

“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 up on her closet floor based on price, color, or jewels, in that order. *Que Kimora, 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 looked over at the photos. She had just opened Sabrina’s vinyl CD carrier case, a relic before iPod nation took over, and winced at her 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**

“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. Neither 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.”

“Hey, Linds,” Evie started.

“*Si?*” Lindsay tacked the photo of Sabrina and Robert back up on the board.

“I just wanna say I am really sorry about the car accident. I mean, the fender bender. I know you went out of your way to protect me and everthing, and I hope I didn’t get you in too much trouble...”

“No, no,” Lindsay said. “Your mother was okay. But what you did Evelina was very wrong and I am very disappointed in you.”

Evie’s heart sank.

“You shouldn’t lie to me or to anyone. And you cannot break the law. I hope these are not habits that you are picking up and thinking of keeping.”

“No, no,” Evie tried to assure her. “I was just being stupid. It won’t happen again.”

“Okay,” Lindsay said. “I want to believe you. Do not make me out to be a fool.”

“I won’t, promise.” Evie badly about the fender bender and that she was eventually going to have to dole out some dough to pay for other driver’s car, but she felt worse that she had let down Lindsay. She lied to Lindsay and that was just plain shameful.

Lindsay put her hands on her hips and looked over Sabrina’s room one more time. The carpet was vacuumed, the stuffed panda bears were propped against the over stuffed pillows, and the TV remote, as well as Sabrina’s silk peach eye mask, was poised politely on the night table – cozy *cositas* ready to welcome Sabrina when she returned home.

“Well, I think we’re done here,” Lindsay concluded. “Let’s go see if your father needs any help.”

Evie followed her outside to the deck where her father should have been in the midst of barbecuing tri-tip on his new Viking Grange grill.

But when they got to the outside deck, Ruben Gomez had yet to even fire up his new Ultra-Premium. He did, however, look the part of Grill Master Ruben in a Q-tip white chef's hat, practically two feet in height, and a stiff red and white striped apron.

"You are *so* not wearing that," Evie looked her father over disapprovingly as Molesto came **trotting** up towards her.

"Why not?" her father frowned and positioned his hat to peak higher.

Is it even possible to explain the **etiquette of cool** to a middle aged parent?

"Because," Evie leaned over to scratch under Molesto's collar. "It looks lame."

"Lame?" Her father asked.

"Silly."

"I know what lame means." Her father looked at Molesto. "I think he knows Sabrina is coming back today. He's had this energy, excitement, all morning."

At least someone was excited about Sabrina's return.

Evie watched her father take a wire scrub brush to the encrusted grill of his old One Touch Weber. The legs of the grill were rusty and the grill was tar black, charcoal ghosts of BBQs past.

"Why aren't you using your new grill, the Grill Grandioso 3000?" she 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, Senor 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 this. It should be fun, like old times." He looked over at Evie. "Like when we used to go camping, remember?"

"Camping?" Evie squinted her eyes at her father. It was now nearly one in the afternoon, but the sun was blazing. How utterly sweet, **Evie** thought bitterly, it would've been to be out with Alex and then watching Los Olvidados play at the Seaside Park 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 sandy coastline of the beach, making Leo Carillo truly a place in the best of both 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 waterlogged that you'd look like those Californian raisins when you finally came out."

“Dad, we didn’t even camp,” Evie **rumped 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 spend the whole day at the beach together. It was so fun. You and your sister were **inseparable**.”

Evie looked at her father struggling with the Weber grill. It was not getting any cleaner. “Do you even know what you’re 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 she couldn’t help it. She was still annoyed that she had to waste a full day at home, and she placed the blame not only on Sabrina, but also on both her parents.

“Yes, Evie. I do know what I am doing.” Her father didn’t mind her sass. “It’s pretty simple. I just have to get the coals going, which... might...” He read over the bag. “Take 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 over at Lindsay. “Hey, Linds, did you make your salsa? The **verde picante**? It’ll go great with the tri-tip.”

"*Si, si.*" Lindsay brushed some leaves off the chairs with a kitchen towel. "I also made avocado pie, Sabrina's favorite."

"You didn't use any of my mom's organic Rancho Palmillo avocados, did you?" Evie asked as she scratched Molesto's belly.

"Of course not," Lindsay said. "I couldn't if I wanted to. She has those under lock and key, along with all her winning Bunco money."

Before they knew it, Molesto's ears, as if on cue, pricked up and were followed by the purr of Vicki Gomez's Mercedes pulling into the driveway. Molesto rolled over onto his feet and took off for the front yard.

"They got back quick," Lindsay looked at her watch.

Evie got up from her chair, wiped the tortilla chip crumbs off her shorts, and went to the front yard.

"Tell 'em I'll be right there," Evie's father called out as the flames roared to the height of his chest. "I don't think I can leave this... right now."

Evie came around the house just as her sister was getting out of her mother's Saab, but as soon as she saw her sister, she was taken aback. Sabrina, how could you say it nicely, looked really bad. For one thing, Sabrina relished sunshine and poo poed any suntan oil that contained the socially deadly SPF. Now she was pale, almost a sickly white pale, and she was very thin. The dark roots of her blonde hair were an inch deep, exposing a form of laziness that Evie had never known existed within her sister. Evie knew Sabrina would never leave the house, let alone take a trip, looking the way she did. She was one of those girly girls who actually dressed up for travel, in fact, the joke of the

household was that Sabrina's accessories practically had to match the interior of the airlines she was flying, which is why she rarely flew Southwest. She looked horrible in red, blue, and gray.

"Hey, Sabrina..." Evie started as she walked towards her sister. She suddenly felt guilty about the earlier resentment she had felt towards her. Sabrina suddenly looked frail and so alone.

"Hey, Eves." Sabrina's face was flat and emotionless. She clung to the strap of her shoulder bag as if it were a life preserver, and she paid no mind to Molesto, who eagerly vied for her attention.

Evie noticed that their mother didn't pop open the trunk and that there was no luggage in the backseat of the Saab.

"Where's all your stuff?" Evie asked as she awkwardly clutched her right elbow with her left hand.

"I only have my carry-on." Sabrina tugged at her large green suede shoulder bag. "I didn't pack a lot."

"Why not?" Evie asked. "How long are you staying?"

"Evie," Her mother came around the Saab. "Enough with the questions."

"Senorita Sabrina!" Lindsay extended her tanned, wrinkled arms to embrace Sabrina. "Oh, look at you!" She gave Sabrina a long, hard embrace. "*Ay, que flaquita!* Oh, I'll take care of that!"

Sabrina didn't say anything, pretty much resembling a limp, lifeless rag doll.

"I'm going to make my special *fideo* for you," Lindsay chatted excitedly as she took Sabrina's bag and slung it across her own shoulder. "I'll make it with fresh tomatoes from the garden."

"It's really okay," Sabrina mumbled softly.

"Oh, but it won't be a bother."

"But I'm not hungry, Lindsay," Sabrina replied, this time more curtly.

"That's because you haven't had good food," Lindsay said. "Up there at school they don't know everything. But let me —."

"Lindsay!" Sabrina snapped. She rubbed the right side of her temple, hard, as if she was trying to put out a fire under her skin. "Stop it!" she snapped again. "Just *stop* it!"

And indeed everything just stopped. Everything and everyone.

"Oh," Lindsay pulled back from Sabrina. "*Lo siento...*" She turned to Evie's mother for guidance. "I didn't, I..."

Evie looked over at her mother, who immediately went to Lindsay's aid.

"Oh, it's okay," Vicki Gomez tried to assure Lindsay that she was not the cause of Sabrina's upset, but she appeared to still be shaken. "No worries," she said as she went over to Sabrina.

It was unsettling to say the least. Sabrina's disposition was always as sunny as, well, her name, and Evie couldn't recall when she had ever raised her voice to anyone at all, and especially not to Lindsay.

Sabrina bowed her head onto her mother's chest. Her mouth creased downward at the sides, and small tears percolated from the corners of her eyes. Her whole body began to tremble.

"Oh, oh..." Evie's mother said, but she seemed at a loss as what to do. "Lindsay, here," she quickly handed over her own handbag and car keys to her. "I'm going to take Sabrina up to her room." Evie's mother put her arm around Sabrina and led her up to the stone steps and into the house.

"*Si, claro,*" Lindsay took Vicky Gomez's purse and keys. As she watched after Vicki and Sabrina, her face was combination of worry, fear, and confusion.

"What happened?" Evie asked Lindsay as soon as they were inside. "What's wrong with Sabrina?"

"*Yo no se,*" Lindsay confessed. "I never want to make Sabrina upset or make her cry. I would rather die than cause either one of you girls pain."

At that moment, Evie's father, still in his apron and mile high chef's hat, came from around the side of the house.

"Hey," he looked around and found the driveway void of a heart-warming family reunion. "What happened to my little girl?"

Both Lindsay and Evie were too stunned to answer.

Chapter 9

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

The three girls, Evie, Dee Dee, and Raquel had gathered later that afternoon for another impromptu ER/RE! meeting and, again, at Evie's urgency.

As soon as her mother had taken Sabrina upstairs, the barbeque was, of course, off, and the house became oppressively quiet. Lindsay put the food away, and Ruben Gomez's enthusiasm, and chef's hat, came down. Evie took the opportunity to sneak out towards the far west end of the Rio Estates country club golf course, the regular **place** for their ER/RE! meet ups. All three lay flat on their backs, on the meticulously maintained lawn where any passing member might guess them to be just three young girls casually counting clouds or working on their mid-winter tans. Oh, if only 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 exhaled smoke from her flavored 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 as she texted. "It's who broke up with *whom*."

Evie ignored Raquel. "*She* broke up with him."

Dee Dee rolled over on her side to face Evie. "That makes no sense. Then why is she 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 Suprema? She’s like perfect.” Evie was surprised that she would even be cheering for Team Suprema, someone who definitely didn’t need anymore PR work.

“Look, they’d been going out for almost two years.” Raquel thumbs were on fire as she continued typing rapid text. “He was probably bored. Big time.”

“Could you *stop*?” Evie looked over at her fingers and cell phone.

“I’m just giving it to Davey,” Raquel explained. “We were supposed 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. Maybe Sabrina was, like, caught in a tragic love affair with one of her professors or something.” She sat up. “Ooh, and then the wife confronted Sabrina at her sorority house, in front of all her sisters. Oh. *My*. God.”

“*You*,” Evie looked at Dee Dee, “read too many of those **Mexican soap periodicals.**”

“Well, I just don’t get it.” Dee Dee lay back down on the grass. “How could Sabrina leave Stanford and break up with her boyfriend just like that? **I mean, Sabrina is, like, my role model, and, *yo no se*, I’m just surprised, I guess.**”

“I don’t believe you guys.” Evie felt annoyed with Dee Dee and Raquel. She expected better advice from her two ADAs.

“Hey,” Raquel said. “We only know what you tell us, and you’re the one who sent the emergency text. You wanted our opinion on what we think is going on with Sabrina.

It's not our fault you don't agree with what we think." She got a new text and sat up quickly. "*Shit!*"

"*Que pasa?*" Dee Dee looked over at her.

"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 had finally seen who Davey Mitchell was. He had picked up Raquel from school one day in his huge white four-by-four truck (LOCO LFE). 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 the three friends had been at the wrong place at the wrong time. Evie couldn't imagine dating anyone who had an abridged obituary on his truck, and God forbid if Raquel's name got added to Davey's rear window 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 on a Saturday night.

"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 popped fingers. "I *hate* when you do that." She put out her cigarette in patch of dirt. "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 some 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. She was on a fervent texting roll, composing scorned woman payback to Davey.

"It's a rodeo," Dee Dee started to explain. "But a Mexican rodeo, with more synchronized competition, and everyone is dressed in traditional Mexican clothing. It's 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" look. "But wait, how does going to a *charreada* work into your volunteer credit?"

"You got me," Evie shrugged her shoulders. "But I ain't asking. As long as I don't have to clean up at the reserve, it's 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, who I volunteer with, is gonna pick me up," Evie went on to explain. "We're gonna go together."

"If I didn't have to write my essay for Las Patronas, I would definitely invite myself," Dee Dee said. "Charreadas 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 in S.D. so they can go surfing in Baja tomorrow morning. Dawn patrol."

As soon as she spoke, Evie could already sense Dee Dee 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 with me, down in Baja, but I had 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 resented it slightly. 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 over-produced Bunco parties to never notice the craziness Raquel was up to, it 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 the border 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, maybe it's the fact that you're always trying to smuggle tequila in your handbag or pot in your panties."

"Excuse me," Raquel informed Evie. "I do *not* drink tequila. That crap 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 ditched you?" Raquel asked.

"*Not twice*" Evie said.

"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 essay."

"No, but really," Raquel said to Evie. "I'll go with you to this charreada. 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 had been going out with Davey, it seemed like forever since they had any 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 *un* 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 10 Charro, *Claro*

Evie, Raquel, and Ana arrived at the *charreada* just as it was starting. Just about every seat in the small arena was taken up by large Mexican families, rowdy teenagers or glassy eyed men, already drunk on Corona. The walls of the arena were lined with *banderas* in red, white and green, the national colors of the Mexican flag and just about everyone in the bleachers furiously waved additional flags that represented their individual home states of Mexico.

Raquel scanned the bleachers. “Damn, I thought we were going to a rodeo, not some freakin’ *futbol* game. We ain’t never gonna find a seat.”

“Hey, there some space over there,” Ana tilted her chin towards the lower left end of the bottom bleachers. “I’m sure we can fit our asses in.”

Evie followed Ana and Raquel, each of them lugging clear plastic bags of kettle corn and *churritos*, as well as *elotes* slathered in mayonnaise and super sized sodas to wash everything down with.

As soon as she sat down, Raquel looked around and discreetly pulled out a small glass bottle of Jack Daniel's. She poured some into her soda.

Ana eyed the bottle and smiled. "Woman, I like your style."

"You want some?" Raquel asked.

"You bets," Ana answered.

Raquel passed the bottle to her and Evie couldn't help but notice that Ana poured even more J.D. into her own coke.

"Want some Evie?" Ana waved the bottle seductively.

"Uh, no, thanks," Evie **wincd with distaste**. "Whiskey gives me the runs."

"Ah, poor Evie," Raquel feigned sympathy as she took a sip of her drink. "*Lo Sient*. I forgot to purchase some of that fancy Vieve for you."

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

"This is Jessie G from Fontana!" The announcer yelled into the mic. "And if Jessie can stay on Thunder 'til the whistle blows, well, Jessie G. is gonna be going home with his own bottle of tequila! What do you say, *hombres*?!"

Hombres? Where did they find this MC?

"Give *me* the tequila!" Raquel yelled out. She held her Styrofoam cup out towards the arena. "I'm running out!"

The crowd sitting closest to the three girls turned to look at Raquel and laughed.

“I thought you didn’t drink tequila,” Evie reminded Raquel curtly. She knew she was being a buzz kill, but WTF, she didn’t have a buzz and she definitely didn’t want to get popped by security just for being with others trying to get one.

MORE RAQ

Evie checked the time on her her cell phone. She figured they’d have to stay at the *charreada* at least for an hour to get credit.

She also saw that there were no messages from Alex and she wondered if he had already arrived to San Diego. A little text, something, would have been nice.

“Man,” Raquel practically inhaling her drink through her straw. “Check out the *hombres* ‘round here! *Que* fine, right Evie?”

Evie looked around and had to admit that Raquel 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 milling about in their own mariachi inspired duds — bolero jackets and tight fitting pencil pants with silver conchas stitched along the side seams.

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

Evie and Ana looked over. Ana laughed covering her mouth, but Evie was beside herself. The so-called piece of ass belonged to none other than the biggest *nalgón* himself, Arturo.

Evie almost didn’t recognize him at first because he was so out of context. She was used to seeing Arturo at the reserve, cranky and sweaty and wearing a Pendleton and Wranglers and, of course, *those* boots. But tonight he was sorta dressed up in black pants, a black dress shirt and a cowboy hat.

“You’ve gotta be kidding!” Evie laughed at Raquel. “That’s, like, my boss at the reserve.”

“What, are you serious?” Raquel got 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.” She took a larger swig of her Jack Daniel and Coke.

Evie regretted that she had brought Raquel. Not only was she already getting loud and obnoxious, she was gonna make a fool of herself in front of Evie’s “like, boss” from work. She was also getting Ana drunk. Who was gonna drive them home? With all the chaos and confusion that going on with Sabrina, Evie didn’t want to call her mother or father and ask them to pick her up at the rodeo. What *had* happened to Sabrina? Evie wondered. Hmmm...maybe it would be good if she got back home as soon as possible.

Evie turned her head down and away, hoping Arturdo wouldn’t notice her or Ana.

However, Arturdo did see them and waved to over. They both waved back and Evie hoped that would be it. Eye contact made, credit issued. He had told the volunteers that they didn’t have to spend time together as a group, but the less time with *el jefe*, the better. But instead Arturdo, in his black badness, made his way directly towards to them.

“Hey, you two made it,” he actually smiled. “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, as if she were 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 who's been living in Mexico City."

Evie was surprised that he remembered.

"Uh, *no*," Raquel shot Evie a look. "I'm the *other* best friend." She looked back at Arturdo and smiled suggestively. "The *pretty* one, *La Bonita*."

Arturdo looked at her drink and laughed. "You mean the drunk one, *La Boracha*!"

That, Evie had to admit, made her LOL.

"Well it's better than being named Ar-turdo," Raquel said under her breath.

Oh my God. Evie and Ana tried hard contain their giggles. He could *not* hear have that. **It would mean a scheduling and work**

"What did you say?" Arturo asked.

It was then that Evie, Raquel and Ana fought hard to contain their laughter to themselves.

Just then, Josephina, of all people, walked up to them. "Arturo?"

"Ah, Josephina," he turned to face her. He was caught off guard. "You're back already?"

"Yes," Josephina huffed. "Am I interrupting something?" She eyed Evie, Raquel, and Ana coolly.

"Oh," Arturdo suddenly seemed awkward. "You remember Evie and Ana, and this is their friend..."

"Oh, Turo just gave me a pet name, *La Boracha*," Raquel teased.

Josephina looked at Raquel's drink. "Are you drinking?"

"Yeah, you want some?" Raquel held out her cup towards Josephina.

"Uh, no?" Josephina wrinkled her nose. "There are already enough drunks here."

She turned to Arturo. "Turo, I *have* to use a bathroom? I am not about to use the outhouses they have here. Can't you take me somewhere?"

"Somewhere?" Arturdo asked. "We'd have to drive into Moorpark or Camarillo."

"Well, let's go then, anywhere other than here," Josephina looked around and then at Raquel. "There's nothing but *borachos* here." She looked over at Raquel and Ana.

"*Pero querida,*" Arturdo looked at his watch. "We'll miss the *escaramuzas*."

Josephina looked back at him, her eyes demanding.

Arturo looked around and softened his tone. "I don't want you to be uncomfortable. I guess I can take you into Camarillo. We'll find somewhere for you."

"So you gonna leave?" Evie asked. As soon as Arturdo bailed, so could they.
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 Josaphina left the bleachers, Raquel dove in.

"Oh. *My*. God," Raquel **smirked**. "That girl talks like a total val and what's her name again? Horsa-phina? She's a dog!"

Ana almost choked, laughing. "Arturdo and Horsa-phina! Perfect! A match made **in manure. I can't stand either one of them.**"

"And how whipped is that Arturdo?" Raquel observed. "My mack is dry, ay, ay."

“Blah,” Ana waved her hand aside. “He just doesn’t wanna argue with her. She can be pretty high maintenance.”

“Or maybe,” Evie suggested. “He tries to be, like, ‘My Super Sweet Boyfriend.’”

“Please,” Raquel said. “No guy is *that* sweet.”

Evie didn’t have to think for a second. “Alex is.”

“Oh, yeah?” Raquel looked at her. “And where is Prince Charming now? He’s in San Diego probably partying with some surf honeys as we speak.”

Evie didn’t even bother to respond. She knew that was far from the truth. She watched Arturdo and Josephina walk from the grandstand arena towards the exit. She watched him take off his suede jacket and cover Josephina’s **bare shoulders** with it. He rubbed her back slightly. Even though Arturdo was one of her least favorite people, 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 they had actually gone on a date. Yeah, they surfed all the time, or at least they used to, and sometimes they’d split pancakes at Pete’s Breakfast House or a burrito at La Gloria downtown, but those weren’t really dates. Now with her volunteer duties, she wasn’t even able to do those simple things with him and wasn’t like he was making any effort to keep up with the romance he used to initiate.

As soon as she was sure Arturdo had left the arena, Evie was so ready to bail. She really didn’t know what to expect from a *charreada*, but so far, it was just like any other yahoo episode of PBR, chock full o’ of bull riders, barrel wearing clowns, and drunken **drama**. “

“*Vamos a ir, hombres*,” Evie imitated the announcer.

"I *heard* that," Raquel echoed Evie's sentiment. "Just lemme just finish my drink."

"Hey, Eves, you got your learner's permit on you?" Ana tapped the remaining ice from her cup into her mouth. "Maybe you should drive."

"Totally, I'll drive," Evie offered. The night was not going to be such a big loss after all. She was gonna get to practice her driving and Ana had an automatic. Uh, *yes*.

"I don't know about letting Evie drive," Raquel said. "She got in a pile-up a few weeks ago."

"What?" Ana asked. "What do you mean?"

"She doesn't know what she's talking about," Evie insisted. "Besides, between you two stinky *borachas*, I'm the best driver there is between the three of us."

As the girls were getting up to leave, the announcer introduced a new rider and a young girl, dressed in a cream colored Victorian style dress, rode to the center of the ring on a dark carmel colored horse.

Hey," Ana said. "He sorta looks like Chamuco, don't you think?"

"Yeah," Evie agreed as she crammed the last of her *churritos* in her mouth.

"

. Evie didn't know all the different kinds of horse there were, but she remembered Arturo saying something that Chamuco was a draft horse or something. Maybe this horse was the same? She didn't know.

The girl trotted out to the center of ring and tapped the side of her horse with a leather riding crop. The horse instantly lowered his head as his front legs bowed in a courtesy. This, of course, garnered a tremendous applause from the adoring crowd.

“Aw,” Ana clicked her tongue. “He is *so* cute! Wouldn’t you love to have a pony like that, Evie?”

“Yeah,”

Raquel sounded bored as she swirled the ice in her cup. “Okay, I’m ready to go.”

“Wait,” Evie said. “I wanna see more. He reminds me of this one horse at the reserve.”

and the crowd was completely, totally *encantada* with the young rider and her horse.

her horse seemed to have a mind of his own. He started to charge towards the other end of the arena in lightening flash speed. Maybe too much speed? Evie thought. How was petite looking girl going to control a charging horse that was headed straight for a flag covered concrete wall?

“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. Splat!”

Ana was right. The girl was clearly losing control of her horse, who 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 **crazy**?

“Oh, my God,” Evie clenched Ana’s arm as she watched.

The girl was now a few yards away from the wall, 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.

Wow!" Even Raquel was impressed. "That horse is so cool!"

"Well, I'm sure the rider had something to do with it."

Evie continued to watch. All of a sudden she felt this newfound respect for horsemanship. It was pretty amazing. Compared to the horses at the reserve, she felt a bit naive. How could she not have known?

Ana stood up and stretched. "Okay, I'm *so* ready to bail."

"Me tambien," Raquel echoed.

Evie couldn't believe what she had just seen. The horse was beautiful, swift and graceful. Nothing like the horses she had to look after at the reserve. It was like she got to see how horses could be in a different light. No associated with work, after school hours or shoveling up poo.

It was from that night that Evie felt a new respect for what she was doing.

Chapter 11

"Brina?" Evie tapped softly on her sister's bedroom door, but she didn't answer.

She tapped again on the door, but when she heard nothing, not even the hum of the TV or the computer, Evie walked to the end of the hall and into her parents' bedroom.

"Que te molesta, mi 'ja?" her mother asked. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, drying her hair from her morning swim.

Evie sat on the linen chest at the foot of the bed.

"What's wrong with Sabrina?" she asked her mother. "I knocked on her door, but she's not answering. And it was the same thing last night, when I came back from the rodeo."

"She's probably still sleeping," her mother said. "It's still early."

"Early? It's already 9 a.m." It was unusual that Evie would question someone else's sleeping habits. Until Sabrina arrived, she was the sole snoozer of La Familia Gomez.

"She's going through a tough time," her mother sighed as she put a plastic bag over her hair and read the instructions on the box. "It's something we all go through. Heartbreak ...loss." She looked at Evie and smiled. "But your sister is going to be fine. She has so much love around her, how could she not get better? And all she really needs is some good old fashioned Pilates. I'm going to take her with me tonight. Hey, why don't you come?"

"Nuh, uh. *No* way," Evie said. "The only way I'm ever gonna stretch like that is from a hearty nap."

"Evelina!" It was Lindsay calling out.

“God, does there have to be *so* much yelling in this house?” Evie’s mother remarked as she looked up towards the ceiling.

“You better get down there,” her mother said. “It’s Lindsay’s day off, but she came in this morning to help you with your driving. She came just as a favor for you, Evie.”

“I know,” Evie got up slowly.

“Listen,” her mother could sense sadness still clinging to Evie. “Why don’t you practice in my car? Would you like that?”

“Uh,” Evie hesitated. Her mother’s Mercedes? She was *not* about to go there again. “No, it’s okay. I’m sorta used to Lindsay’s car, already. I mean, it’s the only car I’ve been using, besides when I’m with dad and using his.”

Her mother frowned as if she didn’t understand. How could anyone turn down her classic burgundy Benz? “Oh,” she replied. “Well, okay.”

Evie went downstairs to meet Lindsay in the kitchen.

“Are you ready?” Lindsay asked as she took her car keys out of her purse and handed them to Evie.

“Yeah,” Evie took the keys from her. She realized that the last time she had been behind the wheel was that fateful day in her mother’s Mercedes when she had gotten in that (que to lower voice) *accidente*. But today should be different, she hoped. She had Lindsay with her, and she wasn’t going to be distracted by a phone conversation with Dee Dee. Also, it was a Sunday, and according to Lindsay, Jesus and his “protective light” was around a bit more.

“Now,” Lindsay fastened her seat belt after she got in the car with Evie. “What’s the first thing you do?”

Evie reached for the radio dial. “Make sure I got some tasty tunes?”

Lindsay tapped her hand.

“I know, I know,” Evie teased as she checked the rearview mirror and side mirror.

“I make sure all my mirrors are adjusted correctly to my height and for my vision.”

“*Correcto*,” Lindsay pulled down the visor and put on her sunglasses.

Evie slowly backed out of the driveway and onto Camino Real. She felt a little shaky. The memory of that ill-fated Saturday was like damaged *de ja vue*. She just had to relax.

“So, Lindsay,” Evie started. “Have you ever been to a *charro* rodeo?”

“A *charreada*?” Lindsay asked. “*Claro*. We have them all the time in Mexico. My cousins were *escaramuzas*. ”

“Really? What’s that?” Evie turned to ask her.

Lindsay put her hand on the steering wheel. “Keep your eyes on the road, Evie.”

“*Escaramuzas* are team riders, women. A *charrita* is actually a cowgirl.”

“Oh,” Evie said. “I went to one last night and it was *so* cool. They did these tricks-.”

“*Suertes*,” Lindsay interrupted. “They are called *suertes*.”

“Oh, right,” Evie said. “So, hey, how come you’ve never taken me to a *charreada*?”

“Evie, how would I know what might interest you?” Lindsay said. “You are so finicky. One day it’s surfing, and now it’s suddenly horses? What are you going to do now? Trade in your flip flops for *botas*?”

“I’ve *always* been into horses,” Evie claimed. She looked down at her Rainbow flojos. She wasn’t about to trade them in for cowboy boots just yet.

“For today, let’s concentrate on the driving,” Lindsay said. “It’s my day off, but I promised I’d come in this morning to help you. The sooner you learn to drive, the sooner —.” She stopped herself.

“The sooner what?” Evie asked.

“The sooner you get to drive,” Lindsay **replied**.

“No, you were gonna say something else,” Evie said. “Is it about my car? Are my parents gonna get me my Beetle for my birthday? They are, right?”

“Turn here,” Lindsay ignored Evie’s question and pointed to **Calle Boca**.

“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 know what you plan to do.”

“Why?” Evie asked. “So they can speed up and block me?”

The sedan suddenly jumped forward.

“And you don’t need to hit the brake all the time,” Lindsay said. “Keep *both* hands on the steering wheel.

“Oh, I’m *never* gonna get this!” Evie groaned. “I’m 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 Cherry Bomb, I do," Evie said.

"*Cherry Bomb??*" Lindsay looked at her.

"That's what I'm gonna name my car," Evie said.

"Where are you getting this idea that you're getting a car for your birthday?"

"Oh, don't tell me you don't know anything about it," Evie smiled slyly at Lindsay. "But between me and you, Linds—."

"Mi'ja, don't..." Lindsay said. The car stalled.

"Oh, man," **Evie had let the sedan started up the car again.** "I'll never get it."

"You really are doing better," Lindsay said. "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 still so sad."

"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." Lindsay looked at Evie. "It's a sensitive time, and you should try to be extra **nice and helpful.**"

"I *am* nice and helpful," Evie *frowned* at Lindsay. Why was everything thinking she wasn't. **From her counselor to her**

“Okay,” Lindsay leaned over and held the steering wheel again. “You are nice and help, but for now, please, just nicely focus on keeping your eyes on the road.”

Chapter 12

The following week at school, Evie couldn’t think of anything but the charreada.

“You should have been there, Alex,” Evie went on as he drove her to the reserve.

“It was amazing. **The horses were so beautiful. They really are these incredible animals. Did you know that FACT**

not like the old decrepit things I have to clean up after at the reserve.”

“Uh, huh,” Alex said. “You told me. So, I don’t get why you skipped Baja just to be out drinking it up with the girls.”

“I wasn’t drinking it up,” Evie said. “That was Raquel and Ana’s deal. And you know I had to go, to get the credit. It just turned out to be really cool.”

“Well, I’m glad it turned out okay for you,” Alex looked at her and smiled. “It just would have been cool if you had come. We made a bonfire and grilled corn on the cob.”

“We had corn on the cob, at the charreada,” Evie said. “Actually, *elotes*,” she **clarified**, “with mayonnaise and chili powder. Now *those* were good.”

Alex pulled up at the reserve, and Evie felt slightly more enthused about being there. She wanted to find out more about the charreada from Arturdo. How she would ask? But when she reached the stables, Ana had beaten her to the punch with **follow up charro chit-chat**.

“So, did you and Josephina have fun at the charreada?” Ana was in the middle of asking Arturdo, as **Evie walked over to pull out separate flakes of alfalfa and oat hay.**

“Oh, yes,” Arturdo cracked an uncharacteristical smile. “I love charreadas. They have them all the time in Pico Rivera, but I rarely get a chance to get out there. My father is a charro. So are my brothers.”

“And they do all those tricks?” Ana asked.

“They aren’t called tricks,” Evie joined in. “They’re called *suertes*.”

“Right,” Arturdo looked at Evie, slightly surprised. “You know, the Mexican charro was the first cowboy. Not that many people know that.”

“Really?” Ana continued to show interest, and Evie was a little suspicious. It wasn’t like her to be so conversational with Arturdo. “That is *so* cool,” Ana continued. “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 **confessed**. “I 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?” Ana asked.

“Yeah,” Arturdo answered. “I really wanted to go to **Thatcher**.”

“And you left behind your whole family? And all your friends?” Ana asked.

“Whoa,” Arturdo laughed and up held his hand, faking protest. “I didn’t know I was the subject of an in-depth interview. Is this part of your extra credit?”

“No, I was just wondering,” Ana said.

Evie couldn't help but feel a bit curious too. Arturdo was a senior at Thatcher and only a few years older than her and Ana. She couldn't believe that someone would move halfway across the country at such a young age by himself. She loved to surf, but she couldn't imagine moving to, say, Hawaii, just to be closer to some choice waves.

"But come on," Ana tilted her head and smirked at Arturdo. Evie wondered, was she actually flirting. "Don't they have horses in Denver?"

"Of course," Arturdo furrowed his brow at what seemed such a silly question to Evie. Was she flirting? "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 veterinarian school, I'm going need a high school that can give me the best transfer."

"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 helps rehabilitate injured performance horses. If they don't heal, they eventually get euthenized."

"What?" Evie looked over at him, alarmed. "Are you serious? They get killed?"

"Oh, yeah," Arturo said. "Their owners don't think they're as useful if they aren't out performing and making money."

"Wow," Evie **said solemnly**. "I didn't know that."

"Yeah, like Chamuco," Arturo said. "He used to be with the Conejo Drill Team, but now, he's old and blind, so I don't know what's going to happen to him. He is always passed over during our adoption days clinics."

Evie took a deep breath. It was all a bit too much for her. She looked over at Chamuco's stall. He was leaning into his trough, drinking up water. Her heart just broke. Sure Chamuco got frightened easily, and yeah, he was old, but he didn't deserve to be killed. Evie felt horrible, and a knot twisted in her stomach.

"Ar-turrrro!"

It was Josephina calling out for Arturo. Evie was surprised they hadn't heard **her SUV** pull up.

"We're over here," Arturo called out over his shoulder. "**In Blackie's stall.**"

Josephina stood at the doorway in a form-fitting plum colored satin halter dress, beige fishnets that stood out against her tanned legs, and knee-high black leather boots. Her hands on her hips matched the attitude she was about to unleash.

"You're not done yet?" she asked Arturo. Her annoyed tone was less Valley-esque and more demanding. "I thought you made the reservations? At seven?"

"Uh, *hello?*" Arturo teased as he dropped **medicine pills** into the selected buckets.

"Arturo," Josephina checked her **wristwatch**. "It's time to go." She ground her boot heel into the gravel. "I don't want to be late. If we don't get ther on time, we might as well not go at all."

"Josephina," Arturo exhaled. "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 much of a third wheel as she did being in the middle of this **lover's disagreement**. She stayed silent as Arturo and Horsaphina debated whether they would leave on time.

"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.

Arturo turned back to Josephina. "I've got my shirt in my truck. I'll go change really quick."

"Okay, okay," Josephina checked the time again. "But do it quick."

Did all things bitchy have first names that ended in 'A'? What a minute, Evie thought, her given name was Evelina. Never mind.

"I hope I didn't interrupt you guys," Josephina looked at Ana and Evie as Arturo went out to his truck.

"Huh?" Evie asked. "What do you mean?"

"When I walked up," Josephina started. "It's like you guys were in a middle of a conversation? It seems like every time I see you two with Arturo, I am barging in on something."

"No, we were just being silly," Evie felt awkward. The last thing she wanted was Horsaphina **hating her** and then complaining to Arturo. She looked over Horsaphina and assessed damage control. "You look really pretty."

"Oh, yeah," Horsaphina agreed as she smoothed out her dress and adjusted the silver **square shaped bracelet on her other wrist**. "Arturo's taking me to Koi."

"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 smiled 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.

“I can’t believe you’ve never been there,” Josephina said.

Neither Evie nor Ana said anything.

Josephina looked around with an air of disapproval. “Don’t you guys ever get tired of working here?”

“Nuh uh,” Evie said. “Not really.” It seemed odd.

“Me neither,” Ana echoed Evie.

“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.**”

“Oh, I didn’t know that,” Evie said.

No wonder Arturo had been tough on her, Evie thought.

When Arturo re-appeared, Wow. What a difference a nag makes. He had changed from his blue and green Pendleton work shirt to a **grey** button up shirt. His hair was slightly combed back, and Evie noticed the slightest hint of cologne, (**describe**). Did he always wear cologne? Evie hadn't noticed before. She did remember that Alex used to wear cologne (**describe**), at least, for the evenings when the Flojos would all go fancy party crashing or something. Evie sighed to herself. 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*," Arturo started. She was working his last nerve. "There is nothing wrong with my boots." He looked at the ones she was wearing. "You're wearing boots."

"Yes, but mine were, like, four hundred dollars? They're not work boots from Will'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 up. "So, 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.

"But I *did* like the charreada," Evie insisted.

She watched after Arturo and Horsaphina as they headed for his truck. He held the door open as he waited for her to get in the passenger seat, and then went around the front of this truck and got in.

When Arturo's truck finally drove off and were out of sight, Evie excused herself from Ana.

"Man, you better be right back," Ana warned her. "I ain't gonna do all this 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 speed dialed Alex's number. While she waited she thought of Arturo. **He wasn't such a bad guy. So he did come on a little strong at first, just like Alex had figured, but it was pretty cool, no *very* cool that he cared so much about what he did at the reserve. She realized it might be time to take the 'd' out of Arturo's name.**

She got Alex's 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."

Chapter 13 Eves-dropping

The following Saturday evening couldn't come fast enough for Evie. She had spent the whole week looking forward to going *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 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," she reminded him. "I really have only Saturday evening free. I also have to practice my hula **dance** with Dee Dee and Raquel."

"Now that, I'm very excited to see," Alex said. "You know, traditional hula dancers go topless."

Evie slugged him.

"You know, you sure hit me a lot," Alex rubbed his arm. "I could report you for domestic battery."

"And I could report you for perversion."

Alex laughed. "Okay, but listen, so no on surfing, right? Because we *could* do a twilight set. 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**."

"*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. "Whatever you say, cutie."