

"Well, to be honest," Evie started. "I didn't even know where you were. You sorta just took off as soon as we got to the party."

"What?" Dee Dee asked between chomping. "No, I (chomp! crunch!) was there. I was just talking to some friends of Fabby's, from San Diego. Evie, I'm sorry. You're (chomp! crunch!) not mad are you?"

"No, no really." And she wasn't, really. She was more upset about what happened between her and Jose.

"Hey, so what's going on with Alejandra? Doesn't she have a boyfriend?"

"Alejandra? She has a lot of boyfriends. Why?"

"Nothing.."

"What? Is there something I'm missing?"

"No," Evie said. "I was just wondering."

"Anyhow," The chomping continued as Dee Dee instantly switched gears. "I'm calling about tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Yes, *tonight*. The Dia de los Muertos dance."

Evie groaned. "Dee Dee, I am dead. I think I'm call in granny and stay home."

"What?" Dee Dee finally stopped eating. "Evie, you promised. I have the costumes and everything. Graciela even made adjustments and took the Frida skirt in just to fit you. Alejandro flaked on me and now you?"

"Alex isn't going?" Of course, it didn't surprise Evie, but she wondered how soon he had talked to Dee Dee.

"No," Dee Dee said. "So you have to come!"

"Oh," Evie put her fist to her forehead. "Lemme think about it." But that was another lie. She just wanted to get off the phone. There was no way she was going to a dance. She had too many issues with ^{to deal} Dee Dee and besides, her feet and eyes were swollen to the **size of Goodyear blimps** ^{There} and wouldn't be back to regular size by that evening.

But Dee Dee didn't give up. "Why don't I come over now and we can --"

"Dee Dee," Evie interrupted. "My phone is about to die." This was, fortunately, true. Evie could see the low battery warning flash.

"Then call me from the land line," Dee Dee suggested.

"I can't. My dad's on," Lie number two. "With business."

"Argh! You make things so difficult." Dee Dee went back to chomping. "Okay, call me back as *soon* as your phone is on. We are *not* done discussing this."

(chomp, crunch!)

When Evie hung up, she thought her head was going to explode. Dee Dee, Alex. ...and worse, Jose. She turned to her side and petted P. Kitty, but even his affectionate purring didn't make her feel better. She couldn't believe she let herself get so out of control in front of Alex ~~and then made it worse by yelling at him.~~ But what was worse? Yelling at Alex or making out with Jose? Well, they didn't technically make out, but she *did* have his tongue in her mouth. Evie curled ^{together} up to her side. How did that even happen? Why, ~~why, why~~, did she even go into the photo booth? Why was she even at the party? How would she even begin to tell Rockell that she was in a photo booth with both Alejandra and Jose?

She sat up in her bed and looked at herself in the closet mirrors. Take good look at

yourself in the mirror. Well, he didn't say closet mirrors.

Evie definitely owed it to Rockell to tell her about what happened with Jose. She leaned over from her bed and grabbed her cordless and started to punch Rockell's number. It seemed strange. Had it been that long since she had called Rockell? Unlike her cell, her cordless didn't have Rockell's number on speed dial and Evie actually had to pause and remember the digits. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of rings, Rockell answered

"What?" It was clear Rockell had Caller ID for both lines.

"Hey," Evie instantly regretted dialing her number. "It's me."

"Yeah, I know," Rockell said. "What do you want?"

Evie took a deep breath. "So, I went out last night,"

"Did you call to share that with me?"

"No, I'm trying to say that I went out last night and I..." Evie suddenly got to a point where she didn't want to continue but knew she had to. "...I saw Jose."

Rockell was silent.

"Rockell," Evie's left leg was twitching like crazy. "I don't wanna be the bearer of bad news, but you gotta listen. Jose was with Alejandra."

"Alejandra who?" Rockell's harsh tone dropped slightly

"De los Santos. They were at La Pantera Negra, in the photo booth."

Rockell let out a long drawn out sigh. "God, Evie, is this what it has come to? You making up stories just to get back at me?"

"Back at you? Why would I wanna get back at you? You're the one who's been mean to me."

"Me? Evie, I have loyalty to my friends. Dee Dee was a bitch to me from day one. And what do you do? Nothing. Not the next day at your mother's brunch and then you show up Monday at school with her? What the hell is that?"

"Rockell," Evie started. "Yeah, I agree. Dee Dee was a bitch that first night, but really, she's been our friend since we were kids and everything just started off wrong. I mean, listen to me."

"You know what? I don't have to listen to you and you know what? I was with Jose last night."

"What, when?" Evie asked.

"It doesn't even matter."

"But that doesn't make sense, Evie said. "I saw him, last night. I talked to him and he was all grabby, even to me. Rockell, he is *so* not cool."

Rockell laughed. "What ~~would you know about cool?~~ You know what" She was not buying it. "I got another call."

"Wait, Rockell." "Bye, Evie."

And with that, Rockell hung up on her.

Evie was stunned. She was too shocked to even get upset. Rockell didn't believe her. She thought she was lying! How could she think that? Rockell was acting as if Evie was an entirely different person. She looked over at herself in the closet mirrors. Maybe she really needed to take a good look at herself?

The phone rang again, startling Evie. She quickly picked it up, but it wasn't Rockell phoning back, as she had hoped.

*He was grabby w/ you?
Exactly what do you
mean to
got?*

"Evelina?" The voice on the other end asked.

"Oh. Hi." Evie was taken off guard. It was her sister, Sabrina

"*Oh. Hi,*" Sabrina mimicked Evie's disappointed tone. "Sorry to let you down."

"No, I just thought you were someone else."

Sabrina sighed. "Yeah, this morning, I wish I was someone else." She sighed again. This time heavier. "Did mom tell you I called?"

"Uh, yeah," Evie suddenly felt badly. Her sister sounded uncharacteristically down. "I've just been busy. Did you know that Dee Dee is back? Did mom mention that?"

"Yeah, she did. That must be nice for you. So, is she around?"

"Who?"

"*Mom.*" Sabrina said.

"Oh, sorry. Um, I don't know. I just woke up. Let me check." Evie held the phone to her side and called out. Sure enough her mother was outside, on the deck. She waited until her mother picked up the cordless and just as Evie was hanging up, she could hear her mother *sooth through* the receiver. "*Ay, what's the problem, mi'ja?*" Her mother *cooed* softly. "What's wrong, *preecious?*"

~~Even~~ after she hung up the upstairs line, Evie could hear, through her opened bedroom window, the compassion in her mother's voice *from the deck outside*. Her mother and Sabrina talked for a long time. Evie wondered what was wrong. Why hadn't her sister just told her? Finally, after what sounded like her mother was finally off the phone, Evie went outside to join her on the deck.

"How's Sabrina?" Evie slid onto a canvas chair. The fabric was warm and felt nice on the back of her legs.

"Oh, she's not doing too good." Her mother was gluing plastic yellow daises to a terra cotta planter that she had painted orange. It had been her latest interest, buying inexpensive pots from Green Thumb, painting them in bold, vivid colors and then lining the rim with plastic do-dads from Michael's Arts and Crafts. If she only knew the kind of planters Graciela had in her home, her mother would die from shame.

of grand

"What happened?" Evie hoped her sister wasn't sick or anything.

"She just had a break up. Remember Robert?"

"Nuh uh." Her sister went on about so many guys that Evie had lost count.

"She had been dating him for the last year." (Her mother looked up from her gluing. MORE)

Her mother glued

The last year? How could Evie's sister have been hanging out with someone for a whole year and Evie not even know? God, was Alex right? Was she that self-absorbed?

"Anyway," her mother continued. "He broke up with her and Sabrina's pretty upset about it. She's coming home next weekend."

"She's coming home?" This was really unlike her sister who claimed to be so involved with so many projects and school activities that she could never leave the Bay Area.

"Yeah, "Her mother looked at her. "But how are you doing this morning, Evelina. Feeling any better?"

"I'm okay," Evie picked at her toe polish. She wasn't ready to have her mother's attention all on her. "But Sabrina's all pretty and popular," she said matter of factly. "She'll be over him soon enough. And what's the use? Boyfriends cheat on you anyway."

"Evie," her mother frowned. "How could can you be so callous? She just lost a really good friend."

"I thought you said he was her boyfriend."

"A boyfriend is a friend."

"No, a friend is a friend," she asserted. "I'm not gonna be making out with my friends."

"Evie, there's more to a romantic relationship than just 'making out'."

Oh, no. Her mother wasn't gonna start talking about her own relationship with her father was she? *Eyeew.*

"Okay," Evie said abruptly. "Is that today's paper?" She looked at the newspaper her mother *had spread out* used to work on. "I wanna look up movie times."

sternly
Her mother looked at her for a moment. "No, it's yesterday's."

Evie knew it was rude to cut her mother off like that. *So* She watched her measure out the plastic daises, making sure each one had a similar distance between each other round the rim of the planter. Why couldn't she just talk to her mother like Sabrina? Or how Dee Dee did? Was she bad with talking to people?

"So," Evie tried slowly. "Were you and dad friends before you started dating?"

Please, just the facts. No details.

"Oh, yeah," her mother replied. "We were very good friends."

"Yeah," Evie started. "It seems like all my so called good friends are mad at me or vice a versa."

"Why? What happened?" Her mother asked.

Before she knew it Evie was telling her mother all that had been going on for the past month. Her own version, of course. **She left out all the references of liquor, pot, the Ojai Valley Inn, the four letter words and topless Sangros.**

"...And then, last night," Evie continued, not taking a breath. "I was just with Alex last night. I mean, at first I was with Dee Dee. Remember we were going to the birthday party? But then Dee Dee really did something uncool and then I saw Jose, at the birthday party, with another girl and he's supposed to be all loyal to Rockell and everything and then he tries to be cute with me and then I got all mad at Alex and ...I dunno. You know what I mean?"

"I think so," Evie's mother looked like her head was spinning. TMI? "So why did you get upset with Alex?"

"He made a promise to me and he broke it."

"Did he have a good reason for breaking it?"

"I dunno," Evie said.

"He didn't explain?" Her mother seemed confused.

"I never asked him, but he never said anything. He sorta doesn't know that I know. I'm not talking to him."

"Evie," her mother started. "That's the first thing about being a good friend. Communication. Only a coward hides behind a veil of silence. You have to give someone a chance to explain. Besides, sometimes we put our friends on pedestals and we expect so

much from them. We have to remember that they're just people. We have to allow them space to make mistakes."

"Yeah, I guess." Evie ~~felt sorta foolish~~. Had she been too harsh on some of her friends?

"But I know you'll figure this out. You're smart that way. That's something you're good at, questionong people and their actions.

"Good at?" Evie never thought she was ~~so~~ good at something. At least, something her parents recognized

"Yes, you're a bit more of a fighter, Her mother said. "I wish I was."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I've just had so many arguments with your your tias and my sisters. They would have all lasted so much longer if one of us hadn't had the courage to take the first step. Like just like last weekend I had an argument with your Aunt Connie."

"And you apologized?" Evie asked. "You took the first step?"

"Uh, not yet." Her mother **looked sheepish** and went to gluing the plastic daises on the planter. "But who do you think I'm making this for?"

* * *

Evie was surprised by the talk she had with her mother. It was one of the best discussions they'd ever had in a long time. In a way, she felt she had taken a chance, if only with her mother, to communicate.

She got to thinking about Alex. It took the threat of Dee Dee just to make her

realize how important he was to her.

Evie felt panicky. She did not want to lose Alex. She had to call him and ~~right~~ away. What had she done lately, but only push him away, over and over again. And he was someone who was really important to her.

She grabbed her cell, but then stopped. Oh, God, what would she say? So many times they talked on the phone, in his truck, during lunch near Juniper's tree, but now she wanted to make sure she said the absolute right thing. (It was harder than she thought.)

Finally she just did it. She speed dialed his number, but unfortunately her call immediately went to voice mail.

"Hey, you've reached Alex. You know what to do at the sound of the beep."

Evie's confidence flailed. She hoped he was really at Sea Street and not just ignoring her call. Should she just hang up or leave a message? She hung up.

Coward.

She called him again.

His line was busy. Most likely his voice mail processing her hang up? Argh! She waited a few seconds and redialed.

"Uh, hi Alex it's me," she started as soon as she heard the beep. "Uh, I guess I didn't know what to do at the sound of the beep, he, he." *Stupid!* "Anyway, that was me who just called a second ago. *Stupid, again!. Of course, he would know it was her. She had only programmed her number in his cell herself.* "Um I'm sorry about last night. Really, that I woke you up and everything. It was so nice of you to pick me up".

Nice? Guys don't like to be called nice. What should she have said? That was so muscular and strong of you to pick me up? "Well, anyway, I'm just calling because I'm

sorry about last night. *Duh! She already said that!* “And I’m hoping you’ll call me back and I --.” Beep.

She was cut off! Too much and too long. Should she call again?

No, she didn’t wanna come off as a stalker. She’d just have to wait until he called her back.

Sigh. ~~Why hadn’t she noticed how great Alex was before?~~ She went over to her bookshelf and got **her yearbook** from last year. She looked up Alex’s photo. He *was* cute, she concluded. Not that she ever thought he was ugly. Then she went to the back cover and found what he’d written.

To the coolest girl I know,

Looking forward to getting to know you better this summer!

He thought she was cool! How had she over looked that? And he had even said that again last night.

God, Evie thought, Alex *would* make for a really great boyfriend, but now he wasn’t even talking to her.

The cordless rang back. *Yes!* She picked it up, right away.

But it was Dee Dee.

“Hey,” Dee Dee asked. “Is your dad finished on the phone?”

“Yeah,” Evie felt defeated. “He’s all done.” It was no use hiding, or even getting a temporary break, from her. *Dee Dee* She was on a roll.

“Good. Okay, now about tonight...”

And before Evie knew it, she agreed to go to the Day of the Dead Dance. Maybe her mother was right and she shouldn't be putting people on pedestals. She had to give people room to make mistakes. But for all Evie knew, it wasn't worth it, fighting with Dee Dee. Besides, she was running out of friends. If anything, it would be better just to get out of the house, rather than sulk around. She could ask Dee Dee about the shell necklace, because that's what you had to with friends -- talk things out. That's what true friendship was all about – **communication and a hand painted terra cotta planter.**

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Later that night when Evie walked in the Villanueva's gym with Dee Dee, she was blown away by all the elaborate decorations for the dance. It was a sensory overload of multicolored papeles picados hanging from the ceiling, sugar skulls and burning incense on every table and bright orange cempazulti (Correct Evie pronunciation: marigolds) were scattered about the floor.

As she and Dee Dee took in the scene, Evie almost forgot, for a minute, that she had been beefing heavy with Dee Dee.

"Wow, I am impressed." Dee Dee looked the gym over. "Look," she nudged Evie. "They even have an altar. A bit rasquache, but still."

The make shift altar was below the gym's scoreboard and made up from a few cafeteria tables, two on the bottom and one on top and draped in dark velour fabric. Dozens of votive candles were lit and placed about with black and white photos, colored photo cubes, bowls of dry food, plates with cooked food were also on the altar -- everything from Spagetti-Os to Greek domas. There was even an old fishing pole layed

out across everything. They were the favorite foods and things a departed one used to enjoy.

Evie had brought a few things to place on the altar. A miniature Dalmatian figurine, in honor of her great grandpa Rudy, who was once a fire captain in Rio Estates, and for her great grandma, Conchita, a piece of pan dulce from her father's bakery. Not the fat free kind, of course. Great grandma Conchita wouldn't be merely rolling over in her grave at such a thing, she'd be doing double twisted rotating backflips.

Evie wondered if Dee Dee had brought anything to offer for her mother. Since she's been back to Rio Estates, neither her or Dee Dee had brought up the subject of her mother's death. Maybe, Evie figured, it was just something Dee Dee didn't want to talk about. She knows she sure wouldn't.

She decided to not ask.

MORE

Evie looked around the gym and sighed to herself. She knew Alex was going to be a no-show, but she was still hoping to hear from him. Hadn't he gotten her message? She pulled her cell out of the little black velvet purse Dee Dee had loaned her (from NAME OF NOVELA) and checked her cell phone. Is this how Dee Dee felt? Waiting and waiting for Rocio to call? Is this what is like to have a boyfriend? ~~No~~ thank you. She put the cell back in her purse and snapped it shut. *Do not check again!*

Dee Dee was right. The clothes Graciela had brought back from Mexico were incredible. Even with a lightly penciled moustache and unibrow, Evie felt festive and a bit glamorous. Her full skirt (from NOVELA!) had a hand embroidered flower motif stitched with sequins. She wore a frilly off the shoulder blouse (NOVELA), lots of

vintage glass beads around her neck (NOVELA) , and a pair of small hoop gold earrings (NOVELA). Who even knows if Frida Kahno actually dressed that way. Maybe she would, if she had her own telenovela on Univision/Telemundo.

Dee Dee's costume was slightly similar to Evie's, minus the unibrow and penciled in moustache. And while Evie's hair was pinned under a dark thick wig with two braids woven on top, Dee Dee's long blonde hair was loose and flowing. *See?* Of course, her whole costume was tight in some parts and showy in others. Would Frida's sister actually have worn red fishnets, a push up bra and so much red lipstick? To Evie, Dee Dee looked more Can Can than Coyacan. (NEED TO MENTION FRIDA'S FAMILY FROM COYACAN.)

"I wonder where Alejandra is," Dee surveyed the gym. "And this great costume of hers."

Yeah," Evie said. *Where was she? In a photo booth w/ Jure?*
"Well," Dee Dee *said*. "Let's go get some pan muerto."

Evie agreed. Anything was better than standing around, wondering where Alejandra was or waiting for Alex's call. She followed Dee Dee toward the refreshment table. "You know," Evie started looked over the breads. They were all shaped (DESCRIBE DEAD BREAD). "All the pan came from my dad's bakery."

"Oh, yeah?" Dee Dee helped herself to a ☐ She took a bite and looked over.
"Hey, check out your dad!"

"What?" Evie followed her eyes. Oh my God. Was that really her father? Dressed as a pirate and arranging dead bread with Ernie and Bobby from the bakery? She discreetly moved toward him.

“Dad!” Evie whispered sternly to her father. “What are *you* doing here? Dressed like that?”

“What am I doing here? What are you talking about? I always bring the pan muerto to the dance. What are you doing here? You never come to the dances.”

“Dad, *please*. When are you leaving?”

“Arg!” Her father adjusted his eye patch and drawled in a pirate voice. “Don’t you be a worry, Miss Evie. Me mates and I are just abandoning ship!”

“Dad!” Evie was horrified.

“Evie,” ~~he~~ was used to her melodrama. “*Calmate*. Joe called in sick and we had to get all this bread here. Plus, I thought it might be fun to get into the spirit.”

“Dad, *please*,” Evie looked around the gym in a panic. “Does anyone know you’re my dad?”

“Hi, Mr. Gomez!” Dee Dee came up from behind. Two other classmates of Evie’s, Steve Cuevas and **Sammy Zoabi**, looked over at Evie’s father, then at Evie.

“Well, they do now.” His eyebrows raised as though to say “Ooops!” He looked at Dee Dee. “Hey there, Dee Dee. Oh, you sure look cute. Who are you supposed to be?”

“Dad,” Evie pleaded. “It’s *not* important. *Please*.”

“Okay, okay. Jeez,” he said. “I remember the times you *wanted* me to stay at school with you. Remember that, Dee Dee? When you two started kindergarten at Rio Real and Evie was crying and crying because she was so scared? Remember she didn’t want me to leave?”

“Oh, yeah,” Dee Dee puckered her lips and made an exaggerated sad face. She looked over at Evie. “~~Oh~~, *poor* Evie!”

“Dad, stop it!” Evie checked to see if any of her classmates were hearing such gory details. “Please, just leave!”

“Okay, okay.” Her father gathered his aluminum trays and finally said goodbye to the girls. Evie finally exhaled.

“You’re too harsh on her dad,” Dee Dee took another bite of her **NAME OF BREAD**. “I think it’s cute the way he wants to help at the dance. I wish my father was more involved with stuff I was into.”

“No, you don’t.” Evie insisted. “Trust me. Besides, it’s not so much about being involved with me. Dia de los Muertos is one of his busiest times of year. He supplies all the dead bread for just about all the celebrations in the area.”

“Well,” Dee Dee smacked her tongue on her front teeth. “Let’s see if they have some champurrado or something. No offense, but this bread’s *dead*.”

“I’ll make *sure* I tell my dad that,” Evie said sarcastically.

Dee Dee took Evie’s arm and they both crossed the gym to look for champurrado “or something.” That’s exactly what they found, *something*.

“**Nasty**,” Dee Dee made a face when she took a sip from her Styrofoam cup. “What is this?”

“The senior class version of champurrado,” Evie quipped dryly. It was more of a watery gruel of corn and chocolate.

Just then, Fabby and her date, Arnie, came up to the table. She was dressed as **Marilyn Monroe and he was James Dean**.

“Oh, you two look *so* cute!” Fabby cried.

“What are you, two?” Arnie looked over Dee Dee and Evie. “A couple of Mexican lesbians?”

“*What?*” Evie said.

“No, tonto!” Dee Dee replied, indignant. “Evie’s Frida and I’m her sister, Cristina.” Dee Dee tilted her head sideways and threw out her hip in a sexy pose. “Can’t you tell?”

“Not really,” Arnie said. “But hey, didn’t Frida hook up with her sister?”

“No,” Fabby slapped his arm. “Quit being stupid.”

“But I saw the movie,” Arnie protested.

“Arnie, *no*.” Fabby eyes looked upward. “Cristina slept with Frida’s *husband*, Diego Rivera. You know who *he* is, right?”

“We had a Diego, but he flaked on us.” Dee Dee was more concerned about her attempt of an accurate **portrayal** rather than reviving scandalous history. “So,” she looked around the gym casually. “Have you guys seen Alejandra? She’s supposed to be Maria Felix or something like that.”



As Dee Dee talked with Fabby and Arnie, Evie looked over and was surprised to see Mondo. He walked by, not even recognizing her. **The last time she had spoken to him was that day he and Jose cornered her by the Boys PE.**

“Hey Mondo,” Evie called out before she knew it.

He turned around. “Oh, hey, Evie.” He looked at her and frowned. “What happened to your hair?”

"Oh," She had forgotten she was wearing a wig. "It's a wig." He was wearing his a standard Trunk Ltd. Tee and baggy cords. "Who are you supposed to be?"

"Who am I suppose to be?" Mondo rolled his eyes. "I'm *supposed to be* making a delivery, but Jose dragged me by here and now he just took off. I gotta get to the westside."

Jose?" Evie looked around. She suddenly felt frightened. What was *he* doing at the dance? He and Rockell *never* came to school functions. Was Rockell with him?

"Yeah," Mondo looked around, annoyed. "He's around somewhere."

"So," Evie asked cautiously. "Have you talked to Alex?"

"Nah," Mondo crumpled his punch cup and tossed it on the floor. The school dance was definitely not his scene.

"Well," Evie said. "I hope you find him."

"Who?"

"Jose."

"Oh, right." Mondo looked past Evie and his eyes lit up. "Ah, there he is. Later, Evie." She brushed by her.

Evie turned around and looked in the direction ^{where} that Mondo was heading. ^{which led to} She saw Jose. He was in the hallway, near the back of the gym's bleachers. Of course, he wasn't in costume, but Alejandra de los Santos, aka Mexican film star, Maria Felix, definitely was. She had on a 1940s style gown that practically molested her body. It was dark green strapless silk number that defined every curve ^{a 16 year} Alejandra could possibly have. ^{The} Her 1940s vintage platforms made her even taller, and her hair, ^{or was that also a wig?} was dark

Alejandra

with perfectly salon styled waves. Jose had his hands clenched around her hips and his head was engrossed into the side of her head.

Evie watched Mondo talk to Jose for a moment, then leave, without Jose ^{He} who went back to sucking the life out of Alejandra's face.

"How long has that been going on?" Evie nudged Dee Dee and looked toward Jose and Alejandra. Fabby and Arnie had danced away into the crowd.

Dee Dee looked over. "What, them talking?" ^{What?"} It was true. Jose had just pulled away and it now looked like they were just merely having a conversation.

"No, them being together."

"What are you talking about?" Dee Dee bobbed her head to the DJ ⁶ Buck's mix and picked at her dead bread. "Alejandra has a boyfriend, actually two of them in Mexico. You know that. They're just talking."

"Dela," Evie said. "Are you blind? No, look, watch them."

"Evie, I'm not gonna watch them all night, hoping to *catch* them doing something. But look at her dress," Dee Dee sniffed. "It's not all that SPANISH. I don't see what the big deal was. Gracie has a lot more better things. Oops," She wiped the crumbs off her blouse (NOVELA)

"Ay! Que chiste!" Natalia who came up behind Dee Dee and squeezed the sides of her waist. "You make a *great* Cristina! Don't be stealing any husbands tonight!"

"Only if they look like frogs," Dee Dee mused in reference to Diego Rivera's so called amphibian-like features.

"Are you going to Fabby's?" Natalia asked. "After the dance?"

"Oh, si. Claro, right Evie?" Dee Dee asked.

But Evie didn't answer. She couldn't take her eyes off of Jose. She was so angry that Jose was getting away with his lying ass. And how could Dee Dee not see, if anything, how incredibly close he was talking to Alejandra? REWRITE ENDING

* * *

Despite her heart being focused on Alex, her anger on Jose and her humility on her embarrassing father (should she go on?) Evie actually had a decent time at the dance.

People thought her costume was really cute and cool. But, ay, poor Dee Dee. All night she had to explain who she was supposed to be and that involved dragging Evie over to reinforce the originality of her costume idea.

Evie ended up dancing, a lot. Once with Auggie Lopez, who was in her Spanish class and twice with Brian Wilcox, who was on the swim club. And of course, all the Sangros danced together, in a circle. Evie suddenly felt she actually had more friends than she thought at Villanueva. It had been so long since she danced. It felt great to let loose.

Finally, before she knew it, DJ Buck announced the last songs for the evening.

And that was fine Evie. She sat on the chair and rubbed her feet.

Allen Lau came up to her. "You not gonna skip the last dance, are you?"

"But my feet are killing me."

"Wow," he lifted his glasses and squinted. "I've never seen you in shoes before."

"Really?"

"No. It's a really weird."

Dee Dee came up to both of them. "So Evie, you wanna get going to ^{Charlene's} dorm? You should come too, Allen. She having an after party."

"How?" Evie asked. Villanueva had a strict policy against get togethers in student housing, no guests after 9 pm, and absolutely no guests of the opposite sex.

"It's on the DL," Dee Dee said knowingly. She tucked some hair behind her left ear. "Oh, no," She touched her left ear lobe. "I lost an earring. Gracie will kill me. I gotta go back in and look for it."

"Are you serious?" Evie asked.

"Yeah, they are the ones from ^{fuego} *El Cuerpo de Deseo.*"

"What kind of store is that?" Allen asked. ^{frowned changed}

"Let me go with you," Evie offered. "Ill help you look."

"No, it's okay," Dee Dee said. "I think it might be in the bathroom. On the counter." She gave Evie her car keys. "Here, wait in the car, if you want. Then we can walk over to Charlene's dorm."

Evie took the keys and headed out to Dee Dee's car, where everyone else had the made the parking lot into one big tailgate party. But these tailgates, being Villanueva ^{and all} High School, belonged to rides worth sixty grand, at least.

"Evie?"

She looked up. It was Rockell.

"Rockell?" Evie couldn't believe it. What was Rockell doing at the dance? She was walking up from the side of her mother's ^{Bmw} car. Her eyes where puffy and bloodshot and she looked horribly somber in her faded jeans and gray sweatshirt in a parking lot full of laughter and colorful costumes.

Evie couldn't believe it. She had no time to think. "What's wrong? Are you okay?"

"No," Rockell admitted. "I'm not okay."

She reached into the inside of her fleece jacket and she pulled out a strip of paper. It was actually photo stock. The strip of pictures from the photo booth at Fabby's birthday party.

Evie's heart dropped.

"You were right," Rockell looked at the photos.

"Rockell..."

"He is such an asshole, Evie."

Evie looked at the photo strip. Sure enough, in living black and white, there was Jose sandwiched between her and Alejandra de los Santos. **Even in the photo you could see the awkwardness in Evie face.** The third and final photo, her eyes looked shocked and disgusted as Jose face was scrunched into the side of hers. It was clear that he had pounced on her and jammed his tongue hard into Evie's mouth.

"I found it in his wallet," Rockell said.

"His wallet?"

"Yeah, what an idiot," Rockell took a drag from her **cigarette**. "He knows we have total access to each other's flow and he leaves *this* in his wallet? I'm sure he gets a kick showing it off to his friends."

He also always owes me money, but I know when he gets his alone.

Had he shown Alex? Oh, God. Evie hoped not. Maybe that's why he hadn't called her.

“When Jose told me he couldn’t hang out tonight,” Rockell continued. “I knew something was going on. Mondo had a pick up from his cousin out on the westside. His cousin is visiting from Humbolt State. You know what I mean?”

“Uh huh.” Everybody knew that Humbolt was known for its hearty harvest of weed.

“And we were all gonna hang out tonight. Me, Mondo and Jose and then Jose just suddenly turned *that* down”

“Yeah,” Evie sighed. “I definitely can see what you mean.”

Rockell leaned against a car and pulled out a cigarette.

“He’s just been doing that a lot lately. Flaking on me last minute and then when you called me—” She didn’t finish.

She got quiet + looked over Evie's shoulder.
Rockell leaned over to hug Evie and her whole body started to tremble with sobs until she looked up and jerked away from Evie.

Evie turned around and saw Jose and Alejandra, coming out of the gym. Jose had his arm around Alejandra’s bare shoulders and Alejandra’s body was turned into Jose’s as they walked slowly to her car. *across the lot toward the dorms* Her fingers played with his dyed black hair.

“Hey,” Rockell called out. “Hey, Jose”

Jose looked up. He immediately yanked his arm off from around Alejandra.

“So, what’s going on?” She threw down her cigarette and put it out with her flojo.

“Whoa, whoa baby.” Jose went toward Rockell. “It’s not what you think.”

“What would I be thinking?” *He asked calmly*

“Uh, I dunno. I just swung by, with Mondo. Have you seen him?”

“Nuh uh.”

This was so unlike Rockell, to be so *calm relaxed*

Rockell looked at Alejandra. “Are st you supposed to be in costume?” She asked Jose, who seemed confused by her *reserved* ~~calm~~ ^{like} behavior. The calm before storm.

“Yeah,” he laughed uncomfortably. I forgot.”

“No, you got it right. She looked at him up and down. “What are you, some trust fund kid? In your 80 dollar vintage rock T? Or the pussy footing liar, lying to his girlfriend so he can sneak out to a school dance so he could get a couple of **cheap feels** from a Sang-ho?”

“What?”

“Excuse me?”

“No, no. Wait, maybe you’re the Daddy’s boy, who has to rely on his best friend to drive him around like his mommy or somehitng because he didn’t pass his driving test for the third time?”

“You told me you couldn’t drive *your car* because of your grades.”

“Oh, and speaking of grades, let you give you a grade in the sex department. An E for Effort, an S for sloppy and T as in Too soon. Always. You better be careful, Alejandra, the way he get excited, he might just dirty that little pretty dress of yours.”

“What?”

Rockell slapped the side of his face. See you around, Jose. And you know what, don't worry about the money you owe me. You can use it," She tugged on his belt band. "For your medical problem, you know."

Rockell takes off into the darkness

MUCH LONGER

Jose was about to follow her, but Alejandra pulled him back. "Just let her cool down." She said. "Really. Just let her go."

Jose looked over at Evie. "You little bitch. You had to go and open your hole, didn't you?"

"Me?" Evie protested. "I didn't say anything. I didn't have to."

"Yeah, right." Jose narrowed his eyes and came right into Evie. She leaned back, as far as she could, into the door of parked car. Wasn't there anyone around to help her? Alejandra was doing jack, but just standing there, fumbling over Rockell's words.

Jose moved closer into Evie. She could feel the anger exuding from his eyes and nostrils. **Soon** the belt buck was actually pressing against her.

"What. The. Fuck. Evie?"

"What?" She faced him back, directly. She tried to sound tough. But inside she was dying.

"You know, somebody's gotta teach you a lesson?"

Evie closed her eyes and braced herself. *Be strong.*

Just then, her ringtone of () rang.

Jose backed up, a bit thrown off.

Her phone rang again.

“Uh,” Evie said nervously. “I gotta get this.” Then quickly, “It’s my dad. He’s here to pick me up.”

At that same time, Dee Dee came out of the gym. She could see Jose, still practically on top of Evie.

“Jose!” She came over to the both of them. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing,” He finally backed off. “She ain’t even worth it.”

“Worth what? What’s the hell’s going on?”

Come on, Alejandra.

Uh, sorry Josito, but I gotta go to a party.”She pulled out her phone.

“Man,” He waved them both aside with his hand.

“I do not need this **hen party.**” He rubbed his hair with both his hands and turned to leave

“Alejandra,” Dee Dee looked over at her. “How could you not do anything?”

“Oh, Dela,” Alejandra was still on her phone. “You are overreacting. He wasn’t going to do anything to Evie. He was just mad.”

“You could have fooled me.” Evie **finally exhaled. Her body was still shaking.**

“Dee Dee asked. “Why was he so mad?”

“Jose pissed cause Rockell found out about him and Alejandra,” Evie told her.

“She was just here.”

“**Rockell?** Was here?”

“Yeah,” Evie got her breath. “Just a minute ago. She just took off.”

“What?” Dee Dee looked at Alejandra. “Is that true? How could you be after someone else boyfriend? Don’t you have enough attention?”

“Dela, I do not *chase* men,” Alejandra sniffed and she patted her hair in place. “I don’t *need* to. But mira, come on, this boring dance is **over**,” She took a hold of Dee Dee’s arm. We’re all going to **Charlene**’s dorm.”

“Not me.” **Dee Dee** pulled away.

“What?” Alejandra laughed uncomfortably. “Why? You gonna go looking for *La Llorona*?”

(¹) **Maybe, I’d rather be with a weeping woman than a cheating one.”**

Alejandra put her hands on her hips. “You know, Dela, do what you want.

I will.

You are so fake, anyway. You think because you lived in DF for a few years that you’re all that? Mi’ja, you got a *long* way to go.” She started to leave.

“Alejandra! Wait.

She actually stopped.

“You’re dress is so ugly!”

stormed off to find Jose.

“I guess you were right about her and Jose.” Dee Dee told Evie after she left. “I just thought they were just talking. That’s what it looked like to me.”

“In a dark corner, behind the bleachers?”

“I dunno. I mean, how would anyone know, right?”

“I did, but I had seen them last night.”

“Last night?” Dee Dee asked. “Donde?”

“At Fabby’s party. In the old photo booth,”

“At La Pantera? Are you serious? Why didn’t you say something last night?”

“I was just too upset. And actually,” Evie thought it was probably just the best time to bring it up. “Can I ask you something?”

“What?”

“Your shell necklace, the one you wore last night? Evie asked. “Who gave it to you?”

“My necklace?” Dee asked. “Nobody. I got it in Veracruz.”

“In Veracruz? Are you serious?”

“Yeah,” Dee Dee said. “Why would I lie?”

“It’s just that it looks exactly like the abalone shell Alex had found for me at Bard Beach. We are at a party there a while ago.”

“At Bard Beach?” Dee Dee raised her eyebrows. “You were at Bard Beach?”

“Yeah, at the abalone farm.”

“Well, no, Alex didn’t give me any necklace. I got mine in Veracruz. They sell them all over the street. But, I’ll have you know,” Dee Dee feigned snobbery. “It’s *not* abalone. It’s mother of pearl and I chose the necklace over the mother of pearl paperweight with the wiggly eyes glued on.”

Evie laughed.

“But what’s the big deal with the necklace?”

“Oh...nothing.”

“Nothing?” Dee Dee was not convinced, but didn’t press. “So,” she looked around the parking lot. “Where do you think Rockell went?”

Evie saw Kitty Diaz's car still parked in the lot. "I think I know where she is. I should go get her."

"Do you want me to go with you?" Dee Dee asked.

"Actually," Evie said. "Yeah."

They started to cross the parking lot and headed toward the quad area.

DESCRIBE. Ironically, it was the same parking lot where Rockell had made Dee Dee huff away just over a month earlier and now here it was. Dee Dee was skipping a party to go find Rockell.

"By the way, that was pretty ballsy of you," Evie told Dee Dee. "Confronting Jose and all."

"Ballsy of me?" Dee Dee said. "What about you going to parties out on Bard Beach? Now *that* takes huevos!"

She suddenly remembered her cell phone. Some had called and she she it wasn't her father. She pulled it out of her purse and saw she had one new voice mail. She clicked on call history, and yes! It was Alex. Finally! But she didn't call him back. Because she and Dee Dee, well, they had more important things to tend to.

* * *

Sure enough, Rockell was at Juniper's Tree.

She was sitting at the foot of the old oak with her legs bent at the knees. Her face was buried in between them. Her body was trembling and she was moaning in anguish.

Evie had never seen her like this. Even Dee Dee seemed horribly uncomfortable by it.

“Hey Rockell,” Evie started towards her. “Are you okay?”

Stupid question.

“No, Evie,” Rockell sobbed. “I’m *not* okay. He mad me look like a fucking fool in front of everyone.”

“Rockell,” Evie said. “You are so not a fool.

“Yes I am!” She sobbed.

“For what?” Evie asked. “Trusting him? Trusting someone you love? He’s the fool, he’s the idiot.”

“But in front of everyone?”

“Everyone? Who? Alejandra? Who is she? Right Dee Dee?”

Rockell looked up. What is she doing here? Shouldn’t you be with Alejandrerrrra?”

“Rockell, I didn’t know anything about that. I knew nothing about Alejandra being with Jose.

“Yeah, right.” *want convinced*

“Rockell,” Evie started. “She’s being serious. She just told off Alejandra so she could be here with you.”

“Yeah, like you really told have Alejandra off.”

“Rockell she did! ~~And~~ Jose too.” Sorta.

Rockell put her head back between her knees. “I’m such an idiot!”

“He’s an asshole, Rockell. You are rid of him.”

But he was my asshole!”

Quiet.

“But do you really need two assholes?”

Rockell laughed but then started crying again.. “Don’t, don’t try to make me laugh in my misery. I *really* loved him.

“Oh, Rockell,” Evie started. “But you know, a true friend wouldn’t have done that to you.”

“But he wasn’t just a friend,” ~~She looked up.~~ “He was my boyfriend.

“Yeah,” Evie went on. “but he wasn’t even *a friend*. You gotta have that respect and trust, *from a friend* right?”

Rockell looked up. Her face was smeared with tears and snot. “What the hell are you talking about.”

“It’s gonna suck now,” Dee Dee said. “But it’s really for the better. Really. You ~~know Rockell.~~” Dee Dee continued.

“Dee Dee,” She looked at her. “Why are you still here?”

“Dee Dee came because she was worried about you. Listen Rockell, neither one of us have to be here we want to be here. And if you’re gonna put on a tough little show, the the greand one you just did for Jose, okay, go ahead. Btu I think we deserve better than that. And if you want to be just left alone...go ahead. I’m tired of trying to figure you out and trying to make right by you.

“Yeah, right? What does she care? She got everything she wants. What does *she* know about losing someone?”

And the minute, Rockell said that. Evie could just see **the look** in her face, a look of horror and regret that she would actually say something like that to Dee Dee.

“Uh,” Rockell mouth was as wide as her eyes. “I mean...”

Dee Dee said
“Rockell, you don’t think I know what it’s like to lose someone? Jeez, Rocky,”

Dee Dee crossed her arms and said sarcastically. “I wish it was *me* who lost a boyfriend. Man, how lucky can you get?”

“Wait, wait, wait,” Evie could feel everything was getting out of hand.

“Dee Dee,” Rockell pleaded “No, I’m sorry. Really. I’m just, I’m just so...” And she started crying again.

It got terribly quiet. So quiet you could hear practically the firefly light up, that is if Rio Estates was in a part of the country where fire flies lived. ... *lit up.*

took a breath
• “Rockell,” Dee Dee calmed down a bit. “You know this is the second time, in my life, that I’ve ever seen you cry.

“The second time?” Rockell asked. Evie wondered what she meant by it too.

“The first time I saw you...”

“Yeah?”

“...was at my mother’s funeral.”

“It was?” Rockell *your mom’s funeral?*

“Yeah,” Dee Dee voice got softer. “I remember, at Santa Clara cemetery. I was sitting with my family and I tried *so* hard not to cry. So hard. I really wanted to be strong for my dad, but when I looked over and saw you, sitting next to your mother and you were all crying and everything, I almost lost it. It really took a lot for me not to cry. I didn’t want to get emotional in front of everyone.”

“Emotional” Evie was perplexed by such a statement. “She was your mother!” She remembered Margaret de LaFuente’s funeral. The crowded mass at Santa Clara

church, followed by the long stream of car procession to the cemetery. She herself sobbed, as much as her mother and sister did, but she now remembered how much Rockell just balled.

"I know," Dee Dee said. "But my dad,. I didn't want to worry him you really don't know how he can be. He gets so lonely easily. I think that's why he married Graciela so quickly."

— one time
How is it with Graciela?" Rockell asked. "I mean, I just met your quickly, at the party."

"She's great," Dee Dee said. "I mean, she's not my mother of course, but I actually like Gracie. I love her, to be honest. We get along great."

"Dee Dee," Rockell said. "I don't know if I ever told you this, but I really, really liked your mother. I mean, she was so cool. Really ahead of her times, you know? Like, I never felt judged, you know what I mean."

"Yeah," Dee Dee said. "I know."

So did Evie. She, herself, knew that her own mother could be harsh on Rockell.

"But you know," Dee Dee said. "I don't like talking about it. I'd rather not think about my mother. I just wanna think happy thoughts."

"But you can still think happy thoughts...about your mother," Evie said. "It doesn't have to be one or the other."

"I guess..."

"You can guess all you want, but I *know*," Evie said. "In Mexico, all the times you celebrated Dia de los Muertos didn't you honor your mother?"

"No," Dee Dee said. "Not really. I really don't want to think about it. I just went to all the ceremonies and stuff."

Rockell started to wipe her tears. "Hey, I have an idea, But you totally have to trust me."

Evie didn't like the "trust" part. But what could she say, after she had just given Rockell her little speech about friends and trust and respect? It was a relief just to see Rockell not crying

"It'll be cool," Rockell got up and wiped her jeans off. "We can all go in my mother's car."

* * *

The Santa Clara Cemetery is located on the north east end of Rio Estates. The grounds are surrounded by condos, a Home Depot and a (). On the far south end of the cemetery is the Santa Clara River, the **namesake of Rio Estates. 15 miles from the Santa Paula mountains and leading out to the ocean. The Santa Clara is always dry, It's one of the oldest cemeteries in the county that still has grave stone, that have been outlawed in the county for some time. But not the stone for Margaret de Lafuente.**

Rockell pulled up at the main gates of Santa Clara cemetery. "When's the last time you've here?" she askd Dee Dee

"Oh my God, it was when I still lived here," Dee Dee said. "I came out once, after the funeral, but then we moved away. I really didn't get a chance to come back, to say goodbye. I guess," she slowly admitted. "I really didn't want to."

DIALOGUE NEEDS WORK

"Well, we don't have to go in," Evie said. Actually, she didn't want to go in. A cemetery near midnight. *Hola?* Hasn't anyone seen *Night of the Living Dead*?

"Actually," Dee Dee looked at the entrance.. "We can't. It's already closed."

Whew.

sarcastic
"You guys," Rockell started. She unbuckled her seat belt and got out of the car. "I got a flashlight."

"A flash light?" Evie eye's followed her. "For what?"

She & Dee Dee got into
Rockell opened the trunk of her mother's car and pulled out the heavy duty flashlight. She turned it on and directed it toward the cemetery's main black wrought iron fence. "We can jump that," she looked it over. "No problem."

gates
"No problem?" Evie said.

"Come on," Rockell insisted. "What's the big deal?" She bent her legs and clasped her hands together. "Come on, Dee Dee, I'll you you a lift."

"Rockell, are you crazy?" Evie cried. "We can't go busting in on some cemetery! 'Specially on Halloween," She looked through the gates. "I'm sure they have extra security tonight for pranks and looters and stuff."

reminded Evie
"It's not Halloween," Rockell said. "It's Dia de los Muertos."

its
Right," Dee Dee nodded.. "El Dia de los Muertos, a time to honor the dead." She lifted up sequined skirt and put her foot in the cup of Rockell's folded hands.

"Dee Dee, what are you doing?" Evie looked down the road. "You're gonna tear your costume. Isn't it from (Novela)?"

Dee Dee, with Rockell's help, hoisted herself to the top of the fence.

"Whoa," Dee Dee wobbled on the thin wrought iron. "It's a little higher than I thought."

Rachel top
"Come on," Said to Evie. Your next."

Dee Dee carefully made her way down the other side.

Rockell looked at Evie. "Do you want help or not?"

"I can get over myself, thank you." Evie said proudly.

Both Evie and Rockell climbed the main gate and met Dee Dee on the other side.

She rubbed the sides of her arms. and looked around.
She did not enjoy being at the cemetery.

"In Mexico," Dee Dee started, "The cemetery is just filled with people, families. I mean flooded with families on Dia de los Muertos"

"That's what I've heard," Evie said as she glanced over at the Children's section.

Nuestra nino por vida. one of the markers read

Evie
"Oh, I couldn't imagine losing my baby," Rockell said.

Rachel
"Yeah," Dee Dee agreed sadly. "Me either."

"Where," Evie asked. "Where is your mom?"

"I think over there, by that tree, that first one," Dee Dee pointed ahead. "Right across from the mausoleum."

The three girls walked on the paved road that circled the inner part of the grounds.

Pinwheels, jack o lanterns, flowers, musical cards.

"I think her marker is right around here." Dee Dee said, but she was wrong.

"Maybe it's over here?" Rockell asked. "Near the faucet?"

"No," Dee Dee said. "I really remember a tree."

"Yeah," Evie said. "Me too."

"What color is it?" Rockell asked.

"What? The tree?"

No, her," Rockell said. "Uh, marker."

"Uh, rock color?" Dee Dee guessed.

"Well, that says a lot."

(1) Rockell" Evie through her a look.

They girls decided to separate. Rockell checked on the other side othe masoleum and Evie went to the far other side of the trees. After a good thirty minutes Evie was getting cold and she was still spooked out.. Looking for a tombstone in the middle of the night?

Suddenly Dee Dee shrieked.

Oh my God! Ay! Dios it's la muerte!

Evie + Rockell
They both run to her.

"I found it!"

Dee Dee knelt to her knees. "Oh, it's so dirty." She wiped the marker. "It is so dirty. I can't, I can't believe it" her voice started to crack. "I can't believe I let my mom's *marker* tombstone get so dirty."

"Dee Dee, you didn't let it get dirty..."

But she wasn't listening.

"Oh, I feel so bad."

What does it say?

The inscription should say read: Daughter, Sister, Mother, Wife, Friend but all this corrotion."Dee Dee tired to chip it off.

Evie felt horribly uncomfortable. Maybe she and Rockell should leave Dee Dee alone?

Dee Dee lay down beside it. She placed her head on the marker. "I remember picking out the inscription. It's so weird. I remembered going to Reardon Mortuary and they are throwing out numbers at you, telling you things like, the extra cushioning is nice and stuff. But that's the last thing you can think about."

"What were you thinking about?"

"At the mortuary?"

"Yeah.

"About my mother how she did this and that.

They reminince.

"Hey," Dee Dee looked over at Evie. "his is the first time tonight I've seen you not checking your phone."

"Oh, yeah." Evie felt embarrassed.

"What was all that about?" Rockell asked.

"I don't know. I've been beefing with Alex. I don't know what's going on."

"I'll tell you what's going on," Dee Dee said "He's in love with you."

"In love with me?"

"It's so obvious. That night after the welcome back party, we went to Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf.

"You didn't go to Sea Street?" *Evie asked.*

"Nuh Uh. He wouldn't take me. We just went to get blendeds and he was so worried he really hurt you. After I hung up with Rocio, he kept going on and on that you were so angry with him and he didn't know what to do. To be honest," she laughed. "It got sorta annoying after awhile."

smiled
"Well," Raquel started slowly. "I have better proof."

"What?"

"Jose told me..."

"Told you what?"

"Nah, it might be too much for you!"

"Tell me!"

grabbed her shoulder + playfully shook her
Okay, okay. He told me that Alex has always had a crush on you."

"What?" Evie couldn't believe it. "And you never told me?"

"Why? You never seemed interested. Besides, I swore to Jose that I would never tell you. But, please I have no loyalty to him now, that's for sure."

"Are you serious?" *Evie asked.*

Yeah, no loyalty at all!" Rockell smiled.

"So what are you gonna do about it chica?" *Me*

Evie tugged at her blonde striped hair under her braided Frida wig and realized it was wasn't just time to return Alex's call, but to really talk to him. "Well, I guess, I'm gonna call him and ~~have a talk.~~"

"Right on!" Rockell said. She looked over at a faucet, near by. Why do they have so many faucets?

(/ For the flowers. /)

“Oh right. Hey, there’s some rags and stuff in the car. We can get them and clean your mom’s marker.”

“Yes! Cool.” *See*

“Over the fence?” *tree*

“I’ll go get them.” *Raquel*

As Evie watched Raquel walk back to the cemetery gate in the dark, she suddenly realized may be Dia de los Muertos, Evie thought, but it was definitely a night of new life for the three friends.

15

RioChica (9:38 PM): Tommorrow I’m doing DP!

ShaggyMA (10:00 PM): I just looked at Surfline. Should be a nice south swell in your neck of the state. Have fun!

RioChica (9:42 PM): Thank you. I will!

It seemed like ages since Evie had been to the beach at Sea Street. Actually, it had only been a few months, but in California, that’s a lifetime.

The early morning marine layer was thick. It was, after all, 5:30 in the morning.

and it would be awhile before the haze would burn off. Though it was Southern California, it was still early in November and there was a chill in the air. Evie had on her favorite Neighborhoodie, the black one with Rio Estates area code, 805, spelled out across it in white felt letters.

She had taken Alex's advice and put on a full wetsuit. Her brand new Heat 3Q Zip by O'Neill. Her father balked at the price, but here it was Sunday morning and Her father looked mighty pleased as they both left the house at 5 am.

"So you finally taking the board out, eh?" He had said to Evie as he got in his *Car* Escalade to head to work.

"Yeah," Evie told him while she waited on the drive way for Dee Dee and Raquel to pick her up. "Im putting your money to use."

(1) Should I get a wet suit for your school books?"

But now she was on the beach, at Sea Street. The ocean was choppy and full of white caps. *Her* The water was choppy, full of white caps. The waves were supposed to be so called beginner waves, baby three footers; as Alex had earlier that morning on the phone after listening to the surf report, but to her they looked threatening and a bit scary.

made The wetsuit fit snug, like a girdle, making her feel like an awkward walrus. Alex had also assured her that she'd appreciate the blubber warmth once she was out in the mid November ocean. Yeah, it was south cali, but it was November.

She had only half of the suit pulled on, up to her waist. The top part was unzipped, hanging down like farmer's overalls. They were all at Sea Street, the golden trio, Evie, Raquel and Dee Dee. She walked over to where Raquel and Dee Dee were

huddled in beach chair. They were

Raquel," Evie asked as she struggled to get the rest of the suit pulled up past her waist and zippered. "Can you help me with this?"

Raquel got up from her beach chair. She was bundled up, head to toe, in multiple layers of clothing. She yanked at Evie's pullover. "You need to take off this raggedly Mexican poncho first."

"It's not a poncho," Evie smirked. "It's a Senor Lopez, vintage."

"What," Dee Dee look over. "J.Lo's father has a clothing line too?"

"Well, whatever you wanna call it," Raquel started matter of factly. "You gotta take it off to put on the rest of your suit."

"But I'm freezing!" Evie chattered her teeth to emphasize her discomfort. Why, did she agree to do DP? She could have just waiting until Spring, sprink break, when it was warm and sunny and in the middle of the day.

She reluctantly pulled off her Senor Lopez, revealing a metallic gold bikini top.

"What is *this*?" Dee Dee eyed Evie.

Okay, so maybe she picked a little bit from the Sangros. Is that so wrong?

"Oh," Evie got sheepish. "I sorta had borrowed it from Charlene and I sorta haven't returned it."

"Yeah," Raquel pulled at top's sides. "And it's just sorta a little baggy."

"Is *is* that bad?" Evie tugged at it.

"Nah," Raquel said. "Don't worry about it. Besides, doesn't cold water cause shrinkage?"

Evie and Dee Dee laughed.

Evie then as quickly as possible, pulled up the rest of her wetsuit and Raquel zipped the back of it. *up*

"I don't know *why* you want to do this," Raquel rubbed the sides of her arms. "It's so friggin' early in the morning."

~~"Yeah," Dee Dee looked out towards the ocean. "And those waves look hairy."~~

"You're right, I don't *have* to do this." Evie looked out toward the Pacific.

"Good!" Raquel zipped her black hoodie all the way up to her chin. "Let's go home. I got a nice warm comforter with my name on it."

"No," Evie **said**. "I mean, I *want* to do this. All the times we went to the beach as kids and I rarely went in passed my waist."

"Yeah," Raquel said. "And what's so wrong with that?"

at the time
"Nothing," Evie started to say. "It's just—"

"Hey," Dee Dee looked over toward the parking lot above them. "Alex is here."

Evie looked up and saw Alex coming down the rocks with his board. Her stomach made flip flops. Yes, they did have her talk with him. Well, sorta. She didn't go into details or ask as many questions as she thought she would. He laughed at her awkward phone message and apologized for his jackuped phone..

"I value our friendship, Evie," he had said.

Friendship? Evie sighed to herself when she heard that.

"So you *did* come early," He met the three of them on the cold sand. "I'm impressed. You've walked your talk."

"Uh, yeah," Evie smirked. "We've been here for, like, an hour".

"Yeah, right," He then looked at Evie. "Hey, your hair."

"Oh, yeah," she **tried to be nonchalant**. Who knows how he would react this time?

"It looks good." He tilted his head and smiled slowly. "It reminds me of . . ."

"What?" Evie asked.

"Nothing."

"No," She said. "Don't do that!"

"I was gonna say," Alex started. "It reminds me of when I first met you. Last year"

"Is that a good thing?" Evie asked.

"Yeah," Alex smiled, his eyes directly in hers. "A very good thing."

Clue: time for Dee Dee and Raquel to disappear.

And yes, they did.

back to their beach chairs

"Come on," Alex led Evie closer to the ocean. "Did you already do your stretches?"

yeah," Evie lied.

+ practiced your pep-ups yes!

Alex stopped when they got to the water. The white foam hit Evie's feet.

Alex stops

He opened his wetsuit's key pocket on the sleeve. "Hey, I got a little something for you."

she was wearing booties

For your first DP."

"Huh?"

He pulled out rubber cord. Bits of abalone shell dangled from it.

Evie couldn't believe it. "Is this the shell, from that night at Bard?" she asked.

"Yeah," Alex held up the necklace. "Cool, right?"

Her heart was beating fast. "I thought you'd given it to Dee Dee."

I dunno,” Evie felt foolish. “I mean, for a while there it seemed as though you were into her.”

“Into Dee Dee?” Alex. Uh, no. “I mean, I wanted to be extra nice to her, if anything because I knew what a good friend she was to you. I mean, I like her and all, but I don’t know, she sorta talks a lot. You’re more kick back.”

“As in flojo?”

“Exactly.”

Okay,” Evie laughed. “I guess you can stop there. ~~She is my friend!~~”

“Yeah, to be honest I wasn’t into the blue hair or that blonde look. I mean, I think you look good anyway. You don’t need anything extra. Except for a wetsuit. Now *that* looks good on you.”

he's neck got pick

“You gotta be kidding.”

“You’re right, I am.”

“What?”

“Just messing.” *I'm just keeping your out.*

“Don’t be mean.”

Evie looked out at the ocean. There was already a line up of short boarders and Evie immediately felt intimidated. Her own board started to slip from under her left arm. It was heavier than she remembered when she had picked it up from Max. Maybe that’s because Alex held on to one end while they carried it out to his truck? After Evie tied her leash to her ankle, she thought of all the things Alex had told her once she got her board out: Paddle hard, *R* cup your hands, long strong strokes, keep your legs together...

Alex hopped on his board and started to paddle out. “Don’t worry, I’ll go slow.”

he said

Evie was a few feet behind him, then she was suddenly a few yards behind him.

She was already *so* tired. Her back and upper arms were beginning to ache. Alex was right. Surfing was hard work. She tried to keep her balance on her board, but it virtually seemed impossible. The ~~darn~~ *the* thing just kept tipping from side to side. Alex had said to expect that with a new board, but this was ridiculous. She could not keep the thing balanced. She was going to slip. She peered ahead. How much farther did she have to paddle?

Alex looked over his shoulder and saw Evie struggling against the white water. He slowed down and, after what seemed eternity, Evie finally caught up to him.

"How are you doing?"

"Uh, okay." Her pride wouldn't let her admit *the* much pain she felt across her back and that she was nearly out of breath.

"Here, let me help you." He firmly placed the top of foot on the nose of her board. He then paddled harder, pulling her and her board behind him. Evie was about to protest, but plain truth was, she was so tired.

"Alex," she finally called out, "I don't think I can do it. I'm not that strong."

"Yes you can! Wait, *but if* are you afraid? Do you wanna skip it?"

Wait Afraid of what? The uncoming waves or stepping into a potential relationship with him? She was sure he meant the former.

"A little. The waves look big."

"They really aren't, but if you are worried, we can go back in," He called back to her. "But I promise, I won't let anything happen to you. Remember! I used to be a life guard!"

Evie couldn't help but laugh to herself.

She paddled harder.

"See! You're getting it!"

Yeah, right! ~~She probably looked like an idiot.~~

she found a rhythm

"How are you doing?" he called out to her. "Blue Crush?"

"Hello?" Evie yelled back. "I am *not* blue!"

Oh, *that's* right!"

And she was right. She wasn't blue, she was very happy. And she wasn't blonde, she was brown. Born Brown, as it said on the package when she re-colored her hair. **Blue and Blonde, the national flag colors of, whatever country had a flag of blonde and blue?**

But what about crush? Okay, **yes**. She was crushing on Alex and it was so nice!

She cautiously turned her head, to look toward the beach. Her board rocked a bit.
No, no, no...steady.

She saw Dee Dee and Raquel on the beach. They must have seen her turn back to look out at them, because they instantly got up from their beach chair, and jumped up and down ~~and~~ *they* waved their arms frantically.

"Go Evie! ¹¹ The yelled at the top of their lungs "Go Gomez!"

Go Gomez? Did she hear right?

"Go Gomez!" She heard Dee Dee and Rockell yell again.

Yes, she did hear right. *She* was putting the Go into Gomez. She was carrying on the family name. ~~Wouldn't her father be proud. But right now, it was were friends who were so proud.~~ They cheered her on. She continued to paddle. Harder. She paddled harder, leaving, what she hoped would be the lagging, lazy Z of her last name behind her

and harder

for good.

W. J. G. H. A. N.