie, Dee Dee and Raquel all had A-H as a counselor. Alejandra de los Santos had him as well.

"No," Alejandra informed A-H, ^{Through} "I don't plan on living on campus during my internship. I have to live on campus *here* and if I'm going to be donating so much of my time at Yale, I want to be able to be completely free when I'm done putting in my hours."

"Alejandra," ^{there} A-H sounded appropriately exhausted with her arrogance. "I hope you think more of your internship as just putting in hours. Thousands of other high school juniors across the country would die for the opportunity to intern at Yale. I hope you don't take it so lightly." He was an old man and his patience seemed to wear thin during nap time.

"I know," Alejandra said quickly, as if she didn't want some lowly high school counselor telling *her* how to think. "Well, thank you for your time."

As she left his office, Alejandra couldn't help but come ^{face face} head to head with Evie, Dee Dee and Alex in the narrow hallway. How could she be so lucky, Evie thought, that Raquel had *just* left? Ever since Raquel found out that it was Alejandra who had been seeing Jose behind her back, there was the keying of Alejandra's silver Audi, derogatory spanglish scrawled on her locker door and more than a accidental 'domino' slams in the hall. Was Raquel involved with every one of these ^{incidents} ~~0~~? Who knows. Evie and Dee Dee didn't condone such behavior, but never once questioned about ^{Rag.} her about it.

Alejandra's almond shaped eyes scanned the three of them and, perhaps to appear unfazed and possibly to exclude Alex and Evie, she shot off Spanish in rapid fire speed to Dee Dee.

Dee Dee, however, answered in English. Slowly and calmly. "Oh, my father loves his new position," she said. ^{But} "And I *really* don't think *your* father got him his job," ^{told Alejandra}

Ally. I mean, my father has his own credentials. But it was very nice of your ^{dad} father to mention the position to him, but ~~I think that's all he did.~~

Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. Was Alejandra insinuating that her ^{dad} father got Dee Dee's father his new position as chancellor at Cal State Channel Islands?

She couldn't believe that Alejandra would be so bold especially when it was just ~~she~~ ^{her} against the three of them. Her sidekick Sangros, the *Ah*-migas – Natalia, Xiomara and Fabiola – were no where to ~~be seen~~ ^{around}.

"So," Alex asked Alejandra, "You're gonna do an internship at Yale?"

Evie pressed her foot into the side of his ^{hip} ~~flip flop~~. Alex, who *freaking* cares?

"Claro," Alejandra smiled deep into Alex's eyes. "This summer. But I still don't know," She sighed heavily as she pulled on the ^{hair} dark burnette strand, under her mane of blonde, in a ~~bored~~ fashion. Last year, the Sangros trademark had been their vivid blonde highlights, but this semester, after Christmas break, they all returned back from Mexico City, with ^{hair} ~~hair~~ completely blonde. That is, except for a thick solid strand of brunette intentionally left under their newly dyed ^{job} ~~mop~~. Not quite an '80s punk rock rat tail, but ^{was} ~~was~~ more wispy ^{perhaps} ~~(),~~ a thin hint to their affiliation to native country? ^{thick & holder,}

"I might just go back to Mexico and intern at UNAM," Alejandra continued. "I really miss the sophistication of city life." She glanced at the volunteer list in front of them. "Are you doing an internship, tambien?" She asked Alex. "Oye, maybe we could both do one at UNAM. That would be fun." She looked over at Evie.

"Uh, no," Alex said. "I'm not looking for an internship, but Evie is. Actually, she just needs some volunteer credit, or else she can't have her party."

Evie's face burned. Why are boys so **clueless**?

Of course, Alejandra knew about Evie's Sixteenera. As Dee Dee had said, everyone at Nueva was talking about it and that included Alejandra and her fellow Sangros. **It was the talk of the new semester.**

Alejandra looked at Evie and then at the volunteer board. "Well, good luck, Evelin-*a*. You know, maybe my father can help. He has lots of contacts and is very charitable, to those in need help." She then looked back at Dee Dee.

"Oh, I don't need help," Evie answered quickly. Know-it-all high school ^{Seniors} ~~juniors~~ were just as bad as lowly high school counselors. "I'm just gonna volunteer a few hours a week."

"I wasn't talking about volunteer work," Alejandra smiled slowly. "I'm talking about 'your party.' What made you decide to have it at Dukes?"

"What wrong with Duke's?" Evie regretted asking as soon as the words came out of her mouth. What did she care what Alejandra thought? She wasn't ~~even~~ on the invite list.

"Well, for one thing," Alejandra took ^{a deep} ~~another~~ breath as though she had an extensive list of problems to read off. But then her eyes gazed over Evie's shoulder and she suddenly announced her departure.

"Ay, never mind," She patted Evie's shoulder. "If that's what you want for your little party. *Naco*." She then slinked away before anyone could say or do anything...*just* as Raquel reappeared. It was then obvious that Alejandra had seen Raquel, coming towards them.

"Okay, it's *on*!" Raquel held up her hand ^{up} ~~to~~ high five Alex. She was oblivious that her nemesis had just been so close by. Couldn't she smell the residue of 'sulfur de

Sangro' still wafting in the air? Raquel patted the zippered ^{outside} pocket of her backpack. "So, I got the goods from Mondo. You wanna go out to The Tree?" she asked Alex.

Alex looked at Evie. "Uh...."

"Are you serious?" Evie couldn't believe that he was actually thinking of bailing on her. Again.

"Eves," Alex tilted his head to the side. "Don't be like that..."

"Be like what?" ^{She} asked. "Upset that you are flaking on me, again? You said you were gonna help me find work."

"Evie," Raquel said. "Don't be all uptight. Besides, how many pairs of eyes do you ^{really} ~~actually~~ need? Dee Dee can get you started and we'll be back before you know it. I got ^{Rodriguez} ~~Luna~~ after lunch and there is no way I can deal with him without being lit."

"Just go," Evie waved them both aside. She was now officially annoyed. ^{certifiably}

"Are you sure?" Alex asked. "I mean, if you really, really want me to stay..."

"No...just go already."

"Cool!" Alex gave ^{her} ~~her~~ a quick peck on the cheek and took off with Raquel before ^{she} ~~Evie~~ could change her mind.

"Don't worry, Evie," Dee Dee squeezed her shoulder after Alex and Raquel left the office "We'll find something, ~~something~~, something *muy bueno* for you."

"Yeah," Evie looked after Alex and Raquel as they headed towards Juniper's Tree, the big oak tree at the end of the quad. ^{for them little smile out.} "I could use something, or someone, *muy bueno* in my life, right about now."

Chapter 4

“And why do you want to work at a horse reserve?” A through H asked Evie as she took a seat in his office.

After she and Dee Dee had picked what seemed the ideal volunteer position for her – caring for rescued horses at the Southern California Horse Reserve -- Evie tapped on A-H's door. It was still open from his session with Alejandra de los Santos and Evie asked if he had time to answer a quick question. But she soon found out that quick questions could lead to excruciating long winded interrogation. A-H now needed to know exactly why Evie wanted to work at the SCHR.

How should she answer him? That the SCHR was the only thing available on the volunteer list that didn't involve old people or baby thugs? That if she didn't get some volunteer credit under her belt, like *soon*, she was gonna be celebrating her 16th birthday at the Sizzler? Of course, she had to give him the kind of quick answer that all high school counselors want to hear.

“I really want to give back to my community.” Evie simply stated. She looked right into his eyes with as much sincerity she hoped she could possibly project.

“Your community?” A-H breathed heavy over Evie's file. He was a big man, who had yet to come to terms with his large size and the semester he looked fatter. His dress shirt screamed creases in just about every direction. “I thought you lived in Rio Estates,”

“I do,” Evie said. Rio Estates was a high-end gated community with no suitable space to house a horse reserve, but of course, he should know that. “I just want to give back to my equeen community.”

“Do you mean equine?” A- H looked up from ^{Evie's} her file and smiled.

"Yes, ~~absolutely~~ ^{help}." Evie answered. Isn't that what she just said? "I was reading that they needed ~~care~~ ^{help}, for the horses that have been abused or injured. I want to do that."

"Well, you do know that it's already three weeks into the semester and they may not have availability." A-H adjusted his wire frame glasses and looked at the calendar that hung to the left of him. It was a Villanueva school calendar, the one that all the seniors so enthusiastically sold every year to raise money for their prom, as if any student who attended the ten g a year Nueva really needed more money to show case **pretension**. "They may not have room for you."

"But they have a listing on the volunteer board," Evie informed him.

"Oh, those listings are so outdated." A-H opened his drawer to look for something. "We have an intern who is supposed to keep on top of that, but he's always on the office phone talking to someone or on his cell phone texting someone else."

"Oh, do you need someone to work in the office?" Evie asked quickly. An office job would be cool. She would have full access to ~~student files~~, hallway passes, ^{the} internet (though, most likely with limited viewing blocks) and she could work during class hours and *all* for course credit. Que cake. "Because I could do that, too."

"I thought you wanted to work with rescued horses?" ~~A-H looked at her,~~ ^{questioning}. He pulled a cloth lens cleaner from the drawer and started to clean his glasses. "At the reserve."

"Oh, I do." Evie answered. "I was just asking. I mean, if Villanueva needs help, I totally wanna help."

Nice save. *Santa?*

"It's refreshing to hear such school spirit," A-H smiled as ~~continued to clean his~~ ^{he} ~~glasses, going over the lenses~~ ^{went his} with meticulous form. It seemed obvious to Evie that he was on to her. "Well, if we can't get you at the reserve this semester, there is always their summer program." ^{he said}

"Summer program?" Evie was horrified. "No, I have, I mean, I'd *like* to work this semester."

"And the urgency is because of your love of horses?" A through H held up his glasses to the sunlight and inspected them. "And nothing to do with the two Cs on your last quality check?"

"Well," Evie felt her neck turn flush. "Maybe," she answered sheepishly. "Just a little."

"Don't worry, Evie," A through H smiled, a somewhat calm, reassuring smile. He put his glasses back on. "I'll see what I can do. I'll give the reserve a call and see if they have any more openings. I think I can pull some strings. By the way, how is your party coming along?"

"My party?" Evie asked.

"Yes, I hear from many of the instructors that it's been quite the talk on campus, and quite the distraction in the classroom. All the students are talking about it."

"Oh," Evie cringed. "I didn't know that. I'm sorry." Should she offer him an invite?

^{took off his glasses again}
"No worries," A-H ~~smiled~~ again. "But just try to focus on matters on hand, Evie. Your grades need improving. You know, I was your sister's counselor when she was a student here. How is she doing at Stanford?"

“Great,” Evie answered. When was ^{Suprema} Sabrina not doing great?

“That’s no surprise,” he answered. “That girl is one focused individual. A real go-getter.”

“Uh, huh,” was all Evie could say.

And as Evie found out, A-H was good on his word. The strings he pulled actually yanked a last minute internship for Evie at the Southern California Horse Reserve. He then drafted a note to Vasquez and Harrison, suggesting they allow Evie to do the extra credit. Counselor A-H sure held true to his administrative title, A-H, as is *Aaah*... Evie could relax, if just a little.

But Evie’s moment of serenity was short lived. She still had to get final approval from both Vasquez and Harrison to do extra credit (and that took a little maneuvering.)

Like Raquel said, Harrison was a push over. She liked the idea of Evie wanting to learn more about “ranchero life” (her words) and encouraged her to use as much Spanish as possible in her report.

“No problem,” Evie told her with confidence. And it wouldn’t be, considering that it would be Dee Dee writing the whole thing.

“Give me the mood,” Mrs. Harrison weaved her hands dramatically in the air, a gesture that Evie guessed she wanted her to capture on paper. “I want to hear the complexity of what a *charro* life really is.”

"I don't know how many cowboys I am going to run into at the reserve," Evie confessed. "But I will try." She smiled eagerly as she held out the official paperwork for Harrison's signature. "So, when I write my essay, what kind of credit will I receive?"

"Depending on the length and quality," Mrs. Harrison said as she initialed the paper. "You can bring your grade up to half a point, which by the end of the semester, you could very well have a B."

"Wow," Evie wasn't expecting a full letter B. "And that will be reflected on my next quality check? In three weeks?"

"It very well could be," Mrs. Harrison confirmed. "If not, I can write a note."

"Then I'm really going to do a very good job," Evie assured her.

Yeah, a very good job getting on Dee Dee's ass to write a damn good paper.

"Oh, I know you will," Mrs. Harrison patted Evie on the back as she ~~started~~ to leave her classroom. "I know you have been faced with many obstacles in your life, Evie, being a girl, a young girl of color and I want to do as much as I can to support you. I want to support my *mujeres!*" She rolled out the 'R' in mujeres longer than needed. "I know if you put your mind to it, you can get anything you want, Evie."

Vasquez, on the other hand, was a bit harder to be convinced that Evie was an oppressed upper middle class teen struggling for the Malibu birthday party of her dreams.

"I normally don't allow this type of extra credit after the semester has already started," he stated **dryly** as he erased the chalkboard. He kept his back towards Evie the whole time. "It's standard procedure to request volunteer work at the commencement of a new semester. You know that."

Evie tried to remain **calm** and diplomatic. There was no way she could lose this opportunity. "But Mrs. Harrison and my counselor have already okayed it."

"I'm not swayed by other people's decisions," Mr. Vasquez kept wiping the board. "That's the problem with a lot of people nowadays, in this country. They just go for the popular vote, whatever is fashionable. A lot of people don't think for themselves."

"Oh, I totally agree," Evie ~~noded her head in agreement~~ ^{agreed}. *Please, just sign* the paper. "I mean, all my friends were telling me I should work at a hospice, or with Heal the Bay, but I felt I could be more useful volunteering at an animal reserve. It's pretty tragic how horses are so neglected in this country. I mean, they were once the symbol of our frontier, ~~right?~~ ^{right} Now, not enough citizens bother to care ~~about them~~ ^{about them}."

Citizens. Country. Frontier. Words that ~~are~~ ^{will} music, *patriotic* music, to a Civics instructor's ears.

Mr. Vasquez turned around to face Evie. The bottom of his nose had been accidentally dusted with powder from the white chalk. *Party hearty Mr. V!*

He squinted his eyes at Evie and slowly nodded his head with approval. "Good for you, Evie," he said. "It's good to see ~~you~~ ^{that} thinking for yourself. I remember last semester, when you dyed your hair blonde and started hanging out with a different crowd, Alejandra de los Santos and all her friends, I became a little concerned about you. You're a bright girl and now, here you are wanting to do your own thing. Good for you."

Yes!
Yes, Good for me, Evie floated as Vazquez signed her sheet. She was on her way to becoming the most popular sophomore at Nueva and maybe, ~~just maybe~~ ^{just maybe}, out doing **La Sister Suprema**, ~~Sabrina~~ ^{legacy}.

Chapter 5

To be honest, Evie didn't know much about horses. Most of what she related to Vasquez she had paraphrased from the Southern California Horse Reserve's flyer. She did, however, love when Dee Dee's mom, Margaret, ~~used to take~~ ^{foola} her, Dee Dee and Raquel, horseback riding in **Oakview**. And she did fancy herself a lover of animals. Really, wasn't she the only one who made sure Meho's litter box remained semi clumpless and wasn't *she* the only one who rewarded Molesto with bona vide doggie treats after her father so cruelly faked him out with his air nothings?

So after all the paperwork had been approved, signed and turned in, Evie was scheduled for her first day of volunteer work at the reserve that following Wednesday, after school. Alex offered to drop her off at the reserve before heading out to Sea Street. As Eve walked out to the student parking lot to meet him, she heard someone call out her name.

"Hey, Evie."

She turned around and saw two boys, seniors, coming up behind her.

"Oh, hey," Evie said back.

She recognized them from their photos in the school paper's sport's page, but couldn't remember their names. Normally Evie wouldn't think much of jocks, in their numbered jerseys and ^{obnoxious} lifted trucks, but these jocks, *hello*, where on the *water polo* team and while she never bothered to read the accompanying text to remember their names,

Raquel had pointed out the differences between team members which now helped Evie differentiate the two boys who were now walking ^{up} next to her.

“So,” Fine Ass Speedo came up to the left of her. “You be the talk of the town, Miss Eves. How’s the party planning?”

“Yeah,” Big Bulge Speedo came up to her right. “You gonna supply customized party hats? For all your guests?”

“Party hats?” Evie asked. Was he serious?

How did they know! I'm gonna have visitors

“Yeah,” Fine Ass said. “You gots to have party hats, like with your name and birth date and shit like that, printed all over them. So when we use them, we have something special to remember you by.”

Evie hadn’t thought of giving out *recuerdos*, mementos, for her party. They were usually reserved for little kid’s birthdays or tacky over produced weddings. But here were two of Nueva’s hottest water boys suggesting she have some. *totally*

“Yeah, I guess.” She nodded casually. “Why not?”

Cool. Fine Ass approved. “My cos from SB said your party’s all over myspace.”

“Myspace?” Evie asked. “Are you serious?”

“Yeah,” Big Bulge said. “Your party’s gonna knock 805 on it’s ass!”

“Marco?”

Fine Ass and Evie turned around. It was Alejandra de los Santos and her *ah*-miga, Fabiola walking by.

“Uh, hey,” Fine Ass looked over at them.

downtown

"We're gonna go ~~0~~," Fabiola said. "*Quieres contigo?*" She didn't look at Evie. It was clear that the invitation was not extended to her.

"Uh, not right now," Fine Ass. ^{said} "I'm talking party talk with Eves, here."

"Yeah," Evie couldn't help but add as she looked directly at Alejandra. "My party at *Dukes*."

When Evie and the Speedos reached Alex's truck, Alex had just taken his long board out of Mondo's Marauder and was putting it into his flatbed. ~~During school hours~~ ^{School} and on days he wanted to surf right after classes, he would keep his board locked up in Mondo's car and then transfer it to his truck. ^{Aux} *in the afternoon.*

"Hey, Marky," Alex raised his eyebrows and chin to Big Bulge. *Evie Ass*

"Hey," ^{Evie Ass} Big Bulge looked over Alex's longboard. "You gonna rip Sea Street?"

"Nah," Alex curled his upper lip. "Wetsand predicts flat and glassy, I'm gonna try Rincon."

"You're going to Rincon?" Evie balked as she opened the passenger door and tossed her backpack behind the seat. "You didn't tell me that."

Evie felt left out. As long as she's been dating Alex and as long as she's been surfing ^{w/ him} ~~which~~ was basically the same amount of time, she had never been to Rincon, which was only a mere five more miles north of Sea Street. The waves at Rincon were supposedly as fierce as its local territorialism. Alex pretty much kept her away. *a Evie felt a*

"You didn't ask," Alex teased. "sides, you gotta get from ^{stage} ~~suppie stage~~ before ^{nowhere} you can swim with the sharks." *hit patronzi*

Evie felt a twinge of embarrassment. How could he say such a thing in front of Fine Ass and Big Bulge? *The* two top swimmers of the water polo team?

“You can’t swim?” Fine Ass asked Evie.

“Of course, I can swim,” Evie wrinkled her face and shook her head. “He’s just being stupid.”

“‘Cause I was gonna say, if you need help,” Fine Ass started. “I could totally help you.”

“*You?*” Big Bulge smirked. “*after* Look how lousy you did at the last meet. *?* Look, Evie. *✓* If you ever wanna enhance your technique, let *me* know.”

Evie could not believe *that* ~~what~~ she was in the middle of. ~~What these two guys,~~ *water polo* boys, seniors, fighting over ~~who would get to be with her?~~ She couldn’t help but glance over at Alex, who appeared ~~not be~~ *to be* paying attention as he made sure his board was strapped in. *no*

“Wow, that’s so totally nice of you,” was all Evie could say. “I gotta admit, I still get a little tense when I gotta turtle turn, you know, under the waves.”

“Oh, you don’t wanna be tense when you should be having fun. I can totally help you with that,” Fine Ass nodded. “Just let me know.”

“So, we gotta get going, **Marky**,” Alex told ~~the Speedos~~ *Fine Ass* as he came around to the other side of the truck. “Evie’s got an internship over at the SCHR.”

“Oh, Yeah?” Fine Ass *asked* ~~said~~. “Cool. Well... see you guys later.”

“Yeah, Evie,” Big Bulge added. “Lates,”

"What was that all about?" Alex asked as he started up his truck and pulled out of ^{the} ~~his~~ parking space.

"What was what?" Evie asked, but she knew what he was asking about. ^{innocently}

"Flirting like that, in front of me?" Alex said. "So not cool."

"I wasn't flirting," Evie tried to deny it. Was she *really* flirting? Or just being friendly?

"Of course you were," Alex made his voice high and overtly girly. "'Oh, I get so scared when I go under the waves! Help me, help me!'"

"I did *not* say that," Evie insisted.

"In so many words you did."

"~~Alex,~~ Evie pinched him on the side. "Please...aw, you're just jealous."

"Not even," Alex tried to shrug it off. "I just know that you wouldn't like that if I did that in front of you."

"You're right," Evie admitted. "But God, it's not like Fine, I mean, Marky talks to me everyday. He's like Mr. Big Man of the water polo team."

Alex shook his head in disbelief. "God, Evie. You are so impressionable. He's not *that* great."

"Right," Evie looked over at Alex. "And you're *so* not jealous."

Alex waited his turn in the student parking lot to make a left on Ventura Avenue. There was no stop light and the long line of ~~high end student~~ cars from ^{Audi's Porsche} ~~to~~, blasted ^{ing} everything from reggaetron to speed metal, was practically ten cars deep.

"So," Evie started. "Marky said that my party was all over myspace."

"Yeah," Alex said. "I meant to tell you that."

"What?" Evie asked. "Are you serious? How do you know?"

already
"I've gotten two bulletins for it." Alex beeped his horn at a black SUV that completely dwarfed his own fairly large sized truck. "Go already." he muttered under his breath.

"Oh, man," Evie sunk into her seat. "Now I totally gotta make sure I have a kick ass party, let alone *a* party. Marky was even saying I should get customized party hats, can you believe it?" *like he already knew...*

Alex smiled. "And what did you say?"

"I told him I would."

You do know that party hats are rubbers, right?"

"Are you serious?" Evie held her hand over her mouth and laughed. "Oh my God, *is that what he meant?*
I am *such* the dork!"

"Maybe you should get some," Alex then lowered his voice to emulate a radio spokesperson. "Remember, you can't share the love without the glove."

"What if I don't *want* that kind of love?" Evie teased.

softened his voice
"Not even for your birthday?" Alex asked. He *sounded serious*, but didn't look at Evie. "I mean, you *will* be turning sixteen."

Evie smiled out of embarrassment, "Alex, you're gonna crash the truck if you keep talking like that."

"Talking like what?" he asked innocently.

Evie didn't say anything. *but she felt*

"Okay, okay..." Alex said. "Don't want the silent treatment."

finally

Evie looked out the window at the enormous eucalyptus and oak trees that lined Ventura Avenue. This wasn't the first time that Alex had joked about them indulging in more than carpet time. That's what Evie playfully called their extended play, carpet time. If they dare advanced onto a couch or bed, it might get too comfortable for the both of them and who knows what else they would or could do. If they stayed on the carpet, at least the ~~discomfort~~^{hard} or consequences of rug burns would keep them in check.

To be honest, Evie didn't know if she was quite ready to make ^{The} upgrade from carpet time. The first time Alex ^{had} made his first move on her was just enough that ^{almost} made her expode. Should she possibly be ready for more?

^{The first move} ~~It~~ happened at Sea Street, of course, right after a twilight surf session. Alex had come up behind her and she thought that he was going to help her unzip her wetsuit, as he sometimes does. But suddenly he kissed the back of her neck, a short, quick and gentle peck. Evie nearly *died*. She was *so* not expecting it. Alex then placed his hands on her shoulders. ⁴ Even with her wetsuit on, Evie could swear she felt his fingers tremble. She turned around to face him and suddenly his lips were on her mouth. Evie's head ~~seemed~~^{ed} to burst with ~~excitement~~^{euphoria}.

"You're salty," she teased nervously between ~~breaths~~¹⁹⁸⁸.

"Mmmm" Alex muttered. His lips were cold, but soft. "And you're so not..."

The sensation to have Alex's lips on hers was a million more times thrilling than anything she had experienced in her life, a sense of weightless that made her feel she was going to explode from happiness. When was the last time she had ever felt such a sensation? **She had once thought the first time she independently kicked away from the curb to ride her bike** [?] **or the first time she caught a buzz from Veuve Cliquot** ^{at 14}

^{Ragnel's bed room?}

~~were like the absolute end.~~ But even those miniscule moments couldn't compare to sweet, blissful Alex-stasy.

"Damn!" Alex this time held his hand on his horn. "What's this dude's problem? Friggin' student driver!"

Evie was instantly yanked from day dream to daytime reality. "Hey," she told Alex. "I'm a student driver."

"I'm sure you don't suck this hard. He's had three chances to go. *No balls.*"

"Hey, Alex..." Evie's thoughts was still in Alex-stasy.

"Uh huh," he answered **half heartedly**.

"When do you think we can go to Santa Barbara?" she asked. "Maybe this Sunday?"

"Uh, yeah. Why not?" Alex revved his engine and finally ripped a left onto Ventura Avenue. "Hey, you know Bien Ben?" he asked. "That guy who transferred from Buena High?"

"Yeah, sorta," Evie said. "I mean, I know who he is."

"Yeah, so he was talking about going down to Baja. I was thinking we could all go. Cool, right?"

"Yeah, totally," Evie agreed. Baja was just across the Mexican border. A lot of kids went there for simple day trips or for the weekend to surf. It really wasn't a big deal, but the thought of going to another country with Alex, ~~albeit just a few miles~~ south of San Diego, excited her. Carpet time in another country? *Que romantico.*

"I'll see if he'd wanna come out to S.B with us, too." Alex said.

"Who?" Evie's mind was still south of the border. The border south of the U.S., that is.

"Bien," Alex said.

"Can't just you and I go?" Evie asked.

"Uh, yeah," Alex said. "But I just thought that because he was new and he surfed and didn't know too many people that it might be cool to take him around. You don't mind, do you? He's good people."

"Hence, his tag, *Bien*," Evie smirked. "But yeah, I don't mind." She regretted asking if she could have Sunday alone with Alex. Was she becoming the obnoxious possessive girlfriend that she had read about in Dee Dee's Mexican magazines? *Posesiva o' No? Decide Tu.*

Alex slowed down on Ventura Avenue and looked the addresses on the mailboxes. ~~Hey~~, where is this place again?"

"It's actually just coming up," Evie looked at her paper with the address. "The lady on the phone said it was a little past Kane ^{Drive} ~~Street~~ ^{suddenly}." Evie saw the sign for Kane and pointed. "There."

Alex pulled over and Evie noticed on the dashboard clock ^{retro} that she was somehow ^{she was always late.} late. Damn, she so wanted to make ^a the good first impression.

"Well, here it goes." She glumly unfastened her safety belt and grabbed her backpack from behind her seat. She was ~~suddenly~~ ^{when} not looking forward to working an afternoon in the Ojai heat ^{once} when she knew she could be out in sea breeze with Alex.)

"It's gonna be okay," Alex said. "It's good to work, get the old muscles moving."

"Oh, like you know so much about hard work, other than paddling out."

she said

"Hey, I've worked at my dad's nursery," Alex said. "All doing Christmas break *vacation* and I'll be there this spring break. Compared to loading up fifty pound palms and bougainvillea, how bad can brushing down a few horses be?"

I guess
"Okay..." Evie agreed.

"Hey, you need a ride home?" *he asked*

"Nah, Lindsay's gonna come get me. Besides, I don't know how long the whole orientation is gonna last. The lady on the phone said it might be between 30 minutes to an hour, depending on how many questions some of the other volunteers had."

"Who are the other volunteers?" Alex turned up The Rolling Blackouts on his iTrip, a definite sign that he was ready to take off, *sin* Evie, for Rincon.

"I dunno," Evie slammed her door. "Just other high school students desperate for extra credit, I guess. I hope there's some cool people."

"I'm sure there will be." Alex said. "Text me later."

"I will," Evie waved good bye. "Bye!"

As she followed the handwritten signs that directed her to the reserve, Evie's Rainbow flojos kicked up dust. No smoking or cell phones were allowed the signs said, but she only had to worry about the latter. She pulled her cellphone out from the back of her shorts and turned it off. *There*. She already felt as though she was turning a new leaf. To turn off her phone and donate a whole afternoon without ringtones or text messages? Once unthinkable for Evie Gomez. But now she was a bona fide charity donor.

Unimagineable

*mention
- Villanova
dress
(code)*

slowly smell

Gradually the ~~aroma~~ of hay, grain and manure hit Evie's senses and she guessed she must be getting close to the actual reserve. Sure enough, a tall blonde woman in a denim sun hat standing near a chain link gate greeted her.

out
“Hey, there,” the woman called to Evie. She was deeply tanned with gnarly crow's feet extending from the outer corners of her dark eyes. She held a clipboard to her chest. “Are you here for the orientation?”

“Uh, yeah,” Evie said. “Yes.”

“What's your name?” the woman asked.

“Evelina,” she answered. **Evie often introduced herself to adults by her formal name.**

“Do you mean Evie?” The woman looked over her clipboard.

“Oh, yeah,” Evie answered.

“And you're from Villanueva,” The woman smiled and checked off something on her clipboard. “That's right up the road. Hope the commute wasn't *too* grueling.”

“Yeah,” Evie laughed lightly. She learned, from spending time at her father's bakery that you sometimes had to grant sympathy chuckles to adults, especially to those in charge.

“Well, you're the last one we were expecting,” the woman told Evie. “Why don't you go over and join others? My name's Lynn and I'll be with you in just a bit.”

“Sure,” Evie smiled back as she made her way over to “join the others”. Her position at the reserve was now clear and her stomach slowly started to turn with first day jitters. She was at the reserve to work. She would be following orders from people she didn't know and would have to do tasks that she didn't necessarily want to do. At fifteen

and ^{mention later} three quarters, Evie never really had a job. Sure as a kid, she, Dee Dee and Raquel ran **the** perquisite cute little lemonade stand that all kids had in the summer and she had often helped her father out at one of his *panaderias*, but both “jobs” were just for fun. Now, cuteness wouldn’t cut it. She was at the reserve to *work*

As soon as Evie reached the others she discovered how dead wrong she was about what she had told Alex. The majority of volunteers were not high school students like herself. They weren’t even sophomores, but rather seniors. Not *high school* seniors, but seniors, as in senior citizens, *old* people. There were about eight of them, small and ^{slouchy} fragile looking, in baggy high waisted jeans and nylon windbreakers. A few of the men even sported small war veteran pins on the ^{labeled} World War I? Evie wondered.

She had forgotten that there were those in the world who actually like doing good things for good causes, completely free from an agenda, like herself.

To Evie’s relief, there was one other person, a girl, who looked about her age. She was very thin and extremely pale with black shoulder length hair and thick heavy bangs. Evie likened her appearance to Emily Strange, the scowling T-shirt icon with the **moody** sayings, she had gotten to know via Raquel. Eve took a seat in the empty fold up chair next to her.

Lynn walked over and stood in front of the group. Evie shaded her eyes from the late afternoon sun as she listened to her introduce herself as the owner of the Reserve and talk a little bit about the reserve’s history. *Yawn*. Evie hoped she ^{had} *better* get credit for this **hum drum part** of the orientation.

explained
“I’m not here that often,” Lynn ~~admitted~~. “So, you will be trained by Arturo. He has been with the reserve for over a year and I really trust him. He’s my right hand man. And with that,” she looked over at a guy sitting in the front row who Evie hadn’t noticed before. “I’ll ~~now~~ let Arturo take over.”

Arturo got up from his chair and was greeted with an estatic applause. Evie saw that he was actually younger, maybe even closer to her age.

Evie heard Emily Strange Girl mutter under her breath when she saw Arturo, “Nice.”

Evie looked Arturo over. Yeah, he was nice looking. If you liked that country, rural kind of look, which she didn’t. He was tall, like Alex, but not has wiry. He had a broad chest. He had **brown** hair like Alex’s, but light eyes, like almost green. He was *Alex's hair was now post his strands* very tan, which Evie did like, but wore cowboy boots, which Evie definitely didn’t like.

Que fugly.

“My name’s Arturo,” the *guy* ~~boy~~ introduced himself again. “You can call me *Turo* ~~Art~~ if you like, but just don’t call me, last minute, to cancel your hours.”

The whole group, minus Emily Strange Girl, laughed out loud.

Point proven. Sympathy chuckles (sometimes called kiss ass giggles) *are* granted to adults or those in charge.

“No, but seriously,” Arturo continued. “The horses here have already gone through a lot, so if you aren’t truly committed to being here, then you need to think of another option for volunteer work. We, actually, *they* really need responsible individuals to help take care of them.”

Arturo went on to explain that he was a senior at Thatcher High School and also an officer with the FFA, the Future Farmers of America.

“A lot of people think that the FFA is just a bunch of kids who are into raising livestock, but it’s much more than that,” He ^{went} goes on to explain, in ^{an} almost ~~a~~ smug demeanor. “We learn leadership and management skills. I’m the head director for Ventura county, a position that I’m very proud of and now I’m running for state director, which is I position I feel pretty confident I’ll earn.”

Evie looked around at the group. Was this guy for real? The Emily Strange Girl was working on a blemish under her chin, but everyone else, especially Lynn, was so taken by the wonderful magical world of Arturo and his passion for taking charge.

Arturo told everyone that they could request their own hours, however, students usually worked afternoon and weekend hours. “We also have horses that are boarded here,” he pointed out five stables towards the far back of the reserve. “They’re basically our bread and butter. Their owner’s rent pays ~~for~~ ^{a gesture that he was doing the} for our feed, supplies and our own rent.” He finally rubbed the palms together. “Now, who’s ready to meet our clients?” ^{get anxious good time to go}

Of course, all the old people chuckled again and raised their hands ^{w/} in anticipation.

Arturo led the group over to the **stables**, just as Lynn excused herself.

“Have fun and be sure to listen to Arturo,” she said before adjusting her denim sun hat and heading towards her ^{truck} pick up. “I’ll be back before you all leave.”

As everyone followed Arturo, Evie fell into step with the Emily Strange Girl, who glanced over at Evie.

“I like your necklace,” she said.

“Oh,” Evie fingered the chips of abalone shells that dangled from the cord.

“Thanks. My boyfriend made it for me.”

“Oh,” Emily made a face like she just witnessed a kitten mid yawn or something.

“That is *too* sweet.”

Okay, the girl may emulate Emily, but she ^{to tell} obviously had a *sentida* side.

“What school do you go to?” she asked Evie.

“Villanueva,” Evie answered.

The girl threw Evie a knowing glance. “Fan-*cee*. You must have money.”

“I don’t,” Evie answered awkwardly. “But my parents do. Or at least my dad does, but he works. A lot.”

Evie always felt a bit uncomfortable when seemingly cool kids, like herself, questioned ^{family} her financial position. Money usually represented yuppie-dumb, i.e. *boring*. ~~and~~ Evie was way more ‘down with brown’ than ‘down with Buffy.’ *Totally*.

“Where do you go?” she asked the Emily Girl.

“I don’t, really,” Emily Girl answered. “I mean, I do independent study at New Path.”

New Path was a C-school, at the north end of the county. Unlike Nueva in all its majestic Spanish architectural splendor, New Path was just a bunch of white washed quantum huts and non-descript bungalows at the Camarillo airport. Evie didn’t know anyone, except for Jose, Raquel’s ex boyfriend, who went to New Path.

“Do you know a guy named Jose?” Evie asked. She couldn’t help but feel a little bit Emily Strange herself, hoping to hear that Jose was doing badly. But, he *had* been quite the dick to her, and of course, to Raquel, last semester.

“Jose...” Emily Strange Girl squinted her eyes in thought. “Is he a Mexican guy with wild hair, like a ‘fro?”

“Yeah,” Evie said.

“Oh, yeah,” Emily Girl smiled slyly. “*Everyone* knows *that* Jose.”

“I’m sure they do,” Evie smirked. “He used to go to my school and –”

“Excuse me, are we interrupting you?”

Evie looked up and realized that Arturo was directing his question right ^{at} her. Suddenly ten pairs of eyes, including Emily’s, were on Evie.

“Uh, no,” Evie’s face felt hot. “I’m sorry. What did you say?”

“Please,” Arturo looked upward in annoyance. “I really don’t want to go over this again.”

felt the need to stand
“I know,” Evie ~~stood~~ up straight. “I’m paying attention.”

Arturo glanced down at Evie’s feet. “And you can’t be wearing flip flops around the stables. We won’t be taking these horses down for any stroll on the beach. At least, anytime soon.”

All the volunteers, even Emily Strange Girl, chuckled a bit.

““I just came from school,” Evie explained. “I didn’t know.” Her feet suddenly felt over exposed and naked. She placed one flip flop over the other, in a show of **modesty**.

“You wear flip flops *and* shorts to school?” Arturo directed his question less to Evie and more to his newly acquired audience who were now at the mercy of his desperate jokes. “And do you wear a bathing suit to **church**?”

More tittering from the geriatric gallery.

"What is your name?" Arturo looked at his clipboard.

"Evie, Evie Gomez."

"Ah, yes," Arturo said. "You were just added, right?"

"Uh, yeah," The magnifying glass was ^{now placed} definitely on Evie.

"Let me tell you something, Evie" Arturo started. "I know this is a volunteer position, but you need to take your work here seriously. I'm not going to hand out credit just because you show up. You are going to have to do work. Hard work."

"I know," Evie said. Jeez, ^{she} Evie thought to herself, Mr. "Friend of the Animals" was really laying it on thick.

"So, anyway," Arturo tried to continue, but ^{despite his} he was ~~still~~ annoyed. "Back to the real reason why we are all here, the care and rehabilitation of ~~our friends~~."

Arturo then led everyone to each stable and introduced each horse by name. Evie noticed that just about everyone took notes and that many of them went so far as to draw out a diagram of the reserve. She glanced over and saw that even ^{the} Emily Strange Girl was writing something in her notebook. Evie immediately felt inadequate and didn't know what to do with her empty hands. Usually she would fiddle with her cell phone, but that was now not an option.

Besides, wasn't the whole point of doing volunteer work to gain insight and experiences you couldn't learn in the classroom? Why would anyone follow the strict requisite, such as note taking, that just reeked of academia?

"Now, let's go give old Chamuco a visit," Arturo announced after the group had been introduced to the last of at least twenty horses. "Chamuco," Arturo explained, "is

one of our oldest residents. He was seized from a ranch in Santa Ynez and when he first came here he was starving and dehydrated, but he has come a long way."

The whole group followed Arturo to a stable farther away from the other horses. A humongous light brown ^{Carmal colored} Shoshone came over to the group, lazily chewing on strands of hay. He had big eyes that were oddly clouded, almost pure white. It was clear that Chamuco was blind. A collective ^{sympathetic} "Aaaw" was expressed from the whole group.

"Even though his name means devil in Spanish," Arturo got into ^{his} ~~the~~ stall with him, "Chamuco is one of our sweetest horses." He pulled a carrot out of his side pocket and fed it to Chamuco while he started talking baby talk. "Aw, ha-vun't choo Chamuco? You've had a toof time. Poor *bouy*."

Evie glanced over at one of the volunteers. A woman, about four feet tall with dirty grey hair tucked under a silk scarf, was fiercely scribbling on her note pad. Evie looked over at the pad. 'Chamuco/devil, has come along way, pick up Poly-grip on the way home.'

"Who'd like to meet Chamuco?" Arturo asked, more as a challenge than a question, as if no one would dare enter the stable with him.

Suddenly the shared eagerness of the group dimmed. None of the volunteers offered to get in the stable with Chamuco/devil.

Arturo looked over the group, his eyebrows raised in smugness. He then looked at Evie. "What about you, Evie?" he asked. "Why do you come in and say hi to ol' Chamuco?"

"Me?" Evie pointed to herself. The whole group parted, as if they were the Red Sea, and now two separate ~~groups~~ had all their eyes on Evie again.

Sides glared at Evie then began to approach Chamuco.

“Sure” Arturo motioned her to step the inside the stable. “Come on in.”

Evie stepped away from the group and slid between the fence’s slants. Her precious Rainbow flojos sunk into the muddy earth and all the horse flies that had been pestering Chamuco changed course and were now testing her patience as they buzzed around her face and hair. She tried to swap them away.

“You have to be careful with horses like Chamuco,” Arturo warned her, as well as the whole group. “They can get easily startled and can give you a good, swift kick. Which reminds me,” Arturo looked at the group again with a playful smirk on his face. “Did everyone fill out the liability forms?”

Everyone laughed, that is, except Evie. She couldn’t help but feel a bit ~~nervous~~ *hesitant*. She crept cautiously around Chamuco, allowing him enough adequate space so he couldn’t possibly dare feel threatened, but just as she was making her way to the right of him, her cell’s ringtone went off, all five bars excruciatingly loud -- a long continuous scream of Greta, the lead singer of The Black Dolls, blared from the back pocket of Evie’s shorts. It startled Evie, but not as nearly as much as it did Chamuco. His entire gigantic **body jerked back and his neck was coiled back, like a two ton cobra ready to strike.**

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” Arturo tried to grab Chamuco’s by his **neck**. “Easy does it, boy.”

Chamuco swayed his head left to right. He stamped his two front hooves ferociously on the ground, kicking up mud and dirt as Evie^o fumbled to turn it off her ~~phone~~ *phone* that somehow continued ~~blare~~ *blare* wail.

nightmare

came to the side x

"Get out of the stable!" Arturo yelled at Evie as Chamuco picked up a pace ~~around the stable. His ears were pulled back and he~~ started to knock his body against the wooden slants of the fence.

The volunteers watched in **horror**.

"Should we go get help?" one of them asked. *called out*

"No, no," Arturo insisted. "I got him, I got him."

After what seemed a good long while, Chamuco, unbelievably, calmed down.

Arturo stroked his mane, offered him another carrot from his back pocket and softly talked that annoying baby talk to him again. Chamuco, it seemed, was finally **relajado**. Arturo, on the other hand, was **enojado**. Big time.

"You *cannot* have your cell phone here!" Arturo spat at Evie from the stable.

"Didn't you see the signs before you came in?"

"Yeah," Evie tried her best to defend herself. "I mean, yes, I did." She felt horrible that she was to blame for what just happened. The last thing she wanted was to traumatize some poor, blind, defenseless animal that had already been abused enough in his life. "I thought I had turned it off."

"Why would you even *need* your phone?" Arturo snapped. He then addressed the whole group. "Do *not* bring your cell near the stables. At all. Keep phones in your car."

One elderly man with thick white hair and ~~wearing~~ a light blue baseball cap raised his hand. "Uh, I have a question," he looked around at the rest of the group in confusion. *or in the supply shed.*

"Yes, what is it?" Arturo shook his head in exhausted frustration.

"Uh, none of us have mobile phones," the elderly man **said cautiously**. "Is that going to be a problem?"

"No." Arturo answered, exasperated. "Don't worry about it,"

Emily Strange Girl looked over at Evie. "Boy," she remarked sarcastically. "It looks like you sure made a friend."

By the time Evie got home that evening it was almost seven in the evening. She had spent only a little over three hours at the SCHR, but her body ached as though she had busted her butt driving cattle for three years. She nearly fell asleep in Lindsay's car on the way home from the reserve. — *CAKE accident*

"How was your first day, *mi'ja*?" her mother asked from the kitchen. She was eating half of an avocado with a spoon as Evie came into the house with Lindsay.

"Ugh," All Evie could do was groan. She went to the fridge and poured herself some Kern's horchata. Will there ~~ever~~ ^{*ever*} be a time when Lindsay will find the time and make horchata from scratch, like she used to?

"Alex called," her mother told her. "He said he had been trying you all day on your cell phone but you never answered. He was getting worried."

"We can't use our phones at the reserve," Evie said. "It spooks out the horses." She decided to omit the incident that erupted between her and Chamuco/devil. She still couldn't shake off the look of pure fright in his eyes. The pure fright *she* caused.

"You have to tell us all about it." Her mother was now scraping the worn sides of the avocado hull for any possible remaining flesh. "You're father's gonna be home soon. You want something to eat until then?"

"Nuh uh," Evie moaned as took her glass of horchata upstairs with her. "I just wanna take a long bath."

"Evie, wait," her mother called out. "I want to talk to you."

"What?"

"You know your father is really serious about canceling this party," her mother said.

"I know," Evie replied glumly. **Didn't she just bust her butt for the last four hours? Of course, she knew.**

"And I really need you to know how serious he is. If you don't bring your GPA up, you will not only lose the party, but *we* will lose a lot of money. I already had the invitations ordered and there are the three non refundable deposits ~~we made~~, for Duke's, for the food and for the DJ."

"I know," Evie repeated. Jeez, could she feel more pressured?

"And your father and I have already asked a lot of our friends from the country club and a lot of family to hold the date for the party," her mother continued. "So, I just hope that you keep that in mind and that you *are* serious about improving your grades."

"Mom, of course I am. *Evie said* Can't you tell? Look at me, I'm covered in sweat and mud and I've been slaving away all afternoon."

"Okay, okay," her mother smiled. "I just needed you to know."

"Can I go now?" Evie asked. *yes of course.*

Evie continued up the stairs. God, the *nerve* of her mother. It's like she wanted to make sure the party happened ~~more for her own sake~~, just to save face and money. If she wanted the party to friggin' bad, why didn't she just schlep the horse dung herself and clock in under Evie's name? *Evie thought*

Evie slowly made her way to the bathroom of her parent's master bedroom and turned the jacuzzi dial of their over sized tub to high. After she lit two vanilla scented candles and mixed in her favorite lavender oil into the whirling jet streams, she stripped off her stinky clothes and slid into the hot water. She called Alex from her cell phone.

"So how was it?" he asked. "I kept calling you and you never answered. I was worried you got dragged off by a horse or something."

"I feel like I was. I am *so* tired." Evie yawned. "And this was just the orientation. The guy in charge totally had it out for me. He's like, this total kiss ass FFA dork. He made me get in a stable with the most freaked out horse at the reserve and totally went out of his way to make me look like an idiot, in front of everyone."

"What an asshole," Alex said.

"Totally," Evie agreed. "I'm thinking maybe I should just find a tutor and forget all this volunteer business."

"Maybe he's just coming on strong at first," Alex guessed. "You know how teachers do that, play the tough guy first and then soften up later."

"We'll see," Evie yawned. "But either way, he was a jerk. He put me and this other girl on doodie patrol."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I have to clean up after the horses," Evie said. "All of them."

"Are you serious?" Alex laughed. "How many horses do they have?"

"Twenty *too* many. Thank God I just have to go a few times after school."

"I hope it's just a few times," Alex said. "You really missed some good surf today."

"Thanks," Evie answered sarcastically. She rubbed a pumice stone across the bottom of her foot. She could hear that Alex had his TV on. "What are you watching?"

"Surf porn," Alex said. "You know, big waves. Big music."

"Big boobs," Evie teased.

"I didn't notice..." ^{she} Bien's over."

"Oh, really?" Evie asked.

"Yeah, he met up with me today. **Oh, you gotta meet his girlfriend, Aya. She's totally rad.**"

"Cool," Evie tried to mask her envy. Not that she was jealous of another guy's girlfriend.

"Yeah, Bien and I were talking about ^{that trip} ~~going down to~~ Baja sometime."

"So what makes her so rad?" Evie asked.

"Who?"

"Maya, or whatever her name is," Evie said.

"It's Aya," Alex said. "For one, she kicks *ass* on the short board. You gotta check her out, Eves. She's from Japan, but moved out here just so she could surf. Man, talk about dedication."

Evie was now officially jealous. Surfing was something that she shared with Alex and now some other girl was barging in on their flow? Granted, Aya was Bien's girlfriend, but she was a *short* boarder which, as anybody knows, are known for being loud, brash and show offy. Ugh. Why was Evie such a hater?

Just then her call-waiting double beeped and she saw that it was Dee Dee on the other line. **Thank God. She really didn't want to hear any more how "rad" this Aya person was.**

"Hey, it's Dee Dee," she told Alex. "You mind if I take her call? I haven't talked to her since school."

"Nah," Alex said. "I'll try you later tonight."

Evie clicked over to Dee Dee.

"*Hola, charra!*" Dee Dee said. "So, how did it go?"

"Don't even ask." Evie was set to uncork her whine all over again. "It sucked. Big time."

"But it's all going to be so worth it," Dee Dee insisted. "As soon as you get your GPA up, you can have your party and then you'll get Cherry Bomb and then your life will ~~so be no bet.~~

bien puesta.
"I hope so," Evie wasn't feeling as confident ~~as~~ she was a few days earlier. She ran the pumice stone under the bottom of her other foot. "You should have heard my mother tonight. She was all guilt tripping me about the party and everything. It's like she's throwing the party for herself or something."

"*Serio?*" Dee Dee asked. "Well, at least she's on your side."

"Well, she could be on my side with other way. Like *she could* grab a shovel and help me at the reserve."

Dee Dee laughed. "So, *oye*, I haven't told you the most exciting news."

"What?" Evie asked.

Evie got up from her bed to help Lindsay in Sabrina's room.

"So, how long is Sabrina gonna visit?" she asked as she walked in. Lindsay was airing out the cream colored comforter over Sabrina's queen sized bed.

"I don't know how long," Lindsay said. "You should probably ask your parents."

Evie looked around the room. Sabrina kept everything in ^{such} tight, impeccable order that you could practically bounce a quarter off the whole room whereas Evie's bedroom was constantly under construction. She did, however, pride herself in the orderly fashion she maintained with her flojos. All of them (eleven pairs in all) were lined on her closet floor based on price, color, or jewels, in that order. *Que Kimora Lee, no?*

Lindsay leaned up from the bed and glanced over at the photos of Sabrina and her now former boyfriend, Robert. They were tacked on Sabrina's gingham cloth bulletin board. "Maybe we should take those down," she suggested.

"Are you serious?" Evie ^{asked} ~~asked~~. She had just opened Sabrina's vinyl CD carrier case, a relic before iPod nation took over, and winced at her ^{sestius} ~~taste~~ in music. From Classical Piano to World Music, how could they possibly be related?

"I think so," Lindsay started to pull out a white plastic thumb tack from the corner of one of the pictures. "Your mother said she was *muy triste*. We don't want to make her more upset." **DICHO** *manana es otro dia.*

"I think she'd be way more upset that we are moving things around in her room."

Evie closed the CD case. "She doesn't like her things messed with. As nor do I, Lindsay,"

Evie exaggerated in proper English enunciation to prove her point.

"Maybe you're right," Lindsay sighed. "But don't blame me if she gets sad. I don't want to be the cause of her tears."

“Why aren’t you using your new grill? The Grill Grandioso 3000,” she ~~said~~ ^{asked} sarcastically as she took a seat on a deck chair and helped herself to some tortilla chips.

“The Ultra Premium,” her father corrected her. “I wanted to use it, but we don’t have enough propane. And the extension cord doesn’t reach out to the deck. It’s all just a mess.”

“I can go get some propane, ~~Señor~~ ^{Ruben},” Lindsay offered.

“Nah, it won’t be necessary,” Evie’s father continued to scrub the Weber’s grill. “It’s been a while since I’ve used the this. It should be fun, like old times,” He ~~looked~~ ^{looked} over at Evie. “Like when we used to go camping, remember?”

“Camping?” Evie squinted her eyes at her father. It was now nearly ~~three in the~~ ^{four in the} afternoon, but the sun was ~~still~~ ^{still} blazing. How utterly sweet, She bitterly thought, it would’ve been to be out at Sea Street, surfing with Alex and then watching Los Olvidados play at the ~~Seaside Park~~ ^{Seaside} street fair. Stupid Sabrina. Her little melt down just effed up her whole day.

“Yes,” her father said. “We used this grill when we used to go camping at Leo Cabrillo? How can you not remember?”

“Easily,” Evie joked as she crammed more chips into her mouth. Leo Carillo was a state beach between Malibu and Rio Estates, right off the Pacific Coast Highway. The highway divided the hiking trails of the canyon and the ~~rocky~~ ^{Sandy} coastline of the beach, making Leo Carillo truly a place of best worlds, depending on what side of the highway you were on. Evie realized it had been years since she had thought of Leo Carrillo.

“Those were some good times,” her father continued. “Remember you and Sabrina would take the boogie boards out and would be in the ocean all day? We couldn’t

get you out of the water for nothing. You girls were so water logged that you'd look like those Californian raisins when you finally came out."

"Dad, we didn't even camp," Evie **rumpled her lips**. "We slept in the Vacationeer and half the time mom would get so annoyed with all loud campers and the mosquitoes that she'd drive me and 'brina back home so we could all sleep in our own beds for the night. I wouldn't exactly call that camping."

"But you still came back in the morning," Her father refused to let his positive memories be swept away under Evie's moodiness. "We'd ^{drunk} spend the whole day at the beach together. It was so fun. You and your sister were **inseparable**."

Evie looked at her father struggle with the Weber grill. ~~It was~~ not getting any cleaner. "Do you even know what you are doing?" she asked.

"E-vie" Lindsay shot her a look as she arranged utensils on the patio table

Evie knew she was sounding **bratty**, but couldn't help it. She was still annoyed that she had to waste a full day at home and she placed the blame on not only Sabrina, but both her parents.

"Yes, Evie" her father didn't mind her sass. "I do know what I am doing. It's pretty simple. I just have to get the coals going, which... ^{me} ~~is~~..." He looked over the pit ^{bag}.

"Taking ^e a little bit longer than I thought."

"So, how long is Sabrina gonna stay?" Evie asked her father. Molesto had now rolled over. He wanted his belly rubbed.

"I'm not quite sure. You might want to ask your mother." He added more lighter fluid to the coals and then re-read the charcoal bag. "You know, we might be eating a little later than I thought. I hope Sabrina isn't too hungry when she gets here." He looked

But both Lindsay and Evie were still too stunned to answer.

Chapter 7

“So what do you think happened to her?” Dee Dee asked Evie.

The three girls, ~~she~~ ^{Dee Dee}, Evie ~~and Raquel~~ ^{and Raquel} had gathered, ~~later~~ ^{later} that afternoon, ~~for~~ ^{for} another impromptu ER/RE! ASAP! meeting and, again, at Evie’s urgency. This time, the meet up was at their usual place, at far west end of the Rio Estates golf course. They all lay on the grass, flat on their backs, where any passing county club golfer might guess them to be counting clouds or working on their mid winter tans. Oh, if life in the Estates was just that simple

“Like I said,” Evie repeated. “As far as I know, she and Robert broke up and she’s all upset by it.”

“But why?” Dee Dee ~~was smoking~~ ^{took a puff from her} a Californian Dream. “I mean, who broke up with who?”

“It’s not who broke up with who,” Raquel held her cell phone inches above her face with both hands **and texted**. “It’s who broke up with *whom*.”

Evie ignored Raquel. “She broke up with him,”

Dee Dee leaned over to her side to face Evie. “That makes no sense. Then why is Sabrina the one who is all sad and crying?”

“I have no idea,” Evie waved Dee Dee’s cigarette smoke away from her face.

“He probably cheated on her,” Raquel said. “And then she broke up with him after she found out.”

“How could you say that?” Evie looked over at Raquel. “You’ve never even met Robert and why would anyone ever cheat on Sabrina? She’s like perfect.” Evie was surprised that she would be cheering for Team Sabrina, someone who she felt really shined in the spotlight and definitely didn’t need anymore PR work.

“Look, they’d been going out for almost two years,” Raquel ~~continued~~ to text. *+thumbs up on face*
“He was probably bored. Big time.”

“Could you *stop* texting for a minute?” Evie asked.

“I’m just letting Davey wallow in his guilt,” Raquel explained. “We were suppose to hook up today, ‘member? But *now* he’s saying it’ll be later tonight.”

“You know,” Dee Dee started. “I agree with Raquel. I think there is more to the story. It ~~all~~ sounds *mas serio*.”

Evie sat up and crossed one legs over the other. “You guys are really something, making all these assumptions up about people and situations you barely know anything about.”

“Hey, we only know what you tell us and you’re the one with sent the emergency text,” Raquel said. “You wanted our opinion on what we think is going on with Sabrina and we’re giving it to you. It’s not our fault you don’t agree with what we think,” She read a new text and sat up quickly. “*Shit!*”

“*Que pasa?*” Dee Dee asked.

“Friggin’ Davey.” Raquel fumed at her cell phone. “He’s such an a-hole. First he flaked on me today and now he’s bailing on me tonight.”

Evie couldn’t help but feel slightly relieved. One less night with Davey Mitchell was one more night of safety for Raquel. Evie finally saw who Davey Mitchell was. He

had picked up Raquel from school one day in his huge white four by four truck. The words, *In Loving Memory*, in Old English script, were ^{adhered} across the truck's back tinted window. Directly below *In Loving Memory* were the names of three of Davey's friends who had died in who knows what kind of way. When Evie had asked Raquel about it, she simply shrugged her shoulders and said they had been at the wrong place at the wrong time. Evie couldn't image dating anyone who had an abridged obituary on their car and God forbid, Raquel's name got added to Davey's list by merely being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

"Hey," Evie suddenly remembered her own evening duties with the reserve.

"What time is it?"

Raquel checked her cell. "Almost six, why?"

"Ah man. I gotta go." Evie stood up and slipped on her Trovata flojos. She had to meet Ana in less than an hour."

"And where you going, Miss Thang?" Raquel inquired with a suspicious tone. It was she, not Evie, who usually had to take off for somewhere.

"Nowhere exciting," Evie cracked her knuckles as she stood up. "I'm on volunteer duty."

"Ew," Dee Dee wrinkled her nose at the sound of Evie's fingers. "I *hate* when you do that." She put out her cigarette out in the ground. "You're going to work on a Saturday night? I thought you had the whole day free."

"**I did,**" Evie said. "The day. But tonight I gotta go to this charro rodeo."

"You mean a *charreada*?" A smile spread across Dee Dee's face.

"Yes, exactly." Evie said. "How do you say it, again?"

“A *charreada*,” Dee Dee repeated. “You’re going to one? Tonight? *Que chido!*”

“What is it?” Raquel asked. Her thumbs were on a fervent texting roll, composing scorned woman pay back to Davey.

“It’s a rodeo,” Dee Dee said. “A Mexican rodeo, but with more synchronized competition and everyone is dressed in traditional Mexican clothing, really festive and colorful. Rocio and I used to go them when we visited his cousins in Jalisco.” She suddenly got that ‘woe is *yo*, I miss Mexico beyond belief’ look. “But wait, how does going to a *charreada* work into your volunteer credit?”

“You got me,” Evie said. “And I ain’t asking. As long as I don’t have to clean up at the reserve is fine with me. It’s a fundraiser and Arturdo said if any of the volunteers wanted to buy a ticket and go, we could still get credit.

“Ah,” Raquel smirked. “The virtues of capital gain in an altruistic society.”

“And this girl, Ana, that I volunteer with,” Evie explained. “She’s gonna pick me up and we’re gonna go together.”

“If I didn’t have to get ready for my La Patrona mixer, I would definitely invite myself.” Dee Dee said. “Charreada’s are *so* much fun. They have live mariachi music and lots of food. You aren’t taking Alejandro?”

“I would,” Evie started. “But he’s decided to drive down to San Diego tonight. He and Bien, that guy from Buena, are gonna stay the night so they can go surfing in Baja tomorrow morning. Dawn patrol.”

As soon as she spoke Evie could just sense Dee Dee already feeling sorry for her. *He’s going away. Again. Without you. Porbecita.*

“I was actually gonna go with him,” Evie lied. “He wanted to do this whole day thing down in Baja, but I have to work at the reserve.”

“Plus,” Raquel added. “I really can’t see your mom letting you cross into Mexico with Alex. No way would Vicki G stand for that.”

“Right,” Evie raised her eyebrows and nodded. Although Raquel’s observation validated her little fib, she slightly resented it. Why did Raquel always have to point out just how strict her mother was? Just because Kitty, Raquel’s mother, was too busy with her software business, her La Madrinas mentoring network and hosting her overdone Bunko parties, to know or even ask what Raquel was up to didn’t make Evie’s mother a complete tyrant.

“But Baja isn’t Mexico,” Dee Dee felt the need to point out. “Everyone thinks it is, but it isn’t. It’s really just an extension of California.”

“Oh, yeah?” Raquel asked. “If it’s just an extension, why do *I* get sweated at customs when my Cabo tan and I are just trying to make our way back into Cali?”

“Maybe it’s not your dark tan,” Dee Dee mused. “But maybe your dark, moody attitude?”

“Yeah,” Evie laughed. “Or the fact that you’re always trying to smuggle tequila in your ^{hand} bag or pot in your panties.”

“Excuse me” Raquel informed Evie. “But I do *not* drink tequila. **That stuff is nasty.**”

“And,” Evie looked at her. “You don’t wear panties”

“You know,” Raquel threw Evie a sideways glance. “I *was* thinking of tagging along with you to your little rodeo, but now I just changed my mind, thank you.” She went back to texting.

“Oh, yeah, thanks for the offer,” Evie smirked. “Now that Davey’s ditched you.”

“And Alex hasn’t you?” Raquel asked.

“*Not twice*” Evie smirked.

“Not twice *in the same day*, ~~maybe~~,” Raquel bit back.

“Chicas, chicas,” Dee Dee interrupted with an authoritative, almost bored tone.

“How much longer is this juvenile sparring going to continue? If we’re done here, I need to get back home and work on my introduction essay.”

“No, but really,” Raquel said to Evie. “I’ll go with you. I could be into getting my mariachi on.” She extended her elbows and flapped them around a bit.

“Serio?” Evie asked.

“Why not?” Raquel asked. “Can I catch a ride with you and your horse friend?”

Ana, Evie remembered, was also a classmate of Jose’s and she could only imagine an evening of severe grilling a` la Raquel. She made a mental note to warn Ana - - ‘Ixnay on the Jose’. But other than that, Evie thought it would be fun to have Raquel to herself for the evening. Since she has been going out with Davey, it’s seemed like forever since they had QT together on a weekend.

“Of course,” Evie **said**. “You should totally come with us.”

“Oh,” Dee Dee pouted as she put out her cigarette. “**I am so jealous**. You are **going to have a blast**. *Charro* boys are so fine.”

“That’s enough for me,” Raquel slammed her cell phone shut in defiance. “I’m so over Davey.”

Chapter

When Evie got home to get ready for the charreada she couldn’t help but be reminded of the Sabrina situation at home. She went upstairs, but instead of going to her own room, she tapped on Sabrina’s bedroom door.

“Brina?” she asked softly. But her sister didn’t answer.

She tapped again and when she heard nothing, not even the hum of the TV or her computer, Evie walked to the end of the hall, to her parent’s room.

“*Que quieres, mi’ja?*” her mother asked. She was opening new decks of cards and placing them in a square shaped wicker basket.

“Is it your turn to host bunko?” Evie asked.

“Yes,” her mother didn’t look up. “But now I’m thinking maybe I shouldn’t have the party here, with your sister and all.”

Evie sat on the linen truck, at the end of the bed. “What’s wrong with her?” she asked. “I knocked on her door, but she’s not answering.”

“She’s probably just sleeping.”

“Still?” It was weird that Evie would question someone else’s sleeping habits. Until Sabrina arrived, she was the sole snoozer of La Familia Gomez.

“She’s just going through a tough time,” her mother sighed as she opened up another pack of cards. “It’s something we all go through. Heartbreak... loss.” She looked

at Evie and smiled. "But your sister is going to be fine. Nothing that some good old pilates and yoga classes can't take care of."

"Should I stay home?" Evie asked. She actually surprised herself. She had been looking forward to a night out with Raquel and Ana, even if it was work related.

"Oh, no, no," her mother **insisted**. "Lindsay put away all the tri tip and everything and tomorrow I'll reheat it and we'll all eat lunch together. Just go your fundraiser and have fun."

Evie, Raquel and Ana arrived to the small arena that hosted the *charreada* just as it was starting. Just about every seat was taken up by either large Mexican families, rowdy teenagers or men, already drunk on Corona beer. The entire arena was outfitted with *banderas*-- red, white and green, the national colors of the Mexican flag, but just about everyone waved colorful flags ^{of diff. colors} that represented their allegiance to their home states of Mexico.

"See," Evie griped to Raquel as they searched for empty seats. "I told you we wouldn't get here on time! I knew we should have just met you here."

When she and Ana had gone to pick up her up, Raquel, being Raquel, wanted to partake in a little pre-game drinking and of course, made them all late.

"Just chill, Eves. We're here now, aren't we?" Raquel scanned the bleachers. "Damn, I thought we were at a rodeo," she cracked about all the waving flags, "not some freaking *futbol* game."

"Hey," Ana tilted her chin towards the lower left end of the bleachers. "There some space over there. I'm sure we can fit our asses in."

Raquel and Ana, each lugging plastic bags of kettle corn and churritos as well as *elotes* slathered in mayonaise, made their way over to the empty space while Evie followed, balancing their three super sized sodas.

! *a diversel!*
“*Vamos!*” an announcer yelled into the microphone and the whole crowd stood up and belted out a thunderous grito, a cry ~~that to some~~ defines Mexican independence, but to others, announces the start of a party, or fight. From the looks of the crowd, Evie wasn’t sure which what this *part* grito actually defined. *e*

Raquel continued to look around and then discreetly pulled out a small glass bottle of Jack Daniel’s. She poured some into her soda.

Ana eyed the bottle. “Woman, I like your style.”

Raquel passed the bottle to Ana who measured a similar amount into her own coke.

“You want some Evie?” Ana wiggled the bottle seductively.

“No, thanks,” Evie said. “Whisky gives me the runs.”

“Ah, poor Evie,” Raquel feigned sympathy. “*Lo Sient*. I forgot to snake some Veeve for you.”

The first bull rider was released into the ring and the whole crowd stood up from their seats to cheer him on.

From their seats, Evie could make out a cowboy outfitted in chaps and a cowboy hat () atop a non stop bucking black bull.

“This is Jessie G from Fontana!” The announcer yelled into the mic. “And if Jessie ~~can stays~~ *stays* on Thunder ~~until~~ *until* the whistle blows, well he’s gonna be going home with his own bottle of tequila! What do you say, amigos?”

"Give me the tequila!" Raquel held her soda out towards the arena. "I'm running out!"

The crowd that sat around Raquel laughed.

"I thought you didn't drink tequila," Evie reminded Raquel. She knew she was being a buzz kill, but WTF, she didn't have a buzz and she didn't want to get popped for being around others seemingly trying to get one.

"Oh, *my* God," Raquel ignored Evie and exclaimed in excitement. "This totally rocks! Ten times crazier than Avenida de Revolucion in T.J."

"Minus the lame Frat boy contingent." Ana dryly observed.

114 [Evie really regretted that she had brought Raquel. She was already ~~getting~~ loud and obnoxious and getting Ana drunk. Who was gonna drive them home? She checked her cell phone and saw that Alex hadn't even texted her. She wondered if he had already arrived to San Diego.

"Man," Raquel practically inhaled her drink through her straw. "Check out the *hombres* 'round here! *Que* fine!"

Evie looked around. Dee Dee was right. Charro boys, in their snug charro suits were *muy*, how do you say 'FAF' en espanol? Plus, there were just tons of other men, spectators, milling about in mariachi inspired duds— bolero jackets and tight fitting pencil pants with silver conchas stitched along the side seam.

"Damn," Raquel nudged Evie and whistled. "Look at *that* piece of ass!"

Evie and Ana looked over. Ana covered her mouth laughing but Evie was beside herself. The so-called piece of ass belonged to no one other than the biggest nalgon himself, Arturo.

Evie almost didn't recognize him. He was wearing DESCRIBE

"You've gotta be kidding!" Evie said. "That's like my boss, at the reserve."

"What, are you serious?" Raquel pulled down her Utopia Cop Outs to get a better look. "Damn, hook a sister up with some volunteer opportunities. I'm suddenly feeling in a very *giving* kind of mood." She lowered her voice and ribbed Evie in the side. "Ooh, he's looking this way."

"Oh, great," Evie turned her head away, hoping Arturdo wouldn't notice. He had told the volunteers that they didn't have to spend time together as a group, ^{or} but the less time with *el jefe*, the better.

However, Arturdo did see Evie and Ana and actually waved to them. They both waved back and Evie hoped that would be it. Eye contact made, credit issued. But instead Arturdo made his way towards the bleachers directly to them.

"Hey, you two made it," he said. "Nice." He balanced one leg on the bleacher seat above them and leaned his whole body onto it.

Nice? When was Arturdo every happy to see them, let alone Evie?

"My name's Raquel," Raquel held her hand out, poised and dainty like, as if she was actually expecting him to kiss it or something. "I'm Evie's best friend."

Arturdo took Raquel's hand, but merely shook it. "Oh, you're the one whose been living in Mexico City."

— Evie was surprised he'd remember
"Uh, *no*," Raquel shot Evie a look. "I'm the *other* best friend." She then looked back at Arturdo and smiled suggestively. "The *pretty* one."

Arturdo laughed. "The pretty funny one!"

That, Evie had to admit, made her LOL.

"Oh, well it's better than being named Arturodo," Raquel said under her breath.

Oh my god. Evie and Ana couldn't stop from giggling.

"What?" Arturo asked.

Just then, Josephina, of all people, walked up to them. "Arturo?"

He turned around, caught off guard. "Ah, Josephina. You're back already?"

"Yes," Josephina huffed. "The line is too long. It's ridiculous?" She eyed Evie, Raquel and Ana.

"Josephina," Arturodo suddenly seemed awkward. "You remember Evie and Ana and this is their friend..."

"Oh, you can just call me La bonita," Raquel teased. "No, but really, I'm not a volunteer," Raquel pointed out. "I'm Evie's best friend."

"O-kay," Josephina shrugged her shoulders as though it really didn't matter to her, either way. "Arturo," She repeated, looking directly at him. "I have to use a bathroom? And I am not about to use the stinky outhouses they have here. Can't you take me somewhere?"

"Somewhere?" Arturodo asked. "We'd have to drive into Moorpark or Camarillo."

"Well, let's go there, anywhere but other than here," Josephina looked around.

"There's all these *borachos* giving me the eye. **Gross?**"

"*Pero querida*," Arturodo looked at his watch. "We'll miss the *escaramuzas*."

She looked at him, her eyes demanding.

He looked around, loosened his shirt collar and softened his tone. "But I don't want you to feel uncomfortable," he told her. "I can take you into Camarillo. We'll find somewhere for you."

So when are you gonna get my girls out of doodie duty
Smiles once in a while I can pat her in the front office

Arturo

had to

"So you gonna leave?" Evie asked ~~Cool!~~

"It looks like it," Arturdo said as he put his arm around Josephina. "We'll be back. Maybe we'll see you later."

As soon as Arturdo and his girlfriend left the bleachers, Raquel dove in.

"Oh. My. God," Raquel said. "That girl talks like a total val and ~~what a dog face.~~ *looks like*"

"Totally," Evie agreed.

"Actually, she's got more of a horse face," Raquel said. "What's her name again? Horsa-phina?"

Ana almost choked, laughing. "Arturdo and Horsa-phina! Perfect! A match made in heaven."

"More like manure," Evie laughed.

"And how whipped is your boss?" Raquel said. "My mack is dry, ay, ay."

"Blah, he probably just doesn't wanna argue with her. She can be pretty high maintainance." Ana sipped her soda. "Or maybe," she ~~crammed some kernel corn~~ *crushed some kernel corn* into ~~her mouth.~~ "He's like Mr. Super Sweet Boyfriend. *w/ her.*"

"Please," Raquel said. "No guy is *that* sweet."

"Alex is," Evie said.

"Oh, yeah?" Raquel looked at her. *questioning* "And where is Prince Charming now? He's probably partying in S.D. with some surf honeys as we speak."

Evie didn't even bother to respond. She knew what Raquel had said was far from the truth. She watched Arturdo and Horsa-phina walk from the grand stand arena and towards the exit. He took off his suede jacket and covered Josephina's shoulders with it and rubbed her back slightly. It was then that Evie couldn't help but feel a twinge of

envy. She couldn't remember the last time Alex had been so chivalrous with her or the last time she and he had actually gone on a date. Yeah, they had surfed all the time and sometimes they'd split pancakes at Pete's Breakfast House or a burrito at La Gloria, but those weren't really dates. And now with her volunteer duties, she wasn't even able to do those simple things with him. ^{And} it wasn't like he was making any effort to keep up any of the romance he used to initiate.

But twenty minutes in the show, Evie was already beginning to feel bored. She really didn't know what to expect from a *charreada*, but Dee Dee had made it sound so different what regular rodeos, but so far, it was just like any other episode of PBR, full of bullriders, clowns and drama.

Soon the the arena was cleared and the announcer introduced a new rider. She was a young girl rode who rode out on a dark gray horse, actually one that looked like Willow, the Shoshone in stable 8. The girl was dressed in a cream colored Victorian style dress, complete with a high neckline secured with buttons, billowy sleeves and a long full skirt that had layers upon layers of ruffles. A bright red sash was tied around her fitted waist and her long dark hair was weaved with a red ribbon into one long French braid. The girl rode out into the center of the arena, side saddle, gently waving to the crowd.

"She looks really pretty," Evie said.

"Yeah," Raquel stuffed some churritos in her mouth. "Her outfit's pretty cool."

Evie watched the girl elegantly trot out to the center of ring tapped the side of her horse with a black leather riding crop. The horse instantly bowed his head and neck while

his front legs bowed in an actual courtesy. This, of course, garnered even more of a tremendous applause from the **adoring** crowd.

"Ha!" Ana said, ^{gave up} sipping her soda. "Can you imagine doing that with one of our horses? At the reserve?"

"Not," Evie smirked.

Catalina then hoisted herself up and placed her feet directly on the saddle, while *still* on her horse.

"What is she gonna do?" Evie asked.

"Have no idea," Raquel sounded bored as she swirled the ice in her cup. With the booze dwindling and no more men in the ringside, it was so not her scene. ^{can he go already?} *wait*

Catalina then unclipped a small coil of white rope from the side of her waist and slowly started swinging the the rope to her side and then, creating a lasso, spinned it over her head. She spun the lasso around and around, over her and her horse, as he picked up a trot around the ring.

^{Ana} "Whoa, check it out, Eves," Raquel nudged Evie. "It's like she's surfing, but on a horse."

Evie *was* checking it out. She had never seen anything like this in her life and the crowd was completely, totally *encantada* with Catalina.

But within a matter of seconds the horse seemed to have a mind of his own and charged towards the other end of the arena in lightening flash speed. Maybe too much speed? How was this girl, this ^{who was mad} ~~young~~ girl, going to stop a charging horse that was headed straight for a concrete wall?

her final

“Whoa, she’s going a little too fast there,” Ana said as she took a swig of her Jack and coke. “If she doesn’t slow down, she’s gonna smack head on.”

Ana was right. The girl was clearly losing control of her horse. He was leading her right into the **concrete barrier**. Evie looked around the bleachers, but nobody else seemed to notice or even care. Flags waved, the drums rolled, people cheered. Was everyone insane?

“Oh my God,” Evie clenched Ana’s arm as she watched.

The girl was now a few yards, then a few feet and then before anyone knew it, *BAM!* She pulled tightly on the black leather reins and her speeding horse halted to a complete and sudden stop, seemingly inches from the thick concrete barrier.

The crowd went crazy! They thumped their feet on the floor of the metal bleachers and cheered even louder.

Evie exhaled. She couldn’t believe what she had just witnessed.

“Let’s give a big hand to Catalina! La Charrita bonita!” The announcer roared into the microphone. “Catalina del El Monte! Sixteen years old and rides like a pro!”

Sixteen years old? Did Evie hear right?

“Did he say she was sixteen?” Evie asked Ana.

“Uh, huh,” Ana answered.

It was from that moment on that Evie Gomez, very much like the crowd, was totally encantada and there was nothing more in her so flawed life that she wanted more and was to become a full fledged, full time, fashionably dressed...*charrita*.

Chapter 8

"You should have seen her, Lindsay," Evie went on as she and Lindsay headed out to the drive-way. *for a driving lesson* "She was like my age and was riding this horse. Oh, man, I'm thinking I gotta get a horse!"

"Uh, huh," Lindsay said. She had grown weary of Evie sudden ~~new~~ *channels* interests that changed like the TV remote. *(* She was one of the first people, and most likely because she was the only one who would tidy up Evie's room, to mention how much dust Evie's long board had collected. *)*

Evie took the keys from Lindsay and got into the driver's seat of her mother's Saab.

"Now," Lindsay fastened her seatbelt. "What's the first thing you do?"

"Uh," Evie reached for the radio *'s* dial. "Make sure I got some tasty tunes on?"

Lindsay *tapped* ~~slapped~~ her hand.

"I know, I know," Evie teased as she checked her rearview mirror and side mirror.

"I make sure all my mirrors are adjusted correctly to ~~my height~~." *for my vision*

"Correcto," Lindsay said.

Evie backed out onto Camino Real.

"Evie," Lindsay looked over and saw Evie's left leg folded and casually leaning against the driver's door. "Keep both feet flat on the ground."

"But I'm ~~more comfy like this~~," Evie said. "I can drive like this." *It's comfy*

"Evie, you're practicing to get your license," Lindsay pointed out. "You cannot take your test ~~driving~~ with your leg up like that. You have to learn that now." *)*

"Vamos a tener buen tiempo!"

"It's sorta like side saddle," Evie said as she re-positioned her left leg to match her other one, flat on the car's floor. "Speaking of which," she started. "

"Yes, oh my God, Lindsay it was amazing," Evie said. "Have you ever been to one?"

Charro rider
a charreader?
"Of course," Lindsay said. "Keep your eyes on the road. *Evie,* No, of course, I've been to *charreadas*. We had ^Mall the time in Mexico. My cousins were escaramuzas. *11*

"What's that?"

~~"They were~~ team riders. A charrita is actually a cowgirl."

"Oh," Evie said. "Well, anyway, it was so incredible. I have never seen anything like that. How come you've never taken me?"

"Evie, how would I know to take you to anything that might interest you? You are so **finicky** with your taste. One day it's surfing, the other ^{day} it's horses. What are you going ^{do now?} to trade in your flip flops for *botas*?"

"I've *always* been into horses," Evie claimed. She looked down at her flojos. She wasn't about to trade them in for cowboy boots, just yet.

"Evie, let's concentrate on the driving. It's my day off, but I promised I'd come in this morning to help you. The sooner you learn to drive —." She stopped herself.

"The sooner what?" Evie asked.

("The sooner you get to drive."

("No, you were gonna say something else. Is it about my car? Are my parent's gonna get me car, ¹because I'm thinking I'd rather have a horse instead. I'm figuring with *boardly* stable, ~~rent~~ and feed and a professional teacher to show me how to do the tricks *S...?*"

("Suertes," Lindsay said. ¹¹ They are called suertes. *11*

I didn't want to tell you
“Listen, mi’ja,” Lindsay said. “I got the bill. For the dent on that guy’s car.”

Oh, Evie had forgotten
“How much was it?” Evie asked. It had been a while since she had thought of that

fateful afternoon.

Lindsay took a deep breath. “Twelve hundred.”

“Twelve *hundred?*” Evie looked over at Lindsay, taking her foot off the gas. “As in dollars? Wait, no, pesos, right? You’re kidding.” *me?*

“Evelina,” Lindsay leaned over and took a slight hold of the steering wheel.

“Keep your eyes on the road.”

“Twelve hundred?” Evie repeated. “I thought you had this so called great contract. What happened to your brother in law who worked at Tony’s?”

“He does work at Tony’s and this is a good price. Believe me. Anywhere else that man would have taken his car would have cost more. *Mucho mas.*”

Evie heart sunk. She wasn’t planning on having to pay so much for a stupid minor little ding. She calculated all the past birthday ~~cash~~ *checks* gifts she had received from Grandma Pama and they were usually between ~~five~~ *one* hundred and ~~one time she got grand~~ *a five hund*. Chump change when you considered what she needed now. Maybe, and just maybe, Grandma Pama would do that old one hundred bucks for every year ~~(surprise)~~ and give Evie, perhaps, sixteen hundred? ~~(That would leave her to “splurge” with the left over three hundred. Big whoop dee doo.)~~

“Don’t worry Lindsay,” Evie said. “I’ll pay you back. I know that’s a lot of money to you.”

"Mande?" Lindsay looked over at Evie and frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing," Evie said quickly. "I mean, it's just a lot of money."

"Turn here," Lindsay pointed to ^{call} Avenida Boca Larga and ~~looked over her shoulder~~. "Evelina, remember to use your signal *every* time you need to make a turn or get into another lane. Give the other driver enough time to let them know what you plan to do."

"Why?" Evie asked. "So they can speed up and block me?"

The car jumped forward. "And you don't need to hit the brake all the time. Keep both hands on the steering wheel."

"Oh, I'm never gonna get this! ^{Frei viel.} Not good enough to get a driver's license by my birthday."

"You can get your license anytime," Lindsay said. "You don't have to get it by your birthday."

"If I wanna drive away from my birthday party in my new car, I do," Evie said.

^{so you think} "Mande?" Lindsay looked at her. "You're getting a car for your birthday?"

"Oh, don't tell me you don't know anything about it," Evie said. "But between me and you, Linds, I'm ~~thinking I might ask for my own horse, a ()~~."

"Evelina, mi'ja don't...." Lindsay said. The car stalled.

"Oh, man. I don't get it."

"You are really doing better. Much better than when Sabrina was learning."

Evie suddenly sat up in her seat.

"Really?" She asked. "You taught Sabrina to drive and she sucked?"

"I did not say *that*," Lindsay frowned. "She was just very nervous and timid. You are more of a go-getter."

"Really?" Evie suddenly felt gleeful.

Lindsay shook her head and looked out the window. "Ay, I don't know what's going to happen to Sabrina. She is not getting any better."

"My mom said it's just a matter of time," Evie said. "She's just depressed."

"I don't know, Evelina. I think your sister **is sick**. She doesn't eat and she just sleeps all the time. ~~suggesting "spiritual remedies" from Mexico~~

Lindsay looked at Evie. "Just know, ^Eit's a sensitive time and you should try to be extra nice and helpful..

It's obvious that thinking "good thoughts" and practicing "good ol' fashioned pilates" isn't going to cut it for Sabrina.

The car.

Well, Evie thought, if she doesn't get her license, she could always ride a horse to school.

Chapter 10

The following week at school Evie couldn't think of anything but Catalina de ~~Bakersfield~~ (E1 Monte) that she had seen perform at the charreada.

"You should have seen her, Alex," Evie went on.

as they drove ~~home~~ to the reserve. "She was standing on top of the horse and doing these rope tricks. It was amazing. It was like she was surfing, but on a horse, instead of a board."

"So I don't get why you didn't come to Baja with us if you were out drinking it up at some rodeo."

"I wasn't drinking it up," Evie said. "That was Raquel and Ana's **damage**. And you know I had to go just get to get credit. It wasn't like I wanted to go, but Arturdo had the tickets and it actually turned out to be really cool."

"Well, I'm glad it turned out okay," Alex said. "I just sorta felt like the odd man out with Bien and Aya."

"Aya went?" Evie asked.

"Uh, huh," Alex said. "She's really cool. Like one of the guys."

"Yeah, so you said," Evie (). "I didn't know she was going."

"Neither did I, but because you didn't come I had the extra room in my truck and Bien asked if she could come along. Ah, man we grilled corn ^{on the} and she made this really good sauce for them."

"Yeah, cool. Hey, maybe we can go get grilled corn sometime. They have them at charreadas."

"Uh, yeah," Alex said. "Why not?"

"Really? Like soon? You'd wanna go?"

"Yeah, Just let me know." it's really you who has the strict schedule.

They pull up at the reserve.

She was immediately put to work with Ana and because there was so much and two of the senior volunteers, Boyce and Gil had called in sick, Arturdo pitched in.

“So, did you and Josephina have fun at the charreada?” Ana asked Arturdo

“Oh, yes,” Arturdo actually cracked a ~~slight~~ smile. “I love charreadas. Your friend was funny.

“She’s really Evie’s friend,” Ana said. “but she is,” *funny that is.*”

~~Evie didn’t say anything.~~ Evie looked at Ana questionably, but didn’t say anything. It wasn’t like Ana to be so conversational with Arturdo.

~~It was unlike Ana to be so interested in Arturo.~~

“Yeah,” Arturdo started. “They have charreadas all the time in Pico Rivera, but with studying and all my time here, I just never have the time to get out there.”

“My father is a charro.” Arturdo started. “So are my brothers.”

“They do all those tricks?” Ana asked.

“They aren’t called tricks,” ~~Arturdo~~ *Evie* said. *—sweeps on look at you* “They’re (). You know, Mexican charros, they were the first cowboys. Not that many people know that.”

“Really?” Ana continued to express interest. “That is so cool. How come you aren’t one? I mean, you totally could be one. You know so much about horses.”

“It’s not really my thing,” Arturdo admitted. “I love horses, but I just didn’t follow that tradition. Besides, my whole family is still back in Colorado and they all practice and perform together.”

“You came out to California by yourself?” Evie finally joined their conversation.

“Yeah,” Arturdo said. “I really wanted to go to **Thatcher.**”

“And you left your whole family? And all your friends?”

“Whoa,” Arturdo held his hand up and faked protest. “I didn’t know I was getting an in depth interview. Is this part of your extra credit?”

“No, I’m just wondering.” Evie ^{said with} ~~()~~ ^{ed} **with embarrassment.** “But come on, don’t they have horses in Denver?”

She couldn’t help but feel a bit curious. Arturdo was a senior at Thatcher and only a few years older than Ana and herself. **She couldn’t believe that someone would move half way across the country at such a young age** by themselves. She loved to surf, but she couldn’t imagine moving to, say, Hawaii, just to be closer to some choice waves.

“Of course,” Arturdo **furrowed his brow.** “But Thatcher is one of the best equine schools in the country and if I want to get into **Cal Poly and study in their veterinary school,** I’m gonna need a **high school that can give me the best transfer. And,**” he **hesitated.** “I wanted to do something different. **I guess I sorta wanted to prove that I could do something on my own.** My whole family, everyone is still in Colorado.

“And you don’t get lonely?” Evie pried.

Okay, now maybe she knew she was getting a bit nosey. Actually, she couldn’t imagine someone like Arturdo ever getting lonely. He was always busy, busy, busy, giving people orders, orders, orders.

“Nah, not really,” Arturdo ^{divided the feed between buckets} **(did something)** “I have all my friends at school and everyone here at the reserve and, of course, there’s Josephina.”

“Of course,” Evie nodded. She had forgotten about the girlfriend, *his* girlfriend.

“Does she go to Thatcher, too?”

“No, she goes to **Santa Paula**,” Arturo said. “But I met her here, through the reserve.”

“She’s really pretty,” Evie caught ~~herself~~^{ed} blurting out. She couldn’t believe she would say such a thing. She didn’t think Horse-aphina wasn’t cute at all.

~~suitably tagging~~

“Yeah,” Arturodo nodded in agreement. “Thanks.”

Ana looked at Evie with a knowing smirk on her face. She then turned to Arturodo. “Did you ever find a bathroom for her?”

“Uh?” He asked.

“A bathroom,” Ana repeated. “Remember she needed one? At the *charreada*?”

“Oh, I actually ended up taking her home,” Arturodo said. “She was really tired, and I had to some homework to catch up on, anyway. Besides, Josephina’s really not into horses and rodeos and stuff like that.”

“What?” Evie was surprised. “But what about Princesa? That makes no sense.”

“Yeah, she *has* a horse, but that doesn’t mean she really wants, or wanted one,” Arturodo admitted. “She doesn’t take care of Princesa, or even ride her. She just comes by now and then to visit her. People don’t realize how much work it is to own a horse, with the upkeep and the feed, it’s also really expensive (But Josephina’s family has money, so it isn’t an issue with her.)”

“Well, it was the first time I had ever been to charreada,” Ana confessed. “It was really fun. Thanks for asking us.”

“Well, thanks for buying a ticket. It all goes to a good cause. A small percentage help rehabilitate injured performance horses. If they don’t heal, they eventually get killed.”

Evie
“What? Are you serious?”

“Oh, yeah,” Arturo said. “You didn’t know that? People think what use are performance horses if they aren’t out making money?”

Evie thought about this. She really had idea what happened to the horses she was taking care of. She watched Arturo.

But the performers, they don’t think that, right?

More about wanted to be a rider

You know,” Arturo started **as he ()**. “I think it’s really cool that you guys picked the reserve for your volunteer work.”

“Oh, yeah?” Evie asked. “Why?”

“Because being so close to the coast,” he explained, “we don’t get that many other students who want to work here. They always want to volunteer for beach organizations just so they can just be at the beach. It’s not like they really care about other things, they forget that there is this **whole other world 20 minutes inland. We always get stuck with senior citizens, not that there is anything wrong with that, but it’s just they are bit slower, you know what I mean?**”

“Oh, I totally care,” Evie found herself saying. “And as far as horses, I’ve always been into them. I mean, even as a little kid I used to come up here riding at *in Oakview* **()**, all the time.”

Okay, so it was only one time with Dee Dee and Raquel, but he didn't need to know specifics.

"Yeah," Evie continued. "And I really *think* it would be cool to have my horse. I mean, I don't think I could ever have one because where I live, but I don't know. I think it would nice be take care of one, like what you do."

Arturdo looked at Evie and smiled. "That is so cool."

And maybe she had never noticed before or maybe because she didn't care to notice, but Arturo had one of the nicest smiles. Not a "now face the camera" kind smile you often find in California, or a (), but a really warm "I like how you think" kind of smile and it was directed right at *her*. Evie felt a bit taken by it. ~~She usually felt judged,~~ by her parents, teachers and even some of her friends, by what she actually achieved, not for how she *thought*. Sometimes Evie had the best intentions to do something, but didn't always act upon them. It was so nice to have someone respect just what her intentions might be. She smiled back and realized it might be time to take the 'd' out of Arturo's name.

"Ar-turro!"

It was Josephina calling out for Arturo.

"We're over here," Arturo called out over his shoulder. "In ()'s stable."

Josephina showed up in a ~~g~~halter dress and two toned knee high leather and suede **boots**. Her hands on her hips matched the attitude she was about to unleash.

"Are you almost done?" she asked Arturo. Her annoyed tone was less Valley-esque and more demanding. "I thought you made the reservations? At seven?"

*Freckles
Blacks*

“Uh, *hello?*” Arturo teased as he continued to brush *dried feed*.

“Arturo,” Josephina looked at her watch. “It’s time to go,” She grinded her boot heel into the gravel. “I don’t want to be late. If we don’t get Mayru, we might as well not go at all. ”

“Josephina.” Arturo started to put away the *feed*. “We’ll make it. I’m the one who made the reservations, remember? And we’re only 25 minutes away.”

Evie wondered if Ana felt as third wheel as much as she did, being in the middle of this lover’s disagreement. **She stayed silent as Arturo and Horsaphina debated over if they would get to this ‘Mayru’ on time.**

“But I guess Evie and Ana can take over,” Arturo suggested as he looked at Evie. “You don’t mind, do you?”

“Uh, no,” Evie said. “I don’t mind.”

What could she really say? He was the boss, sorta.

“Cool,” Arturo turned back to Josephina. “I’ve got my shirt in my truck. Let me go change really quick.”

“Okay, okay,” Josephina **checked the time on her cell phone**. “But do it quick.”

Did all things bitchy have first names that end in ‘A’? What a minute, Evie thought, her given name, Evelina. Never mind.

“I hope I didn’t interrupt your joke,” Josephina looked at Ana and Evie.

“Huh?” Evie asked. “What do you mean?”

“When I walked up,” Josephina started. “You guys were all laughing? It seems every time you two are with Arturo, I seem to be barging in on some joke or something.”

“No, we were just being stupid,” Evie felt awkward. The last thing she wanted was Horsaphina disliking her and then complaining to Arturo. She looked over Horsaphina and thought of instant damage control. “You look really nice.”

“Oh, yeah,” Horsaphina agreed as she smoothed out her ~~hair~~ and adjusted her. *ready mix suit.*
“Arturo’s taking me to Koi,” *hair*

“Koi?” Evie asked. She had no idea what Koi was. Was it a club? A lingerie boutique as in *Coy*? Maybe it was a mispronounced Native American name for another horse reserve?

“The Teppan Grill?” Josephina explained when she **noticed** Evie’s **confused** expression. “They seat you in groups of twelve and if we’re late? We have to sit at another table and get a regular chef. I like Mayru. He’s the owner?”

“Oh, right.” Evie nodded.

Josephina looked around. “Don’t you guys ever get tired of working here?”

“Nuh uh,” Evie lied. “Not really.”

“Not me,” Ana ~~echoed~~.

“Well, I would,” Horsaphina stated. “I don’t get it. Arturo spends so much time here. But then again, you two *have* to be here? Right?”

“Not really. We’re volunteers,” Evie pointed out. “I mean, I could have picked any organization for work.”

“Hmm - mmm,” Josephina wasn’t convinced. “That’s not what Arturo told me.”

“What are you talking about?” Evie asked.

“He said that your school counselor called to ask if the reserve still had room for you? And they didn’t? Arturo had already made out the whole schedule for the year and

he's very organized that way. But when he told them no, your counselor? Went over his head and went to Lynn, the owner. And she okay'd it. I guess that's what money buys you?" *Don't you live in Higher Gates?*

"What?" Evie said. "I don't pay to work here. Is that what Arturo thinks?"

"Why wouldn't he?" Horsaphina then looked over at Ana. "How long have you? Known you were going to work here?"

"I had to sign up early," Ana admitted. "But it's different at New Path."

No wonder Arturo had been tough on her, Evie thought. There was some resentment, obviously. She suddenly felt badly. She hoped that Arturo didn't think....

When Arturo re-appeared Evie couldn't help but notice what a difference a nag makes. He had changed from the blue and green Pendleton to a grey button up shirt. His hair was slightly slicked back and she **noticed the slightest hint** of cologne, *(and)*. He actually smelled so good. Did he always wear cologne? Evie couldn't remember. She did remember that Alex used to wear cologne (**and**), at least, for the evenings when the Flojos would all go fancy party crashing or something. Evie sighed. But that was all *so* last semester, in a seemingly distant galaxy so far, far away.

"Arturo," Josephina scowled at his boots. "You cannot wear those to Koi. They have a dress code?"

"*Josephina*," She was obviously working his last nerve. "There is nothing wrong with my boots." He looked at her ~~shoes~~. "You're wearing boots."

feet

“Yes, but this are ~~0~~, not some **faux leather work boots** from ~~Gill~~^{Wilbur's} Western Wear.”

“Josephina, if you want me to change it’s only going to make us even more late. Is that what you want?”

~~But~~ Josephina just looked up at the sky and surrendered. “What *ever*?”

As soon as they left, Ana ~~spoke~~^{stated} up. “Wow, she was really riding you.”

“Yeah,” Evie agreed. “Seemed like it.”

~~But~~ “That was real smart of us, huh?” Ana smiled smugly to herself.

“Smart of us, what?” Evie asked.

“Kissing Arturo’s ass like that, pretending we were all into the rodeo and working here and stuff,” Ana said. “That stuff about you wanting your own horse was a special touch.”

“But I did like the charreada,” Evie insisted. “And yeah, I do want to get my own horse.”

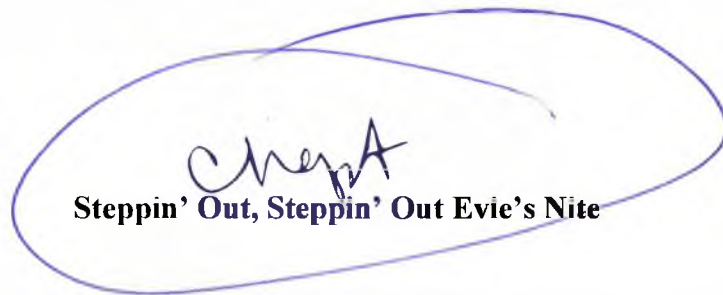
But Evie wasn’t really paying attention. She watched after Arturo and Horsaphina as they headed for his truck. Arturo held the door open as he waited for her to get in the passenger seat. He then went around the front of this truck and let himself in.

When Arturo’s truck finally drove off the reserve and was out of sight, Evie excused herself from Ana.

“You better be right back,” Ana warned her. “I ain’t gonna do this all alone, like last time.”

“No, I just gotta make a call,” Evie said as she went to get her backpack from the supply shed. She pulled out her cell phone and sped dialed Alex’s number. She immediately got his voice mail.

“Hey, Alex. It’s me,” Evie started. “Hey, I’m wondering... this coming weekend. Do you think we can go out? Like not surfing, but go out, *out*? Okay...” she didn’t know what else to add. “Just let me know.”



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

Sat. Nite. Cool. Smthin diff.

“So, no surfing this weekend?” He double checked one last time with ^{her} ~~Evie~~ on Friday afternoon as he was taking her to the reserve. “You sure ‘bout that?”

“I have to work all day tomorrow and then again on Sunday,” Evie reminded him. “I really have only Saturday evening free.”

“But we *could* do a twilight set,” Alex suggested. “After you’re done with your shift at the reserve we can head out to Sea Street. There’s supposed to be a **south swell** at ()”

"Alex," Evie said. "This is California. There will always be a **south** swell coming from somewhere. I wanna go out, *out*, remember? Do something different. You said it was no problem."

"You're right," Alex smiled as she pulled up to the main gate of the SCHR.
"Whatever you say, cutie."

And that Saturday night, Evie did feel quite cute, as she got ready for her date with Alex. She slipped on **her favorite Roxy halter**, *dress* **the one with a pattern of green and yellow swirls** and a three tiered **satiny** skirt she had ~~both~~ bought at Tilly's. She even made the **bold** decision against wearing flojos (*gasp*) and slipped on some borrowed espadrilles from Dee Dee. But as she laced the straps around her ankles, she was horrified to discover that her flojos had created a tan line on her feet. Two conspicuous *strap* ~~thong~~ lines *wear 24/7/365* *created a V* ~~streaked~~ between her big toe and middle toe *and* fanned out to the sides of her feet. It looked like she was wearing light beige flip flops or worse, had tattooed white ink on the tops of her feet.

Evie looked through her bathroom cabinet for a tube of foundation. She thought she could merely touch up her feet, but when she *finally* found her cover-up, she *discover* ~~noticed~~ right away what she was afraid of. The foundation, named Sunburst, ~~and a cream~~ that she used *had* ~~to apply regularly~~, was now, *two months into winter*, was too dark. Thanks to all the long hours at the reserve, yes, she *had lost* ~~was losing~~ her tan. Evie threw the tube *on the counter* in her bag. She needed a lighter foundation, a foundation for light skin, like for someone like... Sabrina.
Yes.

But when Evie went down the hall to Sabrina's room, she found the bedroom room closed, again. Since her return home, Sabrina's door was always shut which was odd. The Gomez's upstairs always appeared similar to the 'Fabulous Twice a Year' Barney's sale held at the Santa Monica airport hangar, in that **the area** appeared as one big, open door, changing room. Just as Evie was about to knock, she heard Sabrina, on the other side of the door. She was crying. To someone. On the phone. Evie caught her fist just in time.

"But it's *not* getting better," Sabrina sobbed. "My family is driving me crazy. I should have just stayed back at Stanford. At least my sisters would know what to do, what to say. Here, I'm surrounded by idiots."

Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. *What? Her sisters? Who?*

"No," Sabrina **struggled to catch her breath**. "She's my only sister, but she's such a little spoiled brat that I might as well not have a sister at all."

Whoa. Evie pulled back from the door. Was she hearing right? How could Sabrina say, even *think* such a thing? She didn't want her as a sister? No. She ^{*couldn't here*} didn't hear right. She leaned in closer to the bedroom door and strained to hear more.

"Evelina!"

Evie looked up and found Lindsay, in the middle of the hallway, holding a small box of tile samples.

"You do *not* sneak around, trying to listen in on other people's conversations."

Lindsay spat under her breath "You are being very rude. You're sister is talking to **Dr. Borego**. Leave her alone."

“Dr. Borego? You mean **Laura?**” Evie lowered her voice and she moved away from the bedroom door. **Dr. Leslie** Borego was a family friend and a therapist. “Why?”

“It is not my place to say. But just leave her alone during her session.”

Her session? Sabrina was having a therapy session? On the phone? Evie didn’t understand it. Why was she talking to a therapist?

“I have to come in your room,” Lindsay heaved the box to her left hip. “Your mother wants to see which tile she needs to order for your bathroom.”

“Now?” Evie asked. “But I’m getting ready for my date, with Alex.”

She never minded having Lindsay do things in her room while she was in it, but this particular night, Evie was looking forward to just blasting ~~music~~ *for Abandonel*, dabbling in make up and hair clips and hogging the closet mirrors all to herself. *w/*

Lindsay adjusted the box again. “Your mother wants to place the order first thing in the morning and I’m going to be leaving soon. We have to do it now.”

“Okay...” Evie started back down the hall to her bedroom. There was no way she was going to argue with Lindsay. And God forbid, she didn’t want to come across as a *spoiled brat*.

Oh, *hurtful*.

As she entered her room with Lindsay, Evie’s bedroom’s landline rang. She grabbed the receiver off the carpet.

“Hullo?” she asked.

“*Finally.*” It was Dee Dee. “*Que paso?* I called your cell and it went right to voice mail and you didn’t answer my text.”

“My cell’s charging,” Evie walked into her bathroom and past Lindsay who was lining up the tile samples on the counter for her mother to look over. She’d just have to settle for the dark foundation for her feet. She ^{gratched} got it out of her bag and moved out of Lindsay’s way. ^{off the counter}

“And then I’ve been calling the landline,” Dee Dee said. “And it just rings and rings. I didn’t even get the voicemail.”

“Sabrina’s been on the phone.” Evie was half listening as she squirted a glob of foundation on the ^{horn} ~~tops~~ her feet.

“What’s wrong?” Dee Dee could sense the deflated tone in Evie’s voice.

“Nothing,” Evie **tried to shake off the feeling.**

“So are you getting ready for your big date with Alejandro tonight?” Dee Dee asked. “Where are you two going?”

“Huh?” Evie smoothed the cream as evenly as she could along the tan line of each foot.

“I *said*, where are you two going tonight?”

“Dela,” Evie started. “Do you think I’m spoiled?”

“What?” Dee Dee asked. “Who said that? Alejandro?”

“No. Nobody.” Evie lowered her voice again and looked over at Lindsay who now standing back and looking over the tile samples **herself**. “Actually, I just overheard Sabrina on the phone and she told someone that I was spoiled. A spoiled *brat*, to be precise.”

“She *said* that?” Dee Dee asked. “I don’t know. I mean, I guess someone might think you were spoiled, because you do get a lot of stuff that you want.”

“Me?” Evie was thrown off by Dee Dee’s blunt answer. “That is so far from the truth. Who’s the one schlepping horse crap around? Who’s the one who may not have her **own birthday party?**”

“It’s really how you look at it,” Dee Dee said. “I mean, of course, you should get the things you want. You are totally worth it, but some people might think you are spoiled, but I’m surprised it would be Sabrina saying that. I mean, doesn’t she get all the things she wants?”

“And more,” Evie argued. “That girl gets the grades she wants, the car she wanted, accepted into the school she wanted. She gets everything her way. Like even now, her being home and everything, I totally have to walk on eggshells around her.”

“Ugh, I could *not* deal,” Dee Dee **groaned**. “That’s why I am *so* glad I’m an only child.”

“You and Raquel, both,” Evie held her feet up to observe **her work**. They looked a little too dark, but she figured it being evening, Alex would never notice.

“Can you imagine if Raquel had a sister?” Dee Dee asked. “A sister like Sabrina?”

“*Not,*” Evie laughed out loud. “It would be like Beauty and the Boozer, **no it would be Blaze and Blazer,**” Evie **laughed to herself**.

“I don’t get it,” Dee Dee said.”

“Blaze like bud and blazer like a preppy jacket, get it?”

“*I guess,* Dee Dee ~~enthusiasm dimmed~~ *didn't sound convinced*. “But anyway, don’t worry about Sabrina.

From what you tell me, she’s just upset over Roberto and bitter things are going to come out of her mouth for a while. I wouldn’t put so much **stock into** what she says.”

“Yeah, I guess,” Evie said. “She’s totally out of it anyway. She like a walking zombie around here, all she does is mope around and she stays in her pajamas till like four in the afternoon and when she finally changes out of them, it’s just to put a fresh pair on before getting back into bed.”

“Ew,” Dee Dee said. “That doesn’t sound like Sabrina at all. What’s wrong with her?”

“I have no idea, but she’s really bumming me out.” Evie got up from her bed and stood with her back towards the closet mirrors. She then quickly looked over her shoulder, a la red carpet *Teen People* pose. She had to check how she looked from behind. No VPL, check. No sightly back fat, check. No bac-...wait. She peered closer into the mirror and saw a small, but throbbing blaring, blemish, right below her left shoulder. ^{low} The deep red zit stood out against her skin. The curse of mid winter bacne! Evie squeezed more foundation onto her fingers and dabbed the offending violator.

~~Sabrina’s words stung something fierce.~~

“So, you never answered my question,” Dee Dee continued. “Where is Alex taking you?”

“I don’t know,” Evie confessed as she rechecked her back after touching up her her back, but now the foundation created a ^{looked} ~~unsightly~~ blotch that appeared like a birthmark. She decided to pull off her whole halter and give herself a thorough application of the foundation, but just as she pulled it off, her mother walked in her bedroom.

Mom, do you mind?” Evie held the phone between her chin and shoulder and covered her chest with her arms. “I’m changing.”

“Sorry, Evie.” Her mother could have cared less. “The door was open and I already knew that Lindsay was in here.” She brushed right past Evie. “**I wanna take a look at these tiles. I need to order them by tomorrow, if we want them () by your party.**” *talavera*

“My party?” Sound like someone was being optimistic.

“**If we have your party. You know your cousins () and tia () will come down and I’m getting the house prepared, just in case.**”

“Oh,” Evie kept her chest covered. She was less concerned about the open door policy and more worried about the incriminating ‘RxE’ inked near her left breast. Last semester, she, Dee Dee and Raquel were the recipients of the fine artistry from **La Ley Cee**, the famed tattoo artist of () who eschews the ‘over 18’ requirement and will ink anyone with enough of an idea and enough cash. **If Vicki Gomez ever saw that her youngest daughter had a tattoo, anywhere on her body, there would be no party, ever.**

She’d find another way to show off the Talavera tiled bathrooms in the house.

you “I have no idea where Alex made reservations,” Evie went back to talking to Dee Dee. “But afterwards, we’ll most likely take a walk around downtown or on the pier.”

Evie looked over at her mother and quickly threw back on her halter.

“*Que romantico*,” Dee Dee sighed enviously. “I can’t wait for Rocio to get here and then we can start doing things like that again.”

“When does he come?” Evie gave her shoulders and back a liberal dusting of bronzer.

"In about a week and then he'll be here for two weeks, but he's staying a few days longer for your party. *Mira*," Dee Dee changed the subject. "You should have Alex take you to that new seafood place in the Channel Islands harbor. I went there with my dad and Graciela and it was **sheer swank**. The shrimp scampi was so good. I haven't had scampi like that since I was in Veracruz. *W/ Rocio*

"Actually," Evie hoped to sound nonchalant. "We might go to Koi."

"Koi?" Dee Dee sounded surprised. "*Really?*"

"Yeah," Evie looked at her back in the mirror again. She added a bronzer to *that* promised to provide a look of 'stunning sun' but she still ~~looked~~ *appeared* medium beige. She pulled out **her make-up brush** and gave back, as well as her neck, shoulders and face, a heavier dusting of bronze powder. "Why wouldn't we go to Koi?"

"I don't know," Dee Dee said. "It's just sorta pricey, that's all."

"Alex has money," Evie couldn't help but feel a little defensive. Dee Dee always went on and on about how well to do Rocio and his family were and how he was able buy her this **(trinket SP)** or take her to **that restaurant (SP)**. It was beginning to bug, big time.

"Of course. Why not?" Dee Dee apparently got the hint. "So, did you go to MK?"

"Totally," Evie looked at her finger nails, which were painted with the sheerest hint of **pink**. "I got a hand job by **Jonathon**, just like you recommended."

"*Evie*," Her mother, as well as Lindsay, looked over from the bathroom. "*Who* are you talking to?"

"Dee Dee," Evie said calmly. "And I'm talking about the *manicure* I got at Michael Kelley. They call them hand jobs, just in case you and Linds were eavesdropping and misunderstood me, *mother*."

"We weren't eavesdropping," Her mother glanced over at Evie's nails.

But they do work

"Evie!" It was now her father calling. "Alex is here."

"Hey," Evie said to Dee Dee as she gave herself a third and final bronze dusting.

"Romeo is here, *I* gotta go."

"Have fun," Dee Dee said. "And don't do anything I wouldn't do."

Andale mes

Evie grabbed her **bag** *+*

"Isn't it a little cold for a halter?" her mother asked.

as she was leaving enough that

True, it was ~~the end of January~~ *early Feb*, but with the weather still balmy she could afford

to flash a little skin. Besides, Alex had called her cutie and tonight she wanted to certify it.

"No, I'm ~~totally~~ *fine*." She modeled her **femmy** ~~fit~~ *offenseble* for her mother and Lindsay.

"How do I look?"

"Uh," Her mother looked over her. "Very *tan*."

"Good," Evie said **smugly** as she applied some gloss to her lips. There was no way her mother's judgment would kill her buzz. She looked cute, she smelled cute and yes, Alex was right. She was a cutie. As she headed downstairs, Evie felt fortunate (*not* spoiled) that she lived in a two story home. There is nothing more *O.C.* than descending down a staircase to the arms of a waiting surfer boy.

But the minute she saw Alex at the bottom of the stairs, her fantasy went from *O.C.* to *O. U. Gotta to be Shittin' Me*. Yes, Alex was waiting for her in the foyer, but not wearing anything remotely **Saturday Night Hottie**. He was in his usual tattered camouflage cut-offs, the ones cut a little below his knees and he was wearing his plastic ~~flip~~ ^{that} flip flops, the 'bin specials' Evie knew too well. He had obviously not taken the **planning** of their date as seriously as she had. He still had sand around his ankles and **the stink of** medicinal sun block emulated from him. Evie guessed that he must have still gone to Sea Street to catch that oh so important late afternoon south swell.

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

"Yeah," she immediately felt foolish. He didn't say she looked nice, just dressed up. Was that supposed to be a compliment? And why did he look so confused?

"Yeah, Evie," her father said. "You do look dressed up."

Okay, maybe 'dressed up' was **male speak** for **cute**?

"So, where are you two going?" her father asked Alex.

"I dunno," Alex said in a tone that was a little too laid-back for Evie. "I've been at the beach all day. I'm pretty wiped out." Alex tilted his neck side to side to prove his point. "I think we'll just take it easy." He looked at Evie. "Right Evie?"

Evie **managed** a weak smile, but said nothing. He could *not* be serious.

"Well, have fun you two," Evie's father walked them to the front door. "And Evie, don't forget your curfew."

Do you think - ... ?

As Evie walked alongside Alex towards his truck, she saw his ^{long} short board in the truck's flatbed – evidence that he *had* just come from the beach, like she had guessed. She felt her chest filled up with heavy disappointment. She looked over at Alex.

“What?” he looked back at her and smiled.

“Nothing.” Evie looked away and felt slightly conflicted. Sometimes Alex would look at her and his dark eyes would just penetrate hers, making her feel the way she felt at Sea Street, the morning he had given her the abalone necklace. She suddenly felt guilty. Alex ^{was} really was a sweet boyfriend and maybe she *was* a spoiled brat. Just because he was dressed down didn't mean he hadn't put any thought into arranging a little something special. The evening was just beginning. Maybe he played it off with her dad. What, was he actually going to go into detail with her father about what he wanted to do with Evie?

 “Well, first, Mr. Gomez, I'm going to take Evie, your youngest daughter, out to a very romantic, very expensive restaurant, where I will request the most secluded table in the whole house, just for the two of us. Then I am going to drive her out to The Shores, where we will stroll out to the most secluded area in the sand dunes and I will spread out a blanket just for the two of us. Then Evie will cuddle up next to me as I crack open a bottle of Vueve (her favorite) and pour it into two glass flutes which, of course, that I brought with me, because I had been planning this whole evening **for a whole week**. Then I will make a toast to our evening right before I will pull out a book of poems that I have carefully chosen for –”

A long slow whistle interrupted the **bodice ripping scene** in Evie's head. The whistle came from the front of Alex's truck. She squint^{ed} her eyes in the darkness and slowly made out the glow of a cigarette in the passenger seat of cab. It was Mondo. She could *not* believe what she was seeing.

"Why is *Mondo* with you?" Evie asked Alex ~~as she~~ struggled to keep her voice to a whisper

"You wanted to do something different," Alex answered earnestly. "And it's just been a while since we all hung out together and you were saying that --."

"*What?*" Evie **forced herself** to maintain her composure. "Are you serious?"

"Uh, yeah," Alex sounded confused. "Why?"

"I *said*," Evie started. "That it had been a while since you and *I* have hung out, spent time *together*. I wanted to go out, *out*, remember?"

"Evie," Alex sounded even more confused. "What exactly does going "out, *out* mean?"

"Just *forget* it." Evie was quickly losing her patience with Alex.

P

Mondo got out of the front cab just as they got to the truck

"Hey, G," he looked Evie over and making her feel just a slight(). "Look at you all gussied up." He pulled the passenger seat forward so he could get in the back of the truck's cab. "So you ready to give the horse gig a break and just chill with Alex and me tonight?"

Alex and me? Grrrr. Evie couldn't help but feel **hot with anger**. What *was* Alex thinking, bringing Mondo along at their date?

piece of meat

“Hey, Evie, check it out,” Mondo took off the white ^{cap}visor he was wearing. He ran his hand over a freshly shorn scalp. “Chop job. I bit your style, from last semester.”

Last year, Evie had cut her own hair herself. ^{dyed it like}She was now gratefully relieved that it had finally grown back to the long brown mane ~~that she felt almost () with~~. Mondo’s hair, however, was newly buzzed and ~~dyed~~ ^{dyed} a yellowish blond.

“Check out the back,” he turned his head to show off a separate dye job, a large ~~0~~ question mark in deep jet black, smack center on the back of his head.

“Evie covered her mouth **to keep from laughing**. “Why? Would you have a question mark on the back of your head? What, are you trying to create some new batman character?”

“Check it out. It stands for ‘What do you need?’” He ran his hand across the back of his head. ^{again}“My cousin just got back from Amsterdam and he told me that, like, all the cafes have little areas with designated question mark signs. Like, you can get *anything* you want there. ^{know what I mean?}Cool, huh?”

“Yeah,” Evie fastened her seat belt. “I guess.”

“So, what’s up for this evening?” [>]Alex got into his truck.

Evie decided to stick to her guns. She was going to get her fancy dinner at Koi whether it killed her, or, more appropriately, **killed** Mondo’s date with Alex

“Actually,” Evie feigned a smile. “I was thinking we go get sushi.”

“Sushi?” Mondo smirked. “Uh, no thanks,” He held his nose and **dropped the sides of his mouth**. “I had sushi last night, if you know what I mean.” He looked at Alex. The look in his eyes said everything.

You have got to be kidding.

“Mondo,” Alex reprimanded him as he started his truck“Come on, there’s a lady present.”

“Yeah,” Mondo **looked out to the side of the window.** “That’s what *I* thought. Last night.”

Alex started to pull out of the drive way.. “So, you want sushi, Evie?”

Not after Mondo’s stupid little one liner.

“You know,” Mondo chimed in. “I could actually go for some seafood. We should go to Otani’s. They got kick ass tempura.”

“Actually,” Evie tried to lure Alex from siding with Mondo. “I was thinking of Koi.”

“Koi?” Mondo frowned as he leaned forward, between Evie and Alex. “You mean that fancy ass place that took over where the Elephant Bar used to be?”

“Yeah,” Evie said.

“Nah,” Mondo said. “We don’t wanna do Koi. It’s all SUV scum. We gotta go to Otani’s.” He leaned back in his seat and **looked at Alex in the rearview mirror.** “Dude, there’s a waitress with a rack *this big.*” He made a gesture over his chest as though he was balancing two imaginary **cannon balls.**

Alex couldn’t help but chuckle a bit as he head out of the driveway.

Evie shot him a look. *“Alex.”*

“Oh, I’m sorry, sweetie.” Alex straightened his smile and tapped her leg. ““Look, we’ll go to Koi. Whatever you want.”

“Whatever *she* wants?” Mondo looked at Alex and then at Evie. “Talk about spoiled milk.”

Spoiled? Evie crossed her arms over her chest.

Was it just Evie or was Mondo truly saying the most inappropriate things so far?



The wait list at Koi was over an hour.

“We can’t seat you any sooner without a reservation,” the **host** told the three of them. “And,” he looked over Alex and Mondo’s feet. “We have a dress code. No flip flops.”

“You gotta be kidding,” Mondo said. “Dude, this is friggin’ South Cali, everyone wears flip flops.”

“Not doing dinner time,” the host held his ground. He was young, most likely a college student. What other long haired blonde ^{guy} would subject themselves to eyeliner and a ^{Kimono} () unless he needed to pay for a college tuition?

Evie looked around the restaurant. There ^{was a} were ~~two~~ stone brick fireplaces outside in the patio. Water trickled from bamboo chutes from the ~~() wall~~ ⁺ into a ~~trough shaped~~ pond filled with koi fish. She thought how romantic it would be to snuggle with Alex on one of the ~~() chairs~~ ^{wicker couches}. It was a full moon. It ~~was~~ ^{And} large with hues of soft yellow, pink and beige. ~~(There wasn’t the so-called SUV scum as Mondo had declared, mostly Cal State Channel Island and VC college students.)~~ “Why don’t we just wait?” She asked. “We can get some appetizers. An hour will go by fast.”

“Dude,” Mondo pulled Alex aside. “That monkey totally dissed us. I ain’t gonna shoot my wad here.” He was already heading back towards the large wooden doors, his

fists deep in the pockets of his baggy corduroys. It was obvious that he had already made a decision for all three of them, killing all notions of romance Evie had fantasied cultivating.

“Sushi is sushi,” Alex apologetically shrugged his shoulders to Evie. “We can come here another time, Eves. Promise.”

At Otani's, Alex sat between Evie and Mondo at the counter. It was a short counter with aged, chipped formica and a messy pile of ~~ben~~^{sloppy} stained menus ~~at the end~~^{plastic on one}. The diners were far from SUV scum, but more local ~~and~~^{at Otani's} and a few longshoremen. Otanis was cheap eating and one could fill up ~~there~~^{surfer}, that is, if you ~~at least~~^{at least} had cash. Some cash. Otanis did not take credit cards and Alex had forgotten his ~~credit~~ card and had only had four bucks on him. The three of them shared one (1) tempura shrimp boat with a complimentary order of sticky white rice ~~and~~ it actually turned out to be a good thing that Mondo did tag along. It allowed Evie to order a **diet soda**.

As they were finishing up their meal Mondo looked past Alex and eyed Evie's shoulders as if he was seeing them for the first time.

“What's up with your skin, Eves?” he asked.

Evie **rubbed** her shoulders. “I always get goose bumps when it gets a little cold.”

“No,” Mondo **looked her over**. “It looks like you got dirt or something smudged on them.” He reached over, ~~completely~~ across Alex, to brush what he thought was dirt on Evie's skin.

“It's not dirt, Mondo,” she **pulled away**. “It's bronzer.”

“Bronzer?” Mondo looked confused. “For what?”

“Never mind, *Mondo*.” Evie hugged her arms across her chest and placed her hands on opposite shoulders. It was cold in Otani’s and she remembered seeing a jacket in Alex’s truck.

“Alex,” she started. “Don’t you have a jacket in your truck? I thought I saw one.”

“Uh, huh,” Alex played with the ice in Styrofoam cup with his straw. “I thought I’d need it but I’m okay.”

“Do you mind if I wear it?” Evie asked.

“Nuh uh,” he said as put his hand in his pant’s pocket and pulled out his car keys.

“But try not to get all that make up on it.”

“Oh,” Evie didn’t take the keys. “Never mind.”

“Dude,” Mondo nudged Alex to look over at group of women who had just entered Otanis. “We’re talking double Ds at 3 o’clock. *Your* 3 o’clock.”

“Mondo,” Evie waved her hand to cut the line of his cigarette smoke. “Can you move your cigarette to the other side of you? The smoke is hitting me right in my face.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Mondo tapped his cigarette carelessly on the edge of his plate.

He then glanced over at Evie’s paper plate. “Hey, you ate more than your fair share.”

“Huh?” Evie asked.

“Look,” Mondo counted the shrimp tails on her plate with the end of his chop stick. “Alex and I only have three tails each, but you’ve got, like, five.”

“Mondo,” Evie couldn’t believe what he was suggesting. She looked down on her plaste. “It’s just batter.”

“No, it ain’t.” Mondo pressed down on the **tails in question** with his chopstick.

“What, you want me to burp them back up?” Evie asked. **Could the tension between her and Mondo get any fiercer?** She pushed her paper plate away from him. “Stop it.”

“So,” Alex stretched back, oblivious how **annoying** Mondo was to Evie. “What’s up for the rest of the evening?”

Evie hoped that she didn’t him correctly. Hadn’t he planned *anything*?

“Check it out, a buddy of mine was telling me about a party tonight,” Mondo said. “Over on Hemlock.” He finally stopped **calculating** the shrimp tails on everyone’s individual plate. “Should be pretty K.B.”

“But what about my board?” Alex rubbed the space between his eyes and yawned. “I don’t wanna leave it out at some party.”

“Yeah, I’m not really in the mood for a party,” Evie said as her stomach growled. “But maybe, if you really want to go, we could drop you off.” She glanced over at Alex’s **Nixon**. It was only 10 pm. She still had a good two and a half hours before she had to be home. She and Alex could still have *some* time to themselves.

“*We*?” Mondo looked at Evie. “When did you start sharing Alex’s pink slip? You don’t even drive.”

“I know,” Evie said. “I’m just saying that we might do something else.”

Why was Alex not backing her up?

“But if you don’t wanna go to a party,” Alex asked her. “What do you wanna do?”

“I don’t know,” Evie hated being put in the position of activities director. “I thought we could go to the pier, walk around. It’s a full moon tonight.”

“Whoa,” Mondo pressed two fingers on the side of his neck. “I hope my **pacemaker** can keep up with this excitement.” He looked at Alex. “Dude, come on, let’s go check out the **party**. Hey, you know who gonna be there?”

“Who?” Alex asked.

“Our boy, Jose.”

The minute Evie heard the name Jose, her stomach went from empty to numb.

“I haven’t seen that clown in **weeks**,” Alex chewed lazily on the end of his plastic straw. “What’s he been up to?”

“Maintaining,”  **Mondo finally ~~put out his cigarette~~**. “So he says.”

“Alex,” Evie **tilted** her head. “Can’t we just go for a walk tonight? It’s so nice out.”

There was no way she wanted to see Jose, even it was some mellow, kick back party. Not only had Jose cheated on Raquel, he had practically molested Evie at a Sangro party and almost decked her in the school’s parking lot. Why would Alex, her own boyfriend, even want to be at the same room with Jose?

Both Evie and Mondo waited for an answer from Alex as he continued to chew on the end of his straw.

“Dude,” Mondo finally **stretched his arm around the back of his stool**. “You know, I’ll do whatever you want. I’m easy.”

At about half past 11PM, Evie returned home. Her so called date with Alex was officially over and Evie was dropped off one full hour before her 12:30 am curfew. No

"That's just it, Alex," Evie pointed out. "I'm not your bud. I'm your girlfriend."

"But you're also my bud," Alex said. "I don't get it. Why do things have to be so different now that we are boyfriend and girlfriend? **You're not trying to change me are you? Like mold me into a little version of what you think is ideal?"**

When Alex explained his feelings, it all made sense to Evie. Of course she didn't want him to change. Of course, she liked him for who he was and what he was about. And that was the reason why she wanted him as a boyfriend. Her boyfriend.

"I ~~don't get it~~, Evie," he said. "Sometimes I don't get you."

Evie looked over at him. He seemed to be intent on focusing on his driving ^{now} and ~~she~~ ^{by looking at him you'd never} and () his profile. She never knew Alex before he had broken his nose. Almost two year ago, when she just started Villanueva, ~~Evie~~ ^a was introduced to Alex, a wiry sophomore ^{he was just} with a wide medical bandage across his nose and ~~()~~ ^{cotton} splints up his nostrils. Some newbie's board flung right into his face and shattered his nose and cheekbones. Evie remembered she judged him to be just like some of the other vain kids at Villanueva and figured he had gotten a nose job. But when she found out the bandages were from a surfing accident, and that he later yanked ^{ed} out the splints himself just so he could go surfing upon hearing, last minute, that a ~~guy~~ ^{north break} was coming in and there was *no way* he was gonna miss it, ~~she~~ ^{guy} **thought he was just about the coolest () she had ever met.**

"I'm sorry Alex," she tugged on his elbow. "I just wish, sometimes, we could do things more, I dunno, romantic. You know what I mean?"

~~But~~ Alex didn't say anything back except "uh, huh" as he turned up the volume on his iTrip.

. The gentlemanly affection that Arturo showered Horsaphina with made Evie feel A girl can't live on texting alone.

Once they got to school
~~Evie could have very well dwelled all day on her spat with Alex,~~ but the news of Rocio's arrival to Rio Estates, dimmed her *Evie* of obsession. Dee Dee was so excited and wanted to do a girl's only lunch, off campus.

Evie figured it might be a good breather from Alex and she texted him by second period.

Goin to O-hi Frstie w/ the grls

To which he responded:

No prob

Of course she read into his two word text more. *Much* more. 'No prob' as in 'No problem. I really don't care what the fuck you do?' Any textlator could translate Alex's simple six characters (seven, if you included the space) into meaning that he was calling it quits. He was *over* Evie. It took everything in Evie's power not to follow up with a second text. She would just have to drown her doubt, misery and insecurity in cheese fries and a Frostie with Dee Dee and Raquel

"So, he got in last night," Dee Dee went on about Rocio as she, Evie and Raquel headed out of the student parking lot in Jumile. "He's staying in our guest room and *ay*, it was so hard to leave him this morning."

"He slept in your house?"

Evie asked. Her parents

“Yes, and it was **unbearable**. I haven’t seen him in over () months and I just wanted to sneak in the guest room and just be with him the whole night.” Dee Dee pulled out to () and made a left, towards O-hi Frostie.

“So why didn’t you?” Raquel, who sat shotgun, tilted the rearview mirror towards her face and picked at her chin. “If I had some fine ass *papi chulo*, as you claim he is, under my roof who I hadn’t seen for months, you best know I’d be giving him a big ol’ grand welcome, *Americano* style.”

“Raquel, you’re scandalous!” Dee Dee laughed. “I can’t sleep in the same bed with him. My parents would freak, seeing us come out of the same room in the morning.”

“What you gotta do,” Raquel started “is set the alarm clock in his room, like, an hour early and then make sure you don’t go in wearing any perfume or that hair stuff of yours that’s gonna leave a girl stink behind. You can’t have his room smelling like you.”

“You’ve obviously done this before,” Evie noted from the back seat. Maybe it was good she was going off campus of lunch. Dee Dee and Raquel, especially Raquel, would keep her mind off Alex.

“You could say that,” Raquel claimed proudly. She positioned the rearview mirror back to how Dee Dee had it.

“Is Rocio gonna stay at your house the whole time he’s here?” Evie asked Dee Dee.

“Pretty much,” Dee Dee lit up a cigarette at the first stop light they came to. “He’s gonna look at schools in San Diego and then in the Bay Area.”

“Ooh, is he gonna look at Stanford?” Evie asked.

“Yeah, in fact, he should talk with Sabrina,” Dee Dee said. “She would be like the

perfect person to talk to.”

“Not right now,” Evie looked out the window. She never talked to Sabrina about what she had overhead and it still stung whenever she thought about it. God, when was Sabrina just gonna go back to school? She was **bringing down** the whole house.

“So, how’s Rocio gonna get around?” Raquel asked. “Is he gonna rent a car?”

“No, you have to be, ~~like~~, 25 or something to rent one. My dad’s just going to lend him one of ours or he’s just gonna use Jumile.”

“Oh *really*?” Evie caught Dee Dee’s eyes in the rearview mirror. “So Rocio must have *good* insurance, right?” ~~She~~ She couldn’t help but rib Dee Dee, just a little. She ~~still~~ resented that Dee Dee’s father, supposedly, wouldn’t allow *her* take Jumile out for quick fun spin once in a while.

“Yes, *Evie*,” Dee Dee threw her a look. “He’s going to get good insurance. International insurance.”

“So when do we all get to meet him?” Raquel **finally got to the point**. “He’s all we’ve been hearing about, like, ‘veinte-cuarto/siete.’”

“Definitely at Evie’s party” Dee Dee pulled into O-hi Frostie where the wooden picnic tables were already taken over by backpacks, skateboards and an overflow of Del Mar public high school students.

“Ew,” Dee Dee looked them over. “*Del Mar*.”

“Wait, Evie’s *party*?” Raquel balked as she got out of the car. “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 *tonta*. It’s just that he is going to be so busy researching colleges and universities that I’m barely going to see him myself.”

↪ But as Evie found out a later that evening, Dee Dee wasn’t ashamed of her and Raquel, *technically*. But she was, however, uncomfortable of Raquel’s, como se dice? erratic social behavior.

“I need you to keep something on the DL,” Dee Dee told Evie on the phone.

“Sure,” Evie lowered her voice. She loved playing the confidante. “What’s up?”

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

“Right.”

“And that 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 schools to offer, than say, ~~maybe~~ 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. Maybe they were ~~going to get~~ engaged and ^{going} run off together. That maybe Dee Dee wanted her to make crepe paper flowers for their get away car. But it was just

dinner, a dinner party, at the de LaFuentes. Cool enough. Very adult like and, by bringing Alex along, made it very date-ish. “We’ll definitely come,” Evie said. “I can’t wait.”

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

“Huh? Why?” Evie asked.

“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 ^{get} ~~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. “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. She and he had been going out for a full month and Dee Dee nor Evie had even been introduced to him. *That* was very telling.

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

“Are you serious?” Evie asked.

“Uh huh,” Dee Dee said. “And I’m not taking about d-dialing my cell. She called on the land line, 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 ~~kidding~~ me?” Evie couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Dee Dee’s father was the most accepting of Raquel, more than her 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 very amorous **chatter**, consisting of Raquel going on and on 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~~**bricks**.

So, you won’t tell her, right?” Dee Dee asked Evie with a hopeful tone in her voice.

“I guess not,” Evie answered, feeling a bit deceitful. “I mean, I won’t.”

“Thanks Evie,” Dee Dee exhaled. “You really are my *amiga favorita...por vida.*”

Dee Dee, however, forgot to mention that maybe Evie should have played down the dinner to her mother. Keeping something on the D.L. with V.G. ~~was~~ would have been a smart move.

“I don’t understand,” Vicki Gomez started as Evie waited for Alex to pick her on Saturday night. (Evie was right in thinking that dinner at the de LaFuentes would reconnect lines between her and Alex, if at least, the opportunity for them to eat for free.)

“Why wouldn’t Frank or Graciela invite your father and me to their party?” Evie’s mother asked.

“Mom, it’s not a party,” Evie tried to explain for the umpteenth time. ~~Her mother~~ had been on her all week once Evie had mentioned the dinner to her. ~~“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. Something like this would never have happened if Margaret was still alive.”

Evie could not believe her mother was comparing Margaret, Dee Dee’s dear belated mother, to Frank de LaFuentes new wife, Graciela. The cattiness belonged more in the hallway at school or in the dorm rooms ^{where} ~~that~~ the Sangros resided in, ~~Not~~ the living room of their own home, where Evie was checking the hemline of her skirt. It was second time in less than two weeks that she wore a skirt for a night out. She hoped this time Alex would notice ~~and appreciate it.~~

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

Man, Evie thought, keeping something on the DL became quite the chore when all parties involved lived within the residential tract of a gated community.

“You know, Evie,” her mother started to suggest. “You should at least take Sabrina with you.”

“What?” Evie gawked at the thought. The last think she wanted was mopey ol’ Sabrina barging in on her date. “Why would I take her?”

“Because, it would be a nice thing to do. Dee Dee and Sabrina have always gotten along. Famously. They have so much in common. Sabrina was a Patrona and now Dee Dee is going to be one.”

“We don’t know that yet,” Evie found herself getting cranky. “She still has to be nominated.”

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

"It's *Rocio*," Evie said. "And I didn't say he was *going* to Stanford, I said he was going to look into their departments. Checking out a school is much different than enrolling into one."

"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? I got a call from Dukes and they wanted to know what kind of flowers you want on the tables. I rememberd you wanted hibiscus, but I couldn't remember what color. "

"What did you tell them?" Evie asked.

"I didn't tell them anything. I haven't returned their call. I just got it yesterday."

"Well, do you think it would be a big problem if we didn't have flowers, but maybe little ^{like} ~~to~~ *saddles or something?*"

"What? Where did that come from?"

"I was just thinking it might be cute."

"Evie, you are crazy. You know, I'm not even gonna worry about it until your next quality check comes. and ^{she added} I just hope I don't forget to send Frank and Graciela an invite to your birthday."

the party

A dinner party at the de LaFuentes seemed to be perfect in terms of mending the friction between Evie 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 to Evie, she was content that they were at least going to dinner. A dinner party. And together, as a couple, it was very date-ish.

When Alex came to pick Evie up for the dinner, she liked that ^{he} Alex was in cords and a dress shirt. It reminded her how he used to dress, before they became a couple.

"You look really nice," he walked her to his truck. "You look cute in dresses."

"Oh, thanks." Evie smiled.

So far, so good. As soon as Evie got into his truck, she put the arm rest up and snuggled up as close to ^{him} as her constraining seat belt would allow.

"You know, I haven't been to Dee Dee's since last semester," Alex said as he lowered the volume on his iTrip and pulled out of Evie's driveway. "Remember? When I went over to give her swimming lessons and Alejandra de los Santos and her little pack of *fresitas* were there?"

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 Xiamor-a."

"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 swanky pad. They're probably gonna be some good grub tonight."

"Totally," Evie agreed. "But I can tell you one thing they aren't going to have."

“What?” Alex asked.

“They aren’t going to have *sushi*.” Evie playfully pinched his side.

“Evie,” Alex frowned at her. “Let it go, will you?”

“I was just messin’.” She cuddled up to him closer.

“No, you weren’t,” he said. “You keep making these little jabs, trying to make me feel guilty.”

“No, I’m not.” Evie could feel his arm tense up. She looked up at him. “Seriously, I told you 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 asked. “What, that I want to go out, alone, with my own boyfriend once in a while?”

“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 your girlfriend, sometimes I wanna be treated like one.”

“So, what, I treat you like crap or something?” Alex asked. He was now turning onto *Camino Pacific* and was a few blocks from Camino Cortez, Dee Dee’s street.

“I didn’t say that,” Evie said. “It’s just 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."

fn
"Granted?" Alex asked. "Like what? When?"

"Jeez, where do I begin?" Evie shook her head in bewilderment. How could he possible be so clueless? "Like you flake on me, *a lot* and –"

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

"So you think you didn't leave me hanging that night at Otani's?" Evie asked.

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

"Oh, so let me get this straight," Evie started. "You and Mondo were kind enough to invite to the party with the both of you. *You two* invited *me*. Wow, gee, Alex, I hope I didn't intrude on your date with Mondo."

"You know," Alex said. "You're acting like a bitch. Like how Raquel would always be nagging Jose."

"*Bitch?*" Evie snapped. "Well, you're beginning to act like Jose, *a punk ass*. All dribbling over big chested waitresses *and* being a flake. Who knows, maybe you're seeing Alejandra de los Santos behind my back."

"Hey," Alex said. "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 declared livid. “Alex, how the *fuck* 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 **complete shit**. God, Alex,” Evie leaned to the far side of the seat 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 said. ^{or} He pulled up in front of the de LaFuentes, ^{he} ~~but~~ did not turn off the engine. Evie looked up at Dee Dee’s house. The lawn lights showcased all the exotic succulents that decorated their front yard as well as the water flowing from the ^{ir} stone fountain.

Before Evie knew it, she reached around her neck and unhooked the clasp of her abalone necklace. “Here,” her hand was shaking as she gave it to Alex. “Just take it.”

Alex looked at the necklace, then at Evie. “Evie...” he started.

“No, just take it,” she said. “Obviously it’s too hard for you to say or do nice things for me anymore. Obviously it’s too much of a challenge. Here,” she held out the cord. “Just take it.”

Alex took the abalone necklace. “So what is this supposed to mean.”

“”I don’t know,” Evie said. “Maybe we should just take a break.”

“A break, like time off?” Alex said.

“Yeah, 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 sunk. ~~The~~ ^{her} Bose headphones? Ouchie. “I *will*”

“Whatever,” Alex stuffed the necklace into his glove compartment. “If that’s what you want...time off.”

“Yes,” Evie got out of his truck and slammed the door. “It’s totally what I want”

When Evie showed up at Dee Dee’s room, she was puffy eyed and bare necked.

“Hey,” Dee Dee voice **dropped** soft when she saw Evie at her doorway. “What happened? What’s wrong?”

Before Evie knew it, she was crying all over again. “Alex and I got in a fight. He just dropped me off and 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 her night table. “What happened? Tell me.”

Evie went into the **horrid** details about her argument with Alex. She left out nothing as she recounted how Alex accused her of being a bitch, a nag, and ^atwo timing bestfriend. That’s all she pretty much remembered of the whole conversation.

“And what did you say to all that?” Dee Dee asked.

“Nothing,” Evie said. “I just gave him back his stupid necklace. I didn’t say anything at all.”

“You gave him back the abalone necklace?”

“And the headphones,” Evie said. “I mean, I’m gonna give that back to him when I get it.”

“**Hijole,**” Dee Dee looked around. “I’m really, really surprised, especially the part about him saying all that stuff about you and Jose. Alejandro has always seemed like such a gentleman.”

“He is, or was, I guess.” Evie blew her nose. “I mean, he’s not horrible, but he just acts so flaky and sometimes he treats me like just a dude. 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 princessa.”

Princesa.

“You know, Josephina?” Evie wiped her nose. “At the reserve? The senior Patrona?”

“Uh, huh. Of course.” Dee Dee moved in closer. Perhaps **hoping** that Evie had a scoop about her potential Patrona-ship?

“Well, Arturo is totally sweet to her,” Evie **said**. “I mean, he just dotes on her and I just don’t understand why *I* can’t have a boyfriend like that.” She blew her nose a ~~bit~~ more.

“Arturo?” Dee Dee frowned in confusion. “That’s hard to believe. 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 going off on him, like just a month ago and now you saying that he’s the ideal boyfriend?”

“I didn’t say he was *ideal*.”

“In so many words you did,” Dee Dee said. “And when did you start calling him Arturo? I thought he was Ar-*turdo*.”

“Huh?” Evie didn’t know what she was getting at. “No, everyone calls him Arturo.”

"Everyone, but you," Dee Dee said. "

"Wise people can change their minds,"

"Is that one of Lindsay's dichos?"

"Sorta," Evie said. "It's from one of her big books that she keeps in her night stand."

"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. "*Ay wey!* They're already here!"

For a moment, Evie was so drowned in her own sorrows that she had forgotten the whole reason why she was as the de LaFuentes. She sighed to herself. She was now going to have to fake pleasantries the whole evening, without Alex..

Dee Dee waved her fingers in the air as though she was trying to make wet finger polish dry. "~~But~~ I am *so* nervous." She twirled around for Evie. "Do I look okay?"

Evie looked at Dee Dee. She was wearing (). *DES* .

"Yes," Evie managed to smile. "You look beautiful. No, better than beautiful. You look just like Anahi."

That should do it.

"Anahi? Oh my God." Dee Dee looked at her whole profile in the mirror, with her hand on her hip, *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 telemundo, Actually, Univision, if you wanted to get technical about it, but the whole wide mundo if you wanted to get ^{of T.V.} ~~understand~~ ^{how much D.D. idolized her}

Evie watched as Dee Dee fussed in front of the mirror and then she caught a look of herself. Her face was puffy and tearstained. Her lashes ^{were} ~~horse~~ lash stiff and straight and needed to be re-curled. All three coats mascara that she had applied had collect ^{ed} in the 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 tips of her fingers. "Can I borrow some concealer? For my eyes?"

"Claro, of course," Dee Dee went over to her bathroom and opened up a professional looking make up cart that showcased every compact, tube and brush that Covergirl and Mac could possibly carry. "Here," Dee Dee pulled out three small tubes and ^{an} ~~one~~ airbrush of concealer. She patted the stool in front of her vanity table and mirror, ^{Promphas} ~~Purging~~ Evie to take a seat. "Let me put it on. I can find a color ^{to your perfect blend} ~~that matches you~~." She looked Evie over. "You've lost a lot of your tan, so you ^{!!} ~~can~~ definitely go with ^{have to} ~~just~~ *mas guera.*"

Evie sat down and let Dee Dee take over. It felt soothing, almost relaxing, to have ~~Dee Dee~~ ^{uu} softly rub the cream under her worn, tired eyes.

"Drama should never drain the diva," Dee Dee said as she stepped back to admire her work.

"That's so RDB," Anahi

"But it's not," Dee Dee smiled proudly. "I just made it up."

finally perfect

When Evie and Dee Dee ~~felt ready and~~ they hurried down the stairs where they were met by Rocio, who was waiting in the foyer. He *was* quite cute, Evie thought when she first saw him. He looked just like the pictures she had seen of him with Dee Dee in Mexico City. He had a slight build, seemingly newly cut hair *9*. His eyes were very dark eyes and topped with thick, bushy eyebrows, ~~almost~~ like Dee Dee's father. And he was wearing a casual dark blue dinner jacket that made him appear mature and cosmopolitan. Evie, of course, had seen boys dress similarly, but they were male models in the fashion magazines that Dee Dee had laying around her room and they were always posing on motor scooters or the steps of some historic looking building.

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

"Oh," Dee Dee covered her shy smile with her hand. "*Really?*"

"Yes," Rocio's eye's widened as is she was crazy to question him. "Really."

"Oh, Rocio, I –" Dee Dee stopped herself and looked at Evie. "Oh, I am *so* sorry! This is Evie." She placed her hand on Evie's shoulder. "***Recuerdas? My amiga mejor?***"

"*Si, si,*" Rocio took Evie's hand and actually ~~threw~~ *lowered* his head down to kiss it. "*Soy encantanta.* You are even more lovely in person."

Lovely? Evie can'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? She could get used to this. She glanced down, relieved that she still had the manicured remnants of her hand job from MK.

"*Muchas Gracias, Rocio,*" she said. "I've heard so much about you."

“Good things, I hope,” he smiled. “Or at least, not *so* scandalous.”

Dee Dee looked over Rocio’s shoulder. “Where are your parents?”

“Listen, they’re already out in the backyard,” A large grin continued to spread 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 then linked her other arm with Evie “I couldn’t be happier, my two favorite people *en el todo mundo!*”

Evie can’t help but wonder as the three of them headed outside where Raquel fit in between Dee Dee’s ‘two favorite people in the whole world.’ Also, ~~Evie~~^{she} wondered, would she have been invited to the special dinner if she still had the blue hair from last semester?

Dee Dee’s parents, Frank and Graciela, were out in the backyard, under the palapa styled gazebo with another couple that was obviously Rocio’s parents.

“Dela,” the woman stood up and held her hands out to Dee Dee. “Long time no see, mi’ja. We miss you in D.F.”

Rocio’s mother wore a sleeveless black linen dress, accented by a red silk rebozo, that Evie recognized from Studio Tres Rios. She wondered if had just bought it or if it was a gift from, perhaps, Graciela? Her wavy dark hair was pulled back into an elegant bun and secured by a large simple silver barrette.

Dee Dee went over to hug Rocio’s mother.

“Oh, I miss you too, Joseta. I miss D. F. in general. How is Hermin and Ofelia? Oh, and what about the Café Blanca? Have you been there lately?” She stopped herself

and covered her face with her fingers in bashfulness. "I'm sorry," she apologized. ~~I~~
~~know~~, I sometimes go on and on about Mexico."

Sometimes?

"It's just that I have such an affinity for D.F.," she nervously explained. "I really miss the night life. The U.S is nothing like Mexico, and California can be, *come se dice*, stifling, if you know what 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?~~

Evie wondered where was all this coming from? And why hadn't she been introduced yet?

Dee Dee finally glanced over at Evie as if she had just read her thoughts. "Oh, *lo siento*. I forgot. This is my dear friend, *mi amiga mejor*, Evelina."

"Hello," Evie nodded towards Mr. and Mrs. Fontes. "*Estoy Encantada*."

"*Estamos encantados*," Rocio's parents nodded back and smiled.

Dee Dee immediately sat down next to Rocio and Evie followed her cue. She felt emotionally and physically drained ~~and~~ ^{up} her eyes still felt like two enormous soggy tea bags. She was the solo act among three sets of couples and she felt alone, a bit out of place. Evie hoped she could keep up with an evening that already seemed filled with memories, social etiquette and proper Spanish. As Rocio practically finished Dee Dee's sentences and Dee Dee advised Marcela what to keep out of Rocio's pasta (no peppers, no pine-nuts), it was so apparent that Dee Dee and Rocio were meant for each other. It was like they were already mini adults in the making and this made Evie anxious. She was already going to be sixteen years old. Would she *ever* meet the perfect guy for her?

“So, how are you getting used to the time change?” Dee Dee father asked Rocio’s father.

Rocio’s father also had a slight build, like Rocio. He wore a suit and, Evie noticed, impeccably shined leather shoes.

“We are getting along okay. Thank you. Much better than,” he added playfully *as he* and held up his drink, “we’re getting used to this American tequila. I was expecting, since you are such the big chingon out here, you’d be serving up Tequila Oro or something”

“This is actually *Temequila*,” Frank held 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? So it *was* **distilled** here.” Rocio’s father looked at his glass again and nodded his head with a newfound interest. “*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 rebozo. “Oh, nothing,” she said. “I don’t want to be mean.”

“Now you *have* to tell us,” Rocio’s mother nudged her in 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.”

Last year, in October, Evie’s mother had hosted a small, intimate brunch to welcome the de LaFuentes back from Mexico. It was the morning after the big party that Raquel’s mother had thrown.

“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 both Rocio’s parents raised and soon enough they, too, joined Graciela in laughter.

“*Sin manteca?*” Rocio’s mother looked at Evie. “Without lard? *Tus serioso?*”

But it was Graciela who answered. “Si, *si*” She then started to laugh so much that a cough erupted. She ~~raised~~ ^{used cloth} her napkin to cover her mouth.

“Now, Graciela. *Stop* it,” Frank de LaFuente put his plate down on the glass table and came to **Evie’s aid**. “*Mira*, we never know anything until we take chances. Right, Evie?”

“Right,” Evie smiled meekly. Could she feel even more the ugly, hegemonic American?

“Right,” Dee Dee agreed. “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 fabulous wonderful city life in D.F., Evie found comfort by retreating to the kitchen. She ended up talking to 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 ~~as she~~
~~pulled out her phone~~ to check her messages. There were none.

“*Que ocupadas?*” Marcela questioned Evie. It was apparent that she was hiding out. Why would a guest, after all, be among the help when they can be out at the party helping themselves to quince paste and manchengo cheese?

“Nothing,” Evie lied. Every since she has been spending more time with Dee Dee, Evie has gotten to know Marcela better. Marcela was a lot younger than Lindsay, almost thirty years to Lindsay’s sixty, and Evie sometimes felt she got more contemporary chica insight than, say, the matronly madre judgement **of** Lindsay. “It just my boyfriend and I—“

Marcela’s cell phone suddenly vibrated from her hip. “*Ay, lo siento Evelina,*” she apologized as she unclipped it. She read the text. “Oh, it’s my baby’s papa. I have to take this call.”

“No worries,” Evie said and she cut herself the tiniest sliver of the Spanish membrillo from the slab that was on a serving tray with a cheese knife. God, did *everyone* have *someone* in their life? “Go ahead, take your call.”

“*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 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 ~~full~~ draped in their rebozos. Marcela’s helper soon came after Evie and Dee Dee, with the tray of quincepaste and cheese. Evie looked the tray over. Whew. She had

done a good job with the cutting. No one would suspect ^{her} the earlier therapeutic snacking ~~she did.~~

“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 sabroso!*”

“Gracias, Joseta,” Graciela smiled as she poured hot water 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 frowned playfully. “I’m a little offended you haven’t visited Channel Islands.”

“No, no, sir,” Rocio interjected and placed his fork on his dessert plate as though a long explanation was going to commence. “It’s nothing against CI. I would love to go there. The campus is beautiful and I’d be closer to Dela.” He looked at Dee Dee and took her hand. “But I need to get my MBA from ta university that has the best departments 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 did squeeze her fingers.

“Well, that’s very admirable,” Frank said in a tone you’d expect to be followed by a pat on the back and a lighting of a cigar. “Very admirable. I can respect that.”

Evie couldn’t help but feel that Rocio 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 like Arturo, even to the point that he was also moving away from his family and home to follow a dream. Which, in this case, Evie really wasn’t sure if Rocio’s ultimate dream was to be in business school or with Dee Dee.

She opened her **evening** bag and discreetly checked her cell phone. No new text or messages for Evie.

Chapter 16

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

"I can't *believe* he wants your headphones back. What an asshole." Raquel fumed *ed* leaning against the wall of lockers. "Weren't they like a gift?" *or she*

"Yeah," Evie placed the headphones under his Senor Lopez pullover. They both used to wear their pullovers together on those chilly mornings at Sea Street. "He's just being a jerk," Evie said. "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 couldn't plant some lawn on him and then call the school, anonymously."

"Raquel, *no*." Evie slammed the locker door shut. "He's not that big of a jerk. Besides, he has the combination to my locker."

"Yeah, he ain't worth it anyway," Raquel agreed. "It's a good thing you don't have any classes with him. That would be a major drag. I remember with Jose, I still had 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} ~~goes~~ to school,” Evie found herself teasing.

“Exuse me?” Raquel cocked one eyebrow. “You know, ~~if~~ ^f I wasn’t such a caring friend, I could say something but I won’t. You ~~are~~ ^{be} ‘la sad one’ right now, so I’m just gonna be all nice and supportive.” She put her arm around Evie “But check it out, now you and I can be a team, *the* team. *Solas Patrollas*.”

“But you still have Davey,” Evie pointed out.

“Nah, not really,” Raquel **made a face**. “I mean, we just hang out. It’s nothing serio. We’re just having fun.”

“But don’t forget Dee Dee.”

“Dee Dee,” Raquel said sarcastically and pulled down her Cop Out sunglasses. “Is in a team, a league, of all her own.”

Evie’s first days at school Alex-less were **unbearable**. She checked her cell phone all through out her classes, every hour, half hour. During lunch she scanned the cafeteria for signs of Alex, but found not one hint of his dark hair, **his camouflage cut offs** or ~~not even~~ him wearing *her* Bose headphones. It was weird. How could Alex just possibly disappear from sight?

“Have you seen Alex?” She asked Yvonne Tilly who as also at the salad bar. She knew Yvonne had biology with him.

“You mean Alex, your boyfriend?” *She asked*

Yeah, was he in class today?

I don’t know,” Yvonne looked over at Tracy. *unlions* “I mean, wouldn’t you know if your own boyfried was at school?”

“Yeah, of course, I just left my cell at home and I haven’t seen him. That’s all.

“Hey, Evie, Tracy asked

“Yeah?”

“When do you think you’re going to send out the invites to your party?” *she asked*

“Um, I don’t know. Soon.” *Evie said. she wasn't planning*

“Because my aunt *Ruby* is getting married in Napa that same weekend, but if I can tell my mom I got your invite before, *she'll let me go.*”

“Okay,” *Evie said* “I’ll try to get your invite on top of the stack.” *put*

Since Alex and Evie were beefing, it was either JUMILE or BTLE JCE picking up Evie up for school. After three days, Alex still hadn’t called or texted her and she wasn’t about to do either to him. After all, he *did* leave her hanging, at the de LaFuentes dinner party and she, if anything, deserved an apology

“You are so much better with out him,” Raquel would insist. “He was such a punk ass. I told you how he was at that party, right? The one on Hemlock?”

“Yeah, you did,” Evie didn’t want to hear about that night all over again, but Raquel *would* go over details, expanding *on the details* each each time *she did* it was told.

“So, there I was on the couch at Lil’ G’s mom’s house,” Raquel started. “Just kicking back, blazing some one hitters with some new friends and here comes Jose, with Mondo and Alex. All three of them, as if they owned the place or something. They don’t even know any of the Bard Boys. I mean, *I* know the Bard crew, but they be acting as if their part of the g-unit or something.”

“I really don’t think Alex thinks *that*,” Evie said.

“Well, he comes in acting like it,” Raquel claimed. “So, I’m looking around for Davey, because the last thing I want is Jose getting all up in my face without Davey around and I mean, we know how Jose can be. Remember Evie? Remember how he almost **decked you** in the parking lot last semester?”

“I remember,” Evie looked out the **JUMILE’s window** into space. She was so over this video log of her life, but Raquel insisted on rewinding it over and over again.

“But Jose knows better,” Raquel said. “He just walked by, like he totally didn’t say anything to me, as if I didn’t exist.”

“But that’s what you do want,” Dee Dee said. “You don’t Jose stalking you.”

“Of course, not,” Raquel said quickly. “I’m just saying that he doesn’t have to act like I never existed, like he’s better than me than something.

“I’m sure he doesn’t’ think that...”

“Well he better not be. ~~And I’m~~, like, on terms with Mondo and with Alex but Alex didn’t say jack to me. Nothing. Mondo, at least, like, lifted his chin, but Alex, punk ass, was probably too afraid to acknowledge me in front of Jose. That just shows you, Evie, he is so whipped. There is no way he can ever be a man. You need a man, Evie. 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.”

“I am *not* going out with some Bard Boy,” Evie maintained. “There is *no* way in hell.”

“Oh, *my*.” Raquel looked over at Evie. “Excuse me Little Miss Goodship.”

“Evie needs a gentleman, a *caballero*.” Dee Dee **said**. “Right, Evie? You know, as soon as Rocio moves out here, I’m sure he’ll have lots of new classmates and acquaintances who would be dying to date someone as cute as you.”

“Why do I have to date anyone at all?” Evie exhaled in exaggeration. (“It’s like both of you are saying that’s what I *need* and what I ~~need~~ **right now is just try to focus on getting my credit, so I can get my party and get my car and once I get my car I’m gonna** Besides, look at Sabrina. She was with Robert for like two years and look what happened to her?”

“Oh, hey,” Dee Dee **spoke up**. “I just thought of something. If you’re not talking with Alex who’s going to take ^{you} to your party?”

“Dee Dee,” Raquel looked over at her ⁱⁿ with 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.

“I know,” Dee Dee said. “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. The three of us and Jumile and Beetle Juice and, who else Evie?”

“*Lady Bug*,” Evie answered. It was great when Raquel was on her side.

“And you’re acting like I’m never going to talk to Alex again,” Evie said. “I mean, so we’re beefing now, it’s not like we broke up.” It helped Evie to announce that, outloud. She and Alex did *not* break up. They were just on a time out. “My party is still, like, three weeks away.”

“Right,” Raquel added. ^{But} “And you don’t even know if your mom is gonna let you have it.”

“Right,” Evie mood dropped upon hearing that. Well, Raquel *was* on a short roll there, for a while

“And when is your drivng test?” Raquel asked.

^{End to Sat.} “Next week.”

“So are you like all ready?” Dee Dee asked.

“Oh, totally,” Evie said. “I’ve been practicing with my dad and Lindsay for, like, the last month.”

^{Here gone ASS} “~~Speaking of which~~, how is that Arturo doing?” Raquel asked.

“Has his girlfriend, Josephina, said anything about me?”

“You mean, Horsa-phina?” Raquel took a drag of Dee Dee’s Midnight Berry.

“She’s such a bitch. I penned that the minute I met her,” ^{law}

^{Dee Dee} “No,” Evie answered. “~~She hasn’t~~ said anything, yet. But Arturo, he’s tolerable. I mean, as far as bosses goes.”

To be honest, Arturo had become more than just tolerable. Evie was beginning to like him. Not in a romantic sense, far from it, but he seemed genuinely good person, a *buena persona* as Lindsay would say. And, okay, she had to admit, He was nice to look at.

As usual, she showed up Wednesday to put in more hours at the reserve. She was surprised when she looked at the sign up sheet in the supply shed. She had more hours completed than she had expected. There weren’t many more hours to go.

“What happened to your necklace?” Arturo asked after he gave her the feeding directions for the day.

“My necklace?” Evie asked. Was it that noticeable that she wasn’t wearing it?

“Yeah, the shell one,” Arturo said. “You usually wear it every day.”

So it *was* that noticeable.

“My boyfriend made it for me,” Evie said. “and... I gave it back to him.”

“Oh, did you break up with him?” he asked.

Just a tad privado.

“No, not really.” Evie didn’t feel like going into the details, especially with Arturo, who was in a solid steady relationship and wouldn’t understand the glum she was feeling. It had been about four days since her argument with Alex and she missed him. She missed his texts and she missed the little conversations they’d have on their way to school. God, maybe she was a bitch. No, she *couldn’t* be.

“Not *really*?” Arturo asked. “Poor guy. I can relate.”

“What do you mean, *poor* guy?” Evie asked. “You don’t even know him.”

“But I know all about the jeweled yo-yo.”

“Huh?” Evie asked.

“When Josephina and I first started dating, I gave her a bracelet,” Arturo started.

“It was a complete symbol of our exclusivity. 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 month, 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 and she'd take off the bracelet. So, yes, I actually *can* relate to your boyfriend, or whatever you are calling him."

"Well, I don't plan on asking for the necklace back," Evie said. "but I didn't break up with him, officially."

"Does he know that?"

"I'm sure he does. I mean, I didn't say, 'here's your necklace back, I never want to see you again'."

"Good," Arturo said. "There is nothing worse than a yo-yo relationship."

"I know that, Arturo." Evie said.

When Evie got home from the reserve she just wanted to just give herself a break from homework and ^{my spacing} text messages. She got some juice and went into the den to watch some TV. But wouldn't you know it, Dee Dee called. *Aw, popularity.*

Evie ~~wouldn't have taken the call when she saw the caller ID on the landline,~~ but Dee Dee hadn't gone to school and Evie hadn't talked to her all day.

"So, how are you feeling?" Evie asked.

"I'm not sick," Dee Dee said. "I've been with Rocio all day. We took Jumile up north to look at Cal State San Luis Obispo."

"Really?" Evie asked. This was surprising. Dee Dee never missed school. Even when she had been sick, she'd show up with a hankie and Vick's Mentholated on her chest. Too bad they didn't issue 'Use or Lose' in high school, like they do with so many **county** jobs. She could have cranked out, at the minimum, a two week Hawaiian vacation and still have received perfect attendance and class credit.

"I'm afraid to ask," Dee Dee started. "But did you talk to Alejandro today?"

"No, not yet." Evie hated to admit. A little text or phone message would have been nice.

"Well," Dee Dee started. "He's just mad. He'll get over it, but you know what, maybe this will be his wake-up call. Maybe he'll see what he did.

"It's more like what he *didn't* do. I ~~broke up with him~~ ^{asked 4 times if} because of what he *doesn't* do. That's the problem. I mean, you can't relate. Look at Rocio, he's a totally romantic, a take charge kind of guy.

"Speaking of Rocio," Dee Dee said. "That's the reason I called. I have to tell you something."

"Uh, huh," Evie said. What, another dinner party?

"We talked on the drive back from San Louie and it looks like he doesn't want to go to college out here."

"Oh, no. Are you serious?" Evie asked. "I thought he was all about living out here and being closer to you."

"He is. I mean, about being closer to me," Dee Dee said. "But he doesn't want to leave D.F., and I don't blame him." Dee Dee cleared her throat. "So, I'm thinking I'll move back to Mexico... so I could be closer to him."

"*What?*" Evie laughed. "Dee 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. That's where Frida used to live, with Diego. Romantic, no?"

“No,” Evie said. “But wait, I don’t understand. How can you just move back to D.F.? You just started at Villanueva, What about Las Patronas?”

“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 Patrona anymore? I can’t believe this.”

“No, I’m not saying that. I definitely want to be a Patrona, I’m just saying that I don’t think I can be one at this time. I’m going to have —”

“*At this time?* Dee Dee, 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, I want to be closer to Rocio.”

“But what about the first dance, in your white dress? With your dad? That’s all you’ve been talking about. And your mom? She wanted you to be a Patrona.”

“Evie,” Dee Dee. “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 started to crack. “I, I just don’t want to get into it right now.”

Dee Dee practically hung up on Evie and Evie was left practically with her mouth open. She couldn’t believe how things were so rapidly changing in her life. She called Dee Dee back but, of course, her call went straight to voice mail. Evie then texted Raquel with the emergency code of ER/RE! ASAP! and ~~kept checking and rechecking~~ for a response, but heard nothing by the time she fell asleep.

Chapter 18

“Evie,” Arturo asked again. “Hello?”

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Evie looked up. “I wasn’t paying attention.” She had no idea that Arturo was talking to her. Her mind was on Dee Dee and the talk they had the night before. While the both went through the motions of a school day: ^{The} drive to school, lunch at O-hi Frostie, etc. ^{me} neither she or Dee Dee talked about ^{on Dee Dee} ~~Dee Dee~~ possibly moving back to Mexico.

“So do you want to?” Arturo asked.

“Want to what?” Evie asked.

Arturo tilted his head in confusion. “Take the horses out. We’re pretty much done here and I know your ^{horse keep} ride doesn’t come for another hour and I was thinking we couldn’t take them out.”

“You mean to *ride*?” Evie asked.

“No, take them out of their stalls so they can stand and we can look at them.”

Evie laughed. Actually it wasn’t that funny of a joke, but somehow Arturo’s mild sense of humor was rubbing off on her. “I totally want to go riding. But wait,” she stopped. “I thought the 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?”

She really wanted to go riding, but didn't want to admit to Arturo that she had basically gone horseback riding one time when she was like, ten years old. ~~Evie didn't know what to say so she just opted to agree with him.~~ "Right," she ~~told~~ ^{agreed w/} Arturo.

"Cool," he answered. "We can take Spinkles or Panchito out for a quick spin. They could use the exercise."

"Quick *spin*?" Evie made a face. "Ugh. The last time I went for a quick spin I got stuck with twelve hundred dollar car bill."

"What?" Arturo asked. "~~Serio~~? What happened?"

"Don't *even* ask."

"Okay, I won't," Arturo took off his work gloves and went over to Panchito's stall. ^{Now} But if anything, you definitely could use a nice relaxing ride near the river."

"As long as I don't get Chamuco," Evie said.

"No one rides Chamuco," Arturo told her. "You can take Sprinkles. He's just about the most gentlest horse we have."

"Let me go get my pullover," Evie said as she turned off the hose. She was just finished filling up the troughs.

"Hurry up," Arturo prompted her. "I'll get the horses ready."

Evie sprinted to the supply shed. 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.

~~Miss you.~~ Can we talk?

Evie **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 in backpack. She would text Alex as *soon* as she returned from her ride on Sprinkles.



Evie couldn’t help but feel slightly flattered by Arturo’s invitation. Like he said, only volunteers with equine experience were allowed to ride or take out the horses off the reserve. Arturo was really an okay kind of guy. When Evie came out of the shed, she was a bit taken aback by his appearance. He was already seated on Panchito and looked, well, just so in control. DESCRIBE MORE.

Evie felt a little awkward as she hoisted herself up onto Sprinkles, one of the, brown palaminos with a sprinkling of white spot on his body. Not the most delicate move, but she managed to get on top and not fall over to the other side.

Arturo looked her over. He tilted his ^{head} again and smiled slowly. “You look good.”

Good as in *what*? Evie was suddenly curious to what what he actually meant by that.

“Come on!” Evie nudged **Sprinkles** with the inside of her sneaker. But he did not move. “I wanted a gentle horse,” she told Arturo. “Not a *dead* one.”

Arturo laughed. “Give him a stronger nudge.

on his _____

“I don’t want to hurt him,” Evie said.

"He can take it," Arturo said. "Your ~~little~~^{wife} foot would be just like a pat to him."

Evie nudged Sprinkles a bit harder and he promptly was put himself (and Evie) into gear.

"Whoa!" Evie wasn't quite prepared for his geddy up to just get up and go so quickly.

Fifteen minutes later, the four of them, Evie, Arturo, Sprinkles and Panchito, were already deep in the chapparral of the riverbank, among fauna and animal life that Eve, shamefully admitted, never knew existed.

"Wow, this is *so* nice," Evie marveled on about all the towering yucca plants and jack rabbits that scurried across the path. "I can't believe I've lived so close to the river, all my life and I've never come up here. Not once."

"Yeah," Arturo nodded. "A lot of people forget what's in their own backyard. Espeically if you live in Higher Gates," he teased.

"Hey, I couldn't choose where my parents ~~bought~~^{can't} a house," Evie teased back.

"And it's not like I'm going to be living there the rest of my life. Who knows, maybe I'll move to Pico Rivera."

"Have you ever *been* to Pico Rivera?" Arturo asked.

"No, but had *you* ever been to this part of Cali~~for~~^{buy} before moving here?"

"No, but I did do *some* research." Arturo looked around "And I think because I'm not from around here, I make it a point to explore more than the average person. Sometimes, after my shift, I come up here on Princesa and take a sunset ride."

"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. Sometimes Josephina’s father or brother will come and they’ll take her out, but that’s about it. Hey,” He pointed out a grassy field they were just coming upon. “See where it’s all matted down, in the middle of the field?”

“Uh huh,” Evie said.

“That’s where coyotes sleep. From the size of the impression, you can tell it’s a large pack of them.”

“*What?*” Evie looked around nervously. “Coyotes? Your kidding, right?” She wasn’t about to fight off a wild pack of river coyotes. “Man, something is *always* out to get you!”

“What do you mean?” Arturo asked.

“I mean, when I’m surfing, I have to 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 we’d have to worry and besides, I’ll protect you.”

“I can protect myself thank you,” Evie teased proudly.

“So,” Arturo pulled his rein to the left leading Panchito, as well as Evie and Sprinkles down a smaller trail. “I didn’t know you surfed.”

“Uh huh,” Evie said. “Well, I haven’t actually for a while. I used to surf a lot with my boyfriend. I mean, the boyfriend I’m taking a break from. That’s something we both love to do.”

“That’s cool,” Arturo said. “I wish Josephina and I had shared something like that. Sometimes I wonder if we’re really the right people for each other. We just don’t share the same passion for things.”

“Uh, huh.” Evie didn’t really know what to say. She and Alex shared the same passion – surfing, but now it seemed that it was surfing that was pulling them apart. He was always following their passion, without her.

“Josephina and I just aren’t on the same level sometimes,” Arturo continued. “I mean, I really care about her and everything, but she can be a really insecure person. Sometimes it can be so suffocating.”

“Suffocating?” Evie asked. “In what way?”

“You know,” Arturo caught himself. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be going into this with you. I shouldn’t be disrespectful, to you or to Josephina.”

“Oh no, that’s okay,” Evie said. She couldn’t help but feel a little evil. She would have loved a little dish on Horsaphina.

“It’s just she just gave me back her bracelet,” Arturo said. “Again.”

I thought you didn’t want to go on about it.

“Oh, no,” Evie said. “I’m sorry.”

“And you know what? If she asks for it back. I’m not going to give it back to her. I’m fed up. I’m over it.”

After that, neither Evie or Arturo said anything. There was a short silence between them as a melody of crickets and blue jays composed what seemed the idyllic soundtrack for their ride.

“Are you liking the ride?” Arturo asked.

“Oh, yeah,” Evie said. “I *love* this! Can we do this again? I’ve been thinking, I think I’m going to get a horse and I was thinking I could work more hours at the reserve and then take, like, horsemanship classes and then after that, some classes on doing stunts and then start competing at *charreadas*.”

“Whoa,” Arturo laughed to himself. “That’s a tall order. Becoming a **escaramuza** and learning *suertes* at your age will be hard.”

“*My* age?” Evie scowled. “Catalina, the girl at the charreada, was the *same* age as me. Give or take a few months.”

“Yes, but she has been practicing for years,” Arturo said. “*Years*. She’s got probably ten years of practice on you.”

“Oh, wow,” Evie felt discouraged. “Really? I didn’t know that.”

“And to be honest,” Arturo looked over at Sprinkles. “The first thing you need to learn is how to ride a horse properly.”

“Right.” Evie agreed. “That’s a given.”

“For one thing,” Arturo said. “You can’t have your feet dangling like you have, you need to keep them *in* the saddle’s foot holster.”

A half hour later Evie and Arturo returned to the reserve.

“Do you have to get going?” Arturo asked as he took the reins from both horses.

“Yeah,” Evie regretted slowly. “My housekeeper is probably already on her way.”

- She was having fun with Arturo. He had been so sweet and friendly during their ride.

Plus, it didn’t hurt that he *was* fine or had she mentioned that before. [?] ~~MOKE~~

“‘cause I was thinking,” he started. “That maybe we can go get coffees or something and if you want, I can give you a ride home.”

“Oh, all the way back to *Higher Gates*?” Evie teased.

“I was just messing ~~with you~~,” Arturo ribbed her with his elbow.

“No worries,” Evie said. “I get stuff like that all the time.”

Arturo looked at her and smiled, ~~an~~^{almost} shy, ~~insecure~~^{nervous} smile. “You’re really cute.”

“Yeah, for someone from Higher Gates,” Evie joked. She felt the oddest sensation in her stomach. *No, this could not be happening.*

“I’m going to be direct...” Arturo started.

God, why did Evie’s stomach feel so weird?.

“Would someone like me even have a chance with you?”

“What? What are you even talking about?” Evie tried to play it off and kept her head down. She was feeling so nervous, but to be honest, she died upon hearing Arturo ask such a direct question. Unlike Alex, who had shyly come up from behind her to offer affection, Arturo was front and center, looking right into Evie’s eyes

“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 was dry.

“I don’t know Arturo,” she said softly. She tried hard not to look into his eyes for fear that could read what she was thinking. “I guess you’d have to find out.”

Did she really just say that?

“Oh, I do, do I?” Arturo pursed his lips and then smiled. “Is that a challenge? Well, I *live* for challenges.” And before Evie knew it he lifted her chin towards his mouth and kissed her on the lips.

Evie couldn’t resist. She placed her hands on Arturo’s shoulders and reached up for more. Arturo’s kisses were deep and long, different ^{from} Alex’s who gave short, but gentle, kisses. Evie instantly felt that familiar light headed feeling. As soon as she felt it, she realized it had been a while since she had experienced the sensation. ~~Evie had to admit, she had wondered what Arturo kissed like.~~

“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 mouth.

“I...you didn’t answer my text so I just came by,” Alex started. “Lindsay said you were still here and I thought you’d need a ride home.” He was speaking to Evie, but his eyes were on Arturo.

“Oh, yeah.” Evie ^{tugged} pulled her hair forward and started towards him.

“No, *don’t*.” Alex held his palms out towards Evie, making it very clear that he didn’t want to be touched.

“Alex, wait,” Evie started.

But it was too late. He is already heading back to his truck so he could drive away.

Chapter 19: Text Mex and Other Southwest Catastrophes

It's Over
Nvr mind. SLUT

Excuse me? Did Evie read the message right? Did Alex actually just call her a slut? She read and re-read the text on her cell's screen. She then went through the complete log of message history between her and Alex. How did their relationship shift from "Nite, QT. Thinkin of u" to "*It's Over* Nvr mind SLUT" in just a matter of days?

After she had been picked up from the reserve, Evie had Linday drive her by Alex's house, but his truck wasn't there. He didn't return her phone calls or texts and his cell phone went straight to voice mail. It was clear to Evie, very clear, that he didn't want to talk to her. Perhaps ever.

But now, at nearly 1 AM, she finally got word from Alex. Make that three words and they packed a punch. Then she got angry. The three words packed a passive punch. What, he couldn't say this to her face? He had to *text* it? Raquel was right. She was right. Alex *was* a punk ass.

Evie, of course, was already in bed when she got the text message. And it wasn't like she was sound asleep. She was wide awake. Her mind racing with thoughts on Alex, Arturo, *we* driving test the next day and then back to Alex. But she knew she had to sleep, but her mind wouldn't let her. She closed her eyes in determination, but it seemed hopeless.

Don't think about the test, don't think about him or him, the other one.. Get to sleep. Sleep. You have your driving test tomorrow. The first thing you do is check your mirrors. No, you put on your seat belt. Stop it! You need rest. Fall asleep already!

But of course, Evie couldn't rest or fall asleep.

Arturo, Alex...and then Arturo. Argh.

She turned to her side and hugged her pillow when she heard what sounded like Davey Mitchell's truck rumbling down Camino del Rio. Evie checked the time on her cell phone. It was ^{now} after 1 AM. It *couldn't* be Davey. She got up from her bed and peered through the shutters and yes, it was Davey. He was bringing Raquel home. She saw him drop Raquel off and watched as she snuck around the side of her house.

Evie immediately texted Raquel:

Cn I cme ovr?

To which Raquel replied:

Now?

Evie:

Yes ER

Raquel:

K. Ktch dr.Shh!

Evie threw on on some sweat pants and a hoodie and slipped on her Juicy Couture flojos. She crept downstairs and exited through the side door of the kitchen where she then cut across to the Diaz's backyard. When she entered the Diaz's house through the kitchen, she found Raquel tearing through the refrigerator's freezer.

or
“I totally have the munchies,” Raquel announced. She pulled out two green chili and cheese tamales from Trader Joe’s and popped them in the microwave.

“Raquel,” Evie **moaned** as she pulled up a stool. “You won’t believe it. Alex just texted me. He broke up with me.”

“I thought you guys had already had broken up,” Raquel said nonchalantly. She timed her tamales for five minutes.

“Not officially,” Evie said. She felt her voice starting to crack.

“But I thought you gave him back his necklace,” Raquel said. She took a soda from out of the fridge. “You want one?”

“No,” Evie shook her head. Was Raquel ~~not~~ *overstated* listening to her? “I mean, we never really talked about it,” Evie reminded her. “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 ‘going steady’ do it?” Her fingers gestured quotation marks to emphasize “going steady.”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Evie asked. *Was Raquel ever on her side?*

“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 snapped. “It’s like you’re more interested in your **food**.”

“*Sorry*, Evie.” She unwrapped the corn husks from her tamales and slid them onto a plate. “But I’m starving. Do you mind that I eat something? *It is* my house.”

Evie hated that she was being so *sentida*. Raquel wasn't known as being the compassionate type, but tonight she was downright ~~careless~~ *Thoughtless*.

"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. "Alex caught me."

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

"I was with Arturo," Evie started. "At the reserve, and Alex came by and caught us --"

"Wait, ~~caught you~~ doing *what*?"

Evie pulled her stool closer to the counter. The jack cheese oozing out of the corn masa looked **good**, but of course, she had no appetite. "Nothing really. I mean, we were just kissing, sorta."

"*Just* kissing?" Raquel's mouth dropped. "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 bit into her tamale. "Fuck!" She spat under her breath as she ~~dropped~~ *spat* the steaming *masa* from her mouth to 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 complained. “I fucking burned my tongue. Sheeyat, that was hot. But whatever, go on.”

“We had just started to kiss,” Evie said. “It didn’t seem like we were making out. It was more of a first kiss that got extended play.”

“*Wow,*” Raquel cut a small piece of her tamale with a fork and blew on it 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 you never texted me back,” Evie complained. “I even texted the emergency code.”

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

“Where were you?”

“We were kicking it, at the Hamilton.”

“The Hamilton Hotel?”

“Uh, yeah. Do you know another?”

The Hamilton Hotel was a downtown hotel known for is high transitory turn over. It was a weekly hotel on the poorer stretch Main Street. The ^{of} Hamilton’s ^{w/ a} guest list was a mix of druggies ~~and~~ ex cons and, now, Evie ~~guessed~~ Raquel.

Evie looked at Raquel as she mindlessly scarved down the rest of her tamales and Evie noticed how bad Raquel looked. Not that ‘It’s one am in the morning I’ve been partying all night’ bad, but rather that ‘It’s one am in the morning and I’ve been partying hard for the last year’ bad. Raquel’s skin was flakey and she had two small scabs on the

side of her face. She looked oddly puffy, her face, her fingers. Not necessarily fat, just bloated.

“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 perhaps sick without sounding insulting. “You just look, I don’t know, tired.”

“Well, it’s almost ^{2:00}1:30 in the morning, Evie. And to be honest, so do you. You don’t look so hot, either.” Raquel bit back.

“That’s because I haven’t slept,” Evie got up from her stool. “And I have this driving test tomorrow, I mean, today, and I just know I’m gonna fail. And it’s like everthing is turning to crap.”

“Well, things can’t always go the way we want them in life.”

“Raquel,” Evie raised her voice. “Why are you so negative all the time?”

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

“Okay,” Evie crossed her arms. “I’ll be honest.” She somehow found the courage to say what had been on her mind. “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 amused.

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

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

“It’s a *realistic* observation, Raquel,” Evie said. “An observation that’s making me worried, to be honest.”

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

“Judgmental?” Evie snapped. “I’m not judgmental. I’m concerned Raquel, about people I care about.”

“Yeah, you sure showed it with Alex.”

Ouch ,

Raquel scraped the remaining melted jack cheese from her plate and crammed it into her mouth. “Okay, you want to be so honest?” she asked, her still mouth full. “All things in the clear? Well, I wanna know something, the honest truth.”

“What?” Evie asked.

“What *really* happened between you and Jose in the photo booth, at that Sangro party?”

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

“Well, I’m not. Do you have a problem with it?”

“Yeah,” Evie said. “You know what happened. I told you.”

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

“I *told* you,” Evie’s voice started to rise again. “I saw his flojos and 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 then when Jose saw me, he pulled me in.”

“Pulled you in, huh? And you just couldn’t say no?” Raquel asked suspiciously

“Raquel, *no!*” Evie was now almost shouting. “I didn’t have time to say no! He just pulled me in, like, grabbed me!” She couldn’t believe what Raquel was insinuating!

“The thing is,” Raquel remarked calmly, “is that Alejandra de los Santos doesn’t wear flojos.”

“I *know* she doesn’t but that night she...Jose had bought her some. These red Roxys and —”

“*He* bought her flojos?” Raquel asked.

Just then the kitchen light went on.

“What *is* going on here?!” It was Kitty Diaz, Raquel’s mother, in a terry robe and an eye mask pushed up to her forehead. She was furious as hell. “Evie, what are you doing here? At this hour?!”

“I was just...” Evie started. She hadn’t seen Kitty look so mad in such a long time. We’re talking a long time, like when first discovered **that** Raquel and Evie had stolen () from the supermarket. “Raquel!” Kitty Diaz looked over at Raquel. “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 dryly said, “Thanks a fucking lot, *Evie*.”

Chapter 20

The next morning was Evie's driving test and, of course, there was no way she was going to even make it out of bed, let alone get behind a steering wheel and observe all the rules of the road. Evie had gotten only, at the most, two hours of sleep and she was dead. She had left Raquel's house at nearly two am, but couldn't fall asleep until nearly five in the morning. Her squabble with Raquel added more fodder for her to worry about. How could she possibly sleep thinking how Alex caught her with Arturo, how hot Arturo kissed, how Dee Dee would be moving away, that Raquel actually thinking she came on to Jose and then back to how hot Arturo kissed. God, was she just the worst person in the *whole* world? She was exhausted thinking and worrying about everything and everyone ~~the~~ ~~whole~~ and now here it was, seven in the morning and she was dead tired. She feigned sickie to her mother.

"Oh, you're just nervous," her mother said after she had come in to check on her.

"I'll have Lindsay make you some chamomile. That'll calm your nerves."

"I can't mom. I'm sick," Evie buried her head under her sheets. She didn't want her mom to see that she had been crying all of the morning. "*Please.*"

"But mi'ja, how could you want to miss your test? You've been practicing for months and if you don't go today, it may take some time to reschedule. They have a *I don't know* cancellation policy."

"Mom," Evie whined into her pillow. "Please, I don't care. Just please let me sleep, just call them *please.*"

Evie was in a daze with a headache from **no sleep** and endless crying. In a regular state of mind she would never, ever, even dreamed of missing her driving test. Like her mother said, it was something she had been practicing, and looking forward to, for months.

“Well, okay,” her mother sighed, hesistantly. “I’ll go ahead and call California Driving School, but I don’t’ know. I hope they can take you again soon,” She started to leave Evie’s room. “I had plans to go into factory outlets with Kitty today so I’m not going to be around to take of you.”

“You’re going with Kitty?” Evie’s pulse quickened. Ugh. So *not* good timing.

“Uh, huh,” her mother said. “I’m meeting her after breakfast.”

“Ugh...” Evie moaned into her pillow.

“Evie,” her mother came back and pulled at the sheet that covered her head. “You didn’t dye your hair blue again and are trying to hide it from me, are you?”

“No, no.” Evie said. “I just want to sleep. Please, let me sleep.”

And Evie did sleep. All day. A blissful peaceful sleep void of the worry of boys, and friends, and horses, and traffic regulations. When she awoke the shutters of her room where still closed, but she could tell it had to be at least midday from the brightness that seeped through the wooden slants. She slowly uncurled from her sheets, that were surprisingly damp, ~~she guessed from perspiration~~, and sat up and yawned. Her body felt limp and her head was pounding. She could hear the music from *La Cueva Sucia* on the den’s television downstairs and figured it must be close to one in the afternoon. Lindsay

would be parked on the couch in front of her favorite telenovela. Evie decided to get up and join her. She could cozy up on the couch and drown her sorrows with Lindsay.

But when Evie got to the den, she found it was Sabrina, not Lindsay, who was spread out on the den's brown leather couch.

"What are you doing here?" Evie asked. She didn't mean to sound as accusatory as she sounded, it's just that Sabrina never left her room. Also, Eve was still mad about the comments she overheard Sabrina say about her.

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

"No, I mean, you're usually in your room," Evie said. She flopped down on the matching loveseat. It was a lot smaller and it didn't have the the warm, comfy homemade afghan a' la Lindsay that Sabrina had already hogged for herself.

"And you're usually off with all your friends," Sabrina observed.

And what was that about? Was Sabrina insinuating that Evie was just always off having fun? That she wasn't productive or serious about anything?

"No, I'm not. On Saturday," Evie wanted to clarify. "I usually work at the horse reserve."

There! I do important things just like you, Sabrina.

"Oh, that's right," Sabrina didn't bother to look at Evie and kept her eyes on Leonardo Phillipe who was now pursing a another woman, a woman married to his stepson, who is really his biological son, but who actually used to be a woman, but got a sex change in Brazil. "You're off saving horses or something."

"Where's Lindsay?" Evie was ~~going~~^{tried} to ignore that last comment.

"She went on errands," Sabrina said. "But she should be back soon."

Evie said nothing else as she pretended to be engaged in the soap opera antics of *La Cueva Sucia*. Suddenly Sabrina laughed at joke that ~~Evie~~^{she} didn't understand.

"Why are you even watching this?" Evie looked around for the remote.

~~"Should I be watching something else?"~~ her sister continued to chuckle.

~~"Jeez, what is your problem?"~~ Evie couldn't help but feel defensive. ~~"I'm just asking a question. Where the remote?"~~ Evie asked

"Evie, don't," Sabrina reached for the remote on the coffee table and kept it to herself. "I'm watching this."

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

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

"Why don't you just go up to your room and watch TV there?"

"Because I wanna be in the den," Evie said. "I've been in bed all day. Why don't you go watch TV in your room?"

"Because I want to take advantage that no one is home. I mean, I *thought* no one was home and I just wanna veg out. Why are you even home? I thought you just said that you save horses or something today?"

"I do," Evie said. "But today I was supposed to take my driving test."

"And?"

"I'm sick."

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

"Well, you don't seem sick either, Sabrina," Evie snapped back. "So, shouldn't you be in school? Speaking of which, when *are* you going back to Stanford?"

So who want here to be surrounded
by nuts + idiots?

“I have no idea, Evie,” Sabrina. “Is that a problem?”

“No, I was just wondering,” Evie said.

“You know,” Sabrina tossed the remote to Evie. “Here, it’s yours. I’m done here, thank you.”

She got up from the couch and left the den.

Evie got the remote, grabbed the afghan and lay it over over her. MORE ABOUT HER THOUGHTS ON SABRINA She pointed the remote towards the TV and changed the channel to *TRL Live*. But she was asleep before they even announced the next guest.

Chapter 20

Things seemed back normal at the Gomez house on Sunday morning. Evie’s father has left early for one his bakeries, Sabrina was back to hiding in her bedroom and Evie’s mother was eating a a quarter of an avocado, smeared on a low carb English muffin. Since it was Sunday, she had decided to treat herself. Evie chose to eat cereal.

Evie didn’t find out about Raquel’s problem the usual way. There wasn’t a text from Dee Dee or even one from Raquel herself. She found out that Raquel was going away via her own mother.

“Evie,” her mother started. “I was with Kitty yesterday...”

Evie looked up from her cereal box. Uh oh. Here it comes.

“And I was going to mention it to you last night when I got home, but you were sound asleep on the couch.”

"Uh, ~~huh~~, mention what?" Evie asked. Her mother sounded a little too calm to get ^{if she knew} on Evie for being ^{had been} over at the Diazes at one in the morning.

"Raquel hasn't been feeling well," her mother ^{started} said. "So, Kitty's going to check her into Isla del Mar."

"What?" Evie ~~asked~~. "Isla del Mar?" Evie asked.

Isla del Mar was a hospital on the north east hills of the county, a Spanish styled building that one might often confuse with an early California Mission or, like Villanueva, a five star hotel. Isla was actually a psychiatric center that treated people for addiction or depression. From afar, ^{still Isla looking} it was a beautiful, serene place with lots of oak and palm trees ~~and~~ sometimes the Flojos, she, Raquel, Mondo, Alex and Jose would cram into Mondo's maurader and make their way up the winding road to Isla's faculty parking lot, just to hang out and chill. It had the perfect panoramic view of the city and if you went at night, which they often did, you could see the offshore oil rigs twinkling far away in the distance. But Evie never dreamed that one of their own would be an in patient at Isla.

"Isn't that a little severe?" Evie asked.

"Obviously not," ~~Her~~ mother said. "Kitty said Raquel got another MIP and –"

"What's an MIP?" Evie interrupted.

"She was drunk in public, again. And because she's underage, and because it's not her first time, she could very well do jail time."

"What? Are you serious?" Evie didn't quite believe her mother. "Jail time?"

"Yes," her ~~mother~~ said. "She could end up at the CYA, so it's better she get help at Isla del Mar. Raquel is in some serious trouble," her mother said sternly. "Vicky and