

Chapter 8

"How was your first day, *mi 'ja*?" Evie's mother asked from the kitchen. She was eating half an avocado sprinkled with chili powder as Evie came into the house with Lindsay. *"Did you"*

Evie had spent only a little over three hours at the SCHR, but her body ached as though she had busted her butt driving cattle for three years. She saw that Alex had called her four times, but she was so tired she didn't call him back. She'd ~~do~~ nearly fallen asleep in Lindsay's car on the way home from the reserve.

"Ugh," All Evie could do was groan to her mother's questions. She went to the fridge and poured herself some Kern's horchata. Would Lindsay ever find the time to make horchata from scratch, like she used to?

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

"We can't use our phones at the reserve," Evie said. "It spooks the horses." She decided to leave out the incident with Chamuco/devil. She still couldn't get the look of pure fright in his eyes out of her head, pure fright *she* had caused.

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

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

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

"What?" *Evie asked*

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

"I know," Evie replied glumly. Hadn't she just worked her ass off all afternoon to make sure it didn't get cancelled? Of course, she knew.

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

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

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

"Mom, I am," Evie told her. "Can't you tell? Look at me, I'm covered in sweat and shit, and I've been slaving away all afternoon."

"Evie," her mother's eyes narrowed in on her. "Do *not* use that language with me."

"Okay, okay, I'm sorry." Evie said. "Can I go now?"

"Yes," her mother looked at her sternly. "Go on."

Evie continued up the stairs. God, the *nerve* ~~of her mother~~. It was like her concern about the party was just for her own sake, just to save face and money. If she wanted the party so friggin' bad, why didn't she just clock in under Evie's name and muck horse poop herself?

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

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

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

"What an asshole," Alex said.

"Totally," Evie agreed as she rubbed a pumice stone across the bottom of her foot. "I'm thinking maybe I should just find a tutor and forget all this volunteer business."

"Oh, ^{but} that could be a major drag. Maybe this guy's just coming on strong at first," Alex guessed. "You know how teachers do that, play the tough guy first and then soften up later."

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

"What do you mean?"

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

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

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

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

"Thanks," Evie answered sarcastically. She could hear Alex's TV. "What are you watching?"

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

"Big boobs," Evie teased.

"Hmmm, I didn't notice..." Alex said. "Oh, Gorby's over, too."

"Oh, yeah?" Evie asked.

"Yeah, we met up today and I was telling him about going down to Baja sometime."

So, Alex *did* want to make their Baja trip into a surf dude weekend.?

"Well, just make sure it's on a weekend that I can go," Evie said.

"Yeah, yeah," Alex said. "Of course."

Just then Evie's call-waiting double beeped, and she saw that it was Dee Dee on the other line.

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

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

Evie clicked over to Dee Dee.

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

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

"But it's all going to be so worth it," Dee Dee insisted. "As soon as you get your GPA up, you can have your party, and your life will be so set."


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

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

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

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

"What?" Evie asked.

"I talked to Rocio today..." Dee Dee said, then paused. Evie figured she was trying to create an air of anticipation. 

"And?" Evie asked. (No such air was created. Dee Dee talked to Rocio every day. Their conversations were far from being "the most exciting news.")

"So guess what?" Dee Dee asked.

"*What* already?!" Evie asked.

"He's ~~thinking of~~ going to college out here," Dee Dee announced. Evie could sense a smile cracking on the other end of the line. *more extreme*

"Wow, really?" Evie asked. "You mean, here in the U.S. or in Cali?"

"Here," Dee Dee said. "~~In~~ California."

"Norcal or So Cal?"

"*Evie*," Dee Dee said. "South Cali, of course. *Que chido*, no?"

"Uh, no," Evie answered. "I mean, right, it's cool." (She was always unsure how to answer questions that ended in 'no.' Were you to say "No" as in "I agree with you," Or ^{use earlier!} "Yes, I agree to your no"?)

"Is he coming out here because of you?" Evie asked.

"^{Evie}Claro, of course," Dee Dee said. "He hasn't ever had any desire to ever leave *La Condesa*. That is, until he met me."

"That is so sweet," Evie said. She wondered if Alex would ever do anything like that for her. Making an abalone shell necklace was one thing, but moving to an entirely different country was another. He did, however, suggest they go to Baja sometime soon, and that was another country, sorta.

"So anyway," Dee Dee continued. "Rocio's coming out to research some schools, and I asked him if he could stay a little longer to make it to your Sixteenera."

"Really?" Evie asked. "He's coming that soon?"

"Uh, huh," Dee Dee said. "He knows all about you. He can't wait for your party."

"Wow." Evie felt flattered. She was getting used to the idea that people she had never even met, from Rocio to all her myspace friends (up to 220!), knew all about Evie aka RioChica805. At least about her party, anyway.

"God, Evie, your party is going to be *tan naco*." Dee Dee continued to make Evie's head swell. "I already know what I'm wearing *and* what I'm going to buy you."

"Really? What are you getting me?"

"I'm not telling you, *tonta*, but you are going to love them."

"*Them?* So it's a plural present?" This would be the first birthday in four years that that Evie would get to share with Dee Dee. As a kid, Dee Dee, or at least her mother,

was known for doing it up with over-the-top, perfectly selected gifts. Not that presents were what a birthday celebration was all about, but *still*.

"Oh," Dee Dee's voice broke up over another call waiting beep. "That's Rocio."

"Of *course*," Evie said. It was always Rocio calling.

"*Andale pues*," Dee Dee said.

"Lates," Evie clicked off.

After Evie hung up with Dee Dee, she realized that the pressure was on. She *had* to bring her GPA up so she could have her Sixteenera. She *had* to. She set the jacuzzi jets to high. The hot water blasted, soothing her muscles. She stank like a horse blanket, her arms ached, and she was still scheduled to practice driving with her father later that evening. And she had yet to check in with Raquel, but when she finally got out of the bath, she was so tired that she fell asleep shortly before dinner and didn't wake up until early the next morning.

Chapter 9

The rest of the week at the SCHR was ridiculously stressful for Evie. Wednesday through ~~Friday~~^{SAT} Alex drove her to SCHR directly after school to work a four-hour shift, followed by an evening of homework, phone calls, approval of new myspace friend requests, IMs, and *Laguna Beach* before, finally, the final good night texting with Alex before going to bed.

Alex: Nite QT.

Evie: Nite ☺

By the beginning of her second week of work, Evie noticed that the palms of her hands felt rough. Now that she was in a relationship with Alex, she had become a card-carrying hand holder. Rough, calloused hands would so not do.

"Hey, didn't Turdo say they kept gloves around here?" Evie asked the Emily Strange Girl, whose real name was ~~Tori~~^{Victoria}. *Victoria - but you can call me Tori*

"Yeah," ~~she~~^{Emily} looked up from watering down the dirt with a hose. "They have some in one of the bins in the shed." Evie rolled the muck bucket towards the supply shed to get a pair of work gloves, but when she entered the structure, she was overpowered by the strong smell of peppermint. She noticed a girl in the shed, reclining casually on the top of three stacked plastic bins. Her legs were crossed at the ankles, as if the supply shed were her very own parlor. Evie often escaped the sharp rays of the winter sun by taking short breaks in the cool shade of the supply shed, so the girl's presence wasn't that alarming.

Evie

She glanced over at the girl. She was wearing tight, high-waisted beige riding pants with black leather riding boots that looked so polished they must have just come right out of the box. The girl also wore a black satin camisole, styled like a corset and fastened with seemingly hundreds of miniature black satin-covered buttons. A single thick gold chain with an amber colored pendant hung around her long brown neck and rested right into her ample cleavage. And Arturo thought that *she* had dressed inappropriately on her first day!

"Hey," Evie said as she started to pass her.

The girl offered a slight smile, but nothing else. Her cigarette, positioned between her thin, delicate fingers, was causing the peppermint smell. Evie knew that Turdo would *flip* if he caught this girl smoking on the grounds, ~~especially in the supply shed~~. She didn't necessarily like playing horse reserve monitor, but she figured she'd clue in a clueless volunteer.

"Oh, hey," Evie started. "You're not supposed to smoke, especially in here. The guy in charge is a complete control freak and will totally get on your case about it."

The girl looked right into Evie's eyes and took another slow drag from her scented cigarette. "The guy in charge?"

"Yeah," Evie pulled out a small plastic bucket from under a pile of wool blankets. She found a pair of suede work gloves and tried them on. Size Sasquatch compared to her small hands, but they would have to do. "Turdo," she smiled. "That's the little name we gave him."

The girl looked at Evie with a blank expression on her face.

Evie laughed to herself. "You haven't met him?"

"Me?" The girl took an even slower pull from her cigarette and smirked. "Oh, yes, I've met him."

Just then, Arturo entered the shed.

"Josephina," he said as he took the cigarette from out of the girl's fingers and held it above her head. "You know better than that. *No* smoking." He then put his arm around the girl's waist, making sure to keep the cigarette high, away from both of them, as he leaned in to kiss her.

No *Way*. This girl had obviously met Arturo and knew him well, *quite* well. *Sheeyat*.

"I know," the girl looked towards Evie. "I was just reprimanded? By this helper?"

Reprimanded? This helper?

The girl ended her sentences as if each were a question, typical San Fernando Valley speak that somehow had made it down the Conejo Grade and into Rio Estates. This Josephina person had obviously been infected with the inflection.

Arturo looked over towards Evie. He hadn't noticed that she was crouched down beside the extra saddles and blankets, trying on work gloves.

"What do you need, Evie?" he demanded. He loosened his embrace around Josephina, and she took back her cigarette.

"Just some gloves." Evie held them up to prove that she wasn't goofing off from work or, worse, trying to snoop on his personal affairs. "I was just on my way to dump the daily load."

The girl's body stiffened as she slithered out of Arturo's arms. "Turo," her tone sounded whiny. "*Cuidado*. You're gonna wrinkle my cami?"

Arturo pulled back. The girl looked at Evie blankly, prompting him to introduce her.

"This is Evie," he told the girl. "She's one of the volunteers from Villanueva."

"Villanueva?" Josephina asked.

"Yeah," Evie said.

The girl studied Evie. "I just met a girl? Who goes to Villanueva?"

"Oh, really?" Evie asked. "Who?" Villanueva had about 300 students, including the resident students, and everyone knew just about everyone else, or at least their second-hand *chisme*. "You probably don't know her?" Josephina guessed. "Dela? Dela de LaFuentes?"

"Dela?" Evie said. "You mean Dee Dee? She's like my best friend. How do you know her?"

"You're *Dela's* bestfriend?" The girl's dark eyes widened. "I would have never imagined that."

"Uh, yeah," Evie said. "We've been best friends since we were little kids. Even when she lived in Mexico City, we were tight."

Not quite the truth, but Evie felt as though she had to prove to this girl, whom she now deemed snooty, that Dee Dee was, indeed, a very, very dear friend, her ADA.

"I just met Dela," she said as she held out her hand. "I'm Josephina? From Las Hermanas Senior Committee?"

Dee Dee had mentioned the Las Hermanas Senior committee to both Evie and Raquel. The committee was made up of high school seniors who had a small say as to whom would be selected as a new Hermana for the incoming year. Dee Dee had the best

resume possible, but it always helped to have a good connection. Could Josephina possibly be one for Dee Dee?

"Oh, right," Evie nodded and shook Josephina's hand. She had forgotten to remove the oversized work glove and felt like a big, clumsy bear mauling a delicate fawn. She wasn't used to an introduction followed with a handshake, unless it was with *an* adult. Had she committed a major faux-pas by leaving the glove on? Oh, she hoped it didn't lose points for Dee Dee.

"Are you a volunteer, too?" Evie asked.

"Hardly?" Josephina frowned. "I keep my horse here?" She lifted her chin in the direction of one of the back stables. "Princesa? She's mine."

"Oh," Evie looked over in the same direction. "I know Princesa, or at least what comes *out* of her." Evie laughed, but Josephina's face didn't crack a crease.

"No, but really Princesa is sweet," Evie felt stupid saying such a thing. Was commenting on a pet's poop just as bad as telling a parent that his or her child was ugly?

Just then, Tori poked her head in the supply shed

"*Evie*," she huffed in annoyance. "The wheelbarrow is still out here. You haven't dumped it yet?"

"I was just about to," Evie slid past Arturo and Josephina and walked towards the wheelbarrow.

"Tori," Arturo started. "Why don't both you and Evie do it so we can all get out of here quicker?"

"But Evie was gonna do it," Tori protested.

“Just help her,” Arturo said. “It’s getting late, and I promised to take Josephina to the pier before the sun sets.”

Tori took a hold of the wheelbarrow. “Come on, *Evie*.”

Evie and Tori headed towards the manure pile.

“Who *was* that?” Tori asked.

“I guess Arturo’s girlfriend.”

“Oh, I thought it was one of your fancy ass friends from your fancy ass school.”

“*None* of my friends look, act, or dress like that,” Evie insisted.

“She looks like she was about to go hunting with the hounds...but forgot to change out of her Victoria Secret nightie,” Tori laughed. “What’s her name?”

“Josephina,” Evie said. “Josephin-*a*.”

Evie thought of the Sangros – Alejandra, Xiomara, Fabiola and Natalia. Did all things flashy and bitchy have first names that ended in ‘A’? What a minute, Evie’s given name was Evelina and Tori was actually Victoria. Oh, never mind!

Chapter 10

When Evie woke up on that first Saturday in February, ^{The} ~~her~~ ^{in her} inner Flojo just wanted an afternoon devoted to complete chill. She had worked a full three weeks at the SCHR and she still had to go a fundraiser for the reserve later that night. Yes, chill was in order. She lay in her bed blissfully devoid of duties or obligation. Nothing would get her out of bed, nothing, except maybe the call of Sea Street. And sure enough, Alex's text beckoned her.

C st?

To which she texted back.

Rdy in 20.

It had been too long since she and Alex had gone surfing, and there was no way she was going to miss out on some choice waves this Saturday. She slowly got out of bed, slipped on her Sanuk Fur Real flojos, and looked for her bathing suit. No doubt she'd also have to wear her full-length winter wetsuit, but once she got out of the water, she liked to peel her suit down to her waist so she could brown her shoulders and belly. No matter what time of the year, it was mandatory she stayed tan. How could you be a surfer girl and not look like one?

"Lindsay," she called out as she dug to the bottom of her wicker hamper. "Have you seen my bikini top? The light blue Roxy?"

"I can't hear you when you yell like that!" Lindsay yelled from the kitchen.

"My bathing suit?" Evie called out from her bedroom's doorway. "The blue one. Have you seen it?"

"No, Evelina," Lindsay answered back from the kitchen. "Are you going for a swim? Because maybe you should wait, the pool man was here this morning and it's still filtering."

"No, I'm gonna go surfing with Alex!" Evie yelled out again. "He's gonna pick me up in a bit."

"Evie, you can't go to the beach," Lindsay was now coming up the stairs, drying her hands with a kitchen towel. "Sabrina is coming home today."

"I know," Evie went back into her room. She gave up on her hamper and looked around her bathroom floor. Where there once was bikini tops and towels covered with sand, were now jeans and tennis shoes embedded with mud, straw, and bits of hay. "But not until later today, right?"

"Si," Lindsay said, "but your mother wanted you to stick around, just in case."

"Just in case of what?" Evie didn't want to waste time looking for her blue suit. Alex was on his way. She grabbed her lime green one from the top drawer of her dresser.

"I don't know, Evelina," Lindsay said. "You should ask her."

"Are you serious?" Evie looked at Lindsay in disbelief. "She wants me to stay home *all day*?"

"I think so," Lindsay said. "But you should really ask her."

Evie marched downstairs and found her mother out on the deck with her father.

"Mom," Evie started. "Lindsay just told me that I have to stick around home today. Is that true?"

Her mother looked up from the deck chair to which she was tying a green seat cushion. "What was all that yelling going on inside the house?" she asked.

"Nothing," Evie said. *Don't try to change the subject.* "So do I have to stay home today?"

"Yes," her mother answered. "I'm going to pick your sister up at the airport, and I need you to be here when we get back. Your father is barbequing."

"Right," Evie still didn't see the necessity to stay home *all* day. "So, I'm gonna leave with Alex right now, and I can make sure I'm home by... three? Is that a good time?"

"Evie, no," her mother started to tie cushion to another chair. "I need you to be here. Besides, you won't be here tonight, right? You have that fundraiser."

"Yeah, but that's not until later, like at seven," Evie pointed out. "I could be here a whole four hours, just for Sabrina." She looked at her cell phone. T minus 10 minutes until Alex arrived.

"Evie, stop it," her mother said sternly. "Sabrina isn't feeling well, and I don't want her coming home to an empty house. You are her sister. You need to be here."

Was it just Evie, or was her whole family getting a little too *sentida* over Sabrina's break up with what's-his-name?

"Mom," Evie whined. "I've had to work for the last three weeks, and I have to go to the work thing tonight. This is my only day off, and I haven't gone to the beach in, like, forever."

"Evie," her father threw her a serious look. "You are not going anywhere today, and you shouldn't even be making plans without asking me or your mother. You need to consult us if you are planning a whole day at the beach."

Consult? When did her father start talking like that? Obviously, he had been spending way too much time with her mother.

"So, you're basically saying I can't go with Alex," Evie started, "even though he's already on his way over here?"

Evie's mother threw her a deep, hard look that clearly didn't need a vocalized answer.

"Well," Evie grumbled as she flipped open her cell phone. "I *guess* I better text him. Hopefully he hasn't left yet."

"I have a better idea," her mother suggested. "Why don't you call him? Have you ever tried *that*?"

Evie: Cnt go. Mom OTR. Cll me l8r?

Alex: Bmr. Ttyl.

- TTYS

Evie stomped up to her room, tossed her cell phone onto a pile of dirty horse reserve clothes, and fell onto her bed. *Grrr!* Sabrina was a family member, not some VIP that deserved a U.N. welcoming committee. *recently* She sat up, grabbed her remote from on the nightstand, and pointed it at her CD player. She cranked up Moz and called Raquel.

"*Ee*-yes?" Raquel answered.

"I hate my mother," Evie announced.

"Are you calling me for sympathy or to plot her demise? Because if it's the latter, you best take a number. I still gotta take care of my own mom."

"Don't tempt me," Evie said. "My mom is totally on my case."

"When is she not?"

"I have to stay home all day," Evie complained. "This is like my one free day in, like, forever, and now I have to stick around just to wait for Sabrina. I totally wanted to go surfing with Alex."

"If you wanted to go surfing so badly, maybe you should've gotten up earlier," Raquel teased. "Isn't that what real surfers do? What is it called? Yawn patrol?"

"Dawn patrol," Evie corrected. "And you are *so* not advising me." She clicked off Moz, who was depressing her even more, and switched to Go Betty Go. "If I wasn't working at the reserve all week, it wouldn't be such a big deal."

"Why are you working at that horse place so much?" Raquel asked.

"Vasquez-Reyes Alarcon," Evie sighed, referring to her civics teacher. "He wants me to put in at least fifteen hours a week."

"That's rickulous!" Raquel.

. "What's rickulous?" Evie asked.

"It's like ridiculous, but more hardcore."

Evie laughed. "But seriously, I don't know why everyone is making it so difficult for me to do better. And speaking of rickulous, that guy, Turdo, the one I was telling you about? He's still treating me like such a doormat at the reserve. He makes fun of me in front of all the other volunteers and has me do all the dirty work."

"Sounds like sexual tension to me," Raquel mused.

"Please, the thought of Turdo in any intimate setting is just too repulsive." Evie clicked off her CD player. She realized that she was not in the mood for any music. "So do you wanna stop by and say hi to Suprema later?"

"Nah," Raquel said. "I mean I'd like to, but Davey's gonna pick me up."

"Weren't you just with him last night?" Evie asked.

"Si, *tia*," Raquel stretched, "but Los Olvidados are playing the street fair."

"The street fair?" Evie asked. "At Sea Street? I thought that was next weekend."

"Nuh, uh," Raquel said. "It's today. Didn't Alex tell you?"

"No, he didn't tell me. Not yet." Evie instantly felt left out. "How could her own boyfriend not tell her that one of her favorite bands was playing a local street fair, a street fair near Sea Street, *their* place?"

"Well, when was he gonna tell you?" Raquel asked. "It starts in a couple of hours. In fact, I better get going. Davey's gonna be here any minute, and I've ~~still~~ gotta shower and shampoo. She yawned. "Angelina's still gotta give me a bikini wax."

"You have your *housekeeper* wax you?" Evie exclaimed. "~~Oh, man~~, that is *so* not right."

Raquel laughed. "Ha, I'm just messing with you." She yawned again. "Oh, man, Davey and I got so lit last night. You know, I think I'm getting my tolerance up. I was able to pound a six-pack away last night."

"And that's something to be proud of?" Evie asked.

"Uh, *yeah*," Raquel said as if Evie should know better. ["So, how long is Suprema gonna visit?"

"You know, I have no idea," Evie said. "Everyone keeps saying 'for a while' and I have no idea what 'a while' means."


"Well, I hope she's still here by the time you have your party," Raquel said. "Wait until she finds out about all the free ad-bevs I hooked up for your party."

"God, Raquel, you have such a one track mind lately," Evie frowned. "My party isn't until the end of this month and she'll be back at school by then. Besides, Sabrina's not the party type. You know that."

"Are you kidding me?" Raquel asked. "All those sorority girls play it off like they're all these good little school girls, but not even. One time, I was with Jose, and we went to some frat party over at UC Santa Barbara, and there were all these sorority girls there. They all had fake IDs and oh, my God, they were like the total slutty boozers of the whole party."

"Are you saying my sister is a boozing slut?"

"No," Raquel said, "I said she *might* be a slutty *booz*er. Big difference."


"E-ve-liiina..."

It was Lindsay calling down the hall from Sabrina's bedroom.

"Hold on." Evie put her bedroom landline to her chest. "*Que quieres*, Lindsay?"

"Can you help me?" Lindsay called out. "Your mother and sister are coming back soon, and I'm trying to get Sabrina's room ready."

"My mother already left?" Evie asked.

"Yes, to the airport, to get Sabrina."

"Then she won't be back for a few hours," Evie called back. LAX, the Los Angeles International Airport, was a good three hour roundtrip journey between Rio Estates and Los Angeles.

~~"No," Lindsay said. "She's picking her up at the Santa Barbara airport."~~

"Santa Barbara?" It was unusual that Sabrina would fly into Santa Barbara, a small commuter airport used primarily by jet-setting UC Santa Barbara students, Silicon Valley businessmen, or maybe Oprah, who evidently had a house in nearby Montecito. Santa Barbara airport was only twenty-five minutes from their home. Her mother would be back soon. "Why is she picking her up there?"

"Hel-looo?" Evie could hear Raquel on the other end of the landline.

Evie brought the receiver back to her ear. "Oops, sorry."

"Did you call to talk to me or to Lindsay?" Raquel asked.

"Hey, I better call you later," Evie told Raquel. "I gotta go."

"Uh, I figured that," Raquel said before clicking off.

Evie got up from her bed to help Lindsay.

"So, how long is Sabrina gonna visit?" she asked as she walked into Sabrina's bedroom. Lindsay smoothing out the cream-colored comforter that lay on top of Sabrina's queen-sized bed.

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

Evie looked around her sister's bedroom. Sabrina kept everything in impeccable order. Her room was so tidy and in tiptop tight shape that you could practically bounce a quarter off the whole space -- whereas Evie's bedroom was constantly under construction. She did, however, pride herself in the orderly fashion she maintained with

her flojos. Three rows of flojos (seventeen pairs in all) were lined up on her closet floor. The first row contained the flojos with the heftiest price tag, the second row (the shortest row) was all about comfort, and the third row contained flojos with jewels glittering from the straps. *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 onto 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 sister's taste in music. From Classical Piano to World Music, Sabrina listened to ugh-dult music. How could she and Evie possibly be related?

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

"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."

"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 everything, and I hope I didn't get you in too much trouble..."

"No, no," Lindsay said. "Your mother didn't have any idea what happened, and she's said nothing to me since that day. But what you did was very wrong, and I am very disappointed in you."

Evie's heart sank.

"You shouldn't lie to me or to anyone, Evelina. I hope these are not habits that you are picking up and thinking of keeping."

"No, no," Evie said. "I was just being stupid. It won't happen again." Evie's stomach twisted with guilt -- she felt badly about the fender bender and that she was gonna have to dole out some b-day dough to pay for it, but she felt even worse that she had let down Lindsay. She had lied to her, and that was just plain shameful.

"Okay," Lindsay looked at her. "I want to believe you. Do not make me out to be a fool."

"I won't. Promise."

Lindsay put her hands on her ample hips and looked over Sabrina's room one more time. The carpet was vacuumed, and her stuffed chenille teddy bear hand sewn by Grandma Cuca was propped against the over-stuffed pillows. The TV remote and Sabrina's silk eye mask were poised politely on the night table -- familiar *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 an experienced Grill Master. He wore a Q-tip white chef's hat that perked practically two feet in height from his head 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 presentation to a middle-aged parent?

"Nevermind," Evie leaned over to scratch under Molesto's collar.

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

Was Evie the only one who *wasn't* excited for Suprema's homecoming?

She watched her father take a wire scrub brush to the encrusted grill of his old One Touch Weber. The rickety legs of the Weber 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 as she took a seat on a deck chair and helped herself to some white corn 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," 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 and the sun was blazing. How utterly cool it would've been to be surfing with Alex and then watching Los Olvidados play at the Seaside Park street fair. Stupid Sabrina, her little meltdown 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. Depending on what side of the highway you were on, Leo Carillo truly offered the best of both worlds. 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 looked like those Californian raisins when you finally came out."

"Dad," Evie pressed her lips together. "We slept in the Vacationeer, and half the time mom would get so annoyed with all the 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 confined to Camp Gomez.)

"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 the instructions from 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, and Evie obliged.

"I'm not quite sure. You might want to ask your mother." Her father added more lighter fluid to the coals and then re-read the charcoal bag. "You know, we might be eating a little later than planned. 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 off a few scattered eucalyptus leaves from the deck 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.)

"Ay, no," Lindsay said. "I couldn't if I wanted to. She keeps her avos under lock and key with her Bunco winnings."

Molesto's ears suddenly pricked up and, as if on cue, the purr of Vicki Gomez's Mercedes followed. He rolled over onto his feet and took off towards the drive way.

"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 towards the front yard.

"Tell 'em I'll be right there," Evie's father called out as the flames from the grill roared higher. "I don't think I can leave this... right now."

Evie came around the house and got to the driveway just as her sister was getting out of her mother's Mercedes. She was immediately taken aback by her sister's appearance. Sabrina looked different, *very* different. For one thing, Sabrina worshiped sunshine like Evie. She poo-pooed any suntan oil that contained the socially deadly SPF. But now Sabrina was pale, almost a pasty white pale. The dark roots of her blonde hair were practically an inch deep and exposed a form of laziness that Evie had never known existed within her sister. The Sabrina that Evie knew would never walk out the front door of her sorority house, let alone take a trip, looking the way she did. She was one of those fashion femmes who *had* to make sure that her sunglasses matched her toe polish ^{over} before making a midnight run to the 7-11.

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

"Hey, Eves," Sabrina said. She clung to the strap of her shoulder bag as if it were a life preserver. Moleto was eagerly wagging his tail at her feet, but she didn't even look down. *to acknowledge him - her eyes search.*

"Where's all your stuff?" Evie asked. She noticed that their mother didn't pop open the trunk and that there was no luggage in the backseat of the Mercedes.

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

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

"*Evie,*" Her mother came around her Mercedes. "Enough with the questions."

"Senorita Sabrina!" Lindsay came from the backyard soon after Evie. She extended her tanned, wrinkled arms to Sabrina. "Oh, look at you!" She gave Sabrina a long, hard hug. "*Ay, que flaquita!* Oh, I'll take care of that!"

Sabrina didn't say anything. She just stood there enveloped in Lindsay's embrace, like 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 okay," Sabrina mumbled softly. "You don't have to."

"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. “Stop it!” she snapped again. “Just *stop* it!”

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.

“Oh, it’s okay,” Vicki Gomez tried to assure Lindsay. “No worries,” she said as she went over to Sabrina.

It was unsettling to say the least. Sabrina’s disposition was usually as bright and perky as her name implied. 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. She seemed at a loss as to what to do. She quickly handed her own handbag and car keys to Lindsay. “Lindsay, here,” she said, “I’m going to take Sabrina up to her room.”

“*Si, claro,*” Lindsay took the purse and keys as Vicki Gomez put her arm around Sabrina and led her up the stone steps towards the front door.

“What happened?” Evie asked Lindsay as soon as they were inside the house. “What’s wrong with Sabrina?”

“*Yo no se,*” Lindsay confessed. “I never wanted to make Sabrina upset or make her cry. I would rather die than cause either one of you girls pain. I did not want to be the cause of her tears.”

At that moment, Evie’s father, still in his apron and 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 our little girl?”

Both Lindsay and Evie were too stunned to answer.

Chapter 11

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

Evie, Dee Dee, and Raquel had gathered later that afternoon for another impromptu ER/RE! meeting and, again, it was at Evie's request.

Her mother had taken Sabrina upstairs, and the barbeque, of course, was off. Lindsay had gathered up all the food and put it away. Ruben Gomez's enthusiasm, and chef's hat, both came down. Evie had taken the opportunity to leave the house and head out towards the far west end of the Rio Estates country club golf course, ~~the regular place~~ for their ER/RE! Meet-ups.

Now Evie lay flat on her back on the meticulously maintained lawn where any passing member might guess that she was just a young girl casually counting clouds or working on their her mid-winter tan with her friends. Oh, if only life in the Estates was that simple.

"Like I said," Evie repeated. "As far as I know, she and Robert broke up and she's all upset over 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.

"Oh," Raquel looked away from her cell phone and then looked at Evie sharply. "So, you have to be *perfect* in order for a guy *not* to cheat on you? Are you saying that's why Jose fucked around on me? I'm imperfect?"

"No, I'm just saying that Sabrina and Robert were perfect for each other," Evie *could have stuck* *further?* *on my cell* knew she had put her foot in her mouth. "They had been going out for, like, two years or something."

"Two years?" Raquel's thumbs went back to composing text. "Well, that says it right there. He was probably bored. Big time."

"Could you *stop*?" Evie slapped Raquel's fingers. "That is *so* annoying when I'm trying to have a conversation with you."

"I'm just shoving it back to Davey," Raquel explained. Despite Evie's *irritation* annoyance, she didn't give her fingers a rest. "We were supposed to hook up today, and *now* he's saying he's not even sure about getting together tonight."

"You know," *was still on Sabrina* Dee Dee started. "I agree with Raquel. I think there is more to the story. Maybe Sabrina was, like, caught in some love affair with one of her professors or *illicit*"

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 rags." She felt annoyed with both Dee Dee and Raquel. "I don't believe you guys. I come to you for help, maybe some advice, and all I get is more drama."

"Hey," Raquel said. "We only can guess what's happening from what you tell us. 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."

"I just don't get it." Dee Dee lay back down on the grass and took a long, slow pull from her cigarette. She exhaled from the small slit formed by her lips. "How could Sabrina break up with her boyfriend and then leave Stanford, just like that? I mean, yo no se, it's like she's giving up or something."

Raquel bolted 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, or at least his silhouette. He never came out of his truck (LOC LFE), black with primed fenders, when he swung by campus to pick up Raquel from school on the days she didn't drive. In *Loving Memory*, was written across the truck's tinted back window in old English script. Directly below *In Loving Memory* were the names of three of Davey's friends who had died in who knew what kind of way. When Evie had asked Raquel about

it, she simply shrugged her shoulders and claimed the three ^{guys} friends had been at the wrong place at the wrong time. Evie couldn't imagine dating anyone who had a condensed obituary on the back window of his truck. She also couldn't help but worry about Raquel. What if Raquel was merely 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 into her satin covered Trovata flojos. She had to meet Tori in less than an hour.

"And where are you going, Miss Thang?" Raquel sounded suspicious. Lately she was usually the one who had to take off somewhere on a Saturday night.

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

"Ew," Dee Dee wrinkled her nose at the sound of Evie popping her fingers. "I hate when you do that." She put out her cigarette in the grass. "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?"

charree-ada slowly
"A *charreada*," Dee Dee repeated. "You're going to one? Tonight? *Que chido!*"

"What is it?" Raquel asked, still texting.

"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 there 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 Arturo said if any of the volunteers wanted to buy a ticket and go, we could still get credit."

"I don't get it," Raquel smirked. "So are you, like, *buying* your donation or *donating* your money?"

Evie ignored Raquel "And this girl, *she continued* Tori, who I volunteer with, is gonna pick me up," she went on to explain. "We're gonna go together."

"If I didn't have to write my essay for Las Hermanas, 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 Gorby, 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. Pobrecita. She had mentioned to Dee Dee that she and Alex were planning to go to Baja, but he wanted to go sooner than her work schedule allowed. Of course, it bugged her. *That he went ahead w/ the plans* mine

"I was actually gonna go with him," Evie lied. "He wanted to do this whole day thing with me, down in Baja, but I gotta go to this fundraiser."

"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 nodded. Although Raquel's observation supported her little fib, she resented it slightly. Why did Raquel *always* have to point out just how strict her mother was? Just because Raquel's mother, Kitty, was too busy with her software business, her La Madrinas mentoring network, and hosting her over the top Bunco parties to notice whatever craziness Raquel was up to, it didn't make Evie's mother a complete tyrant.

"But Baja isn't Mexico," Dee Dee pointed 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~~?" *So cal*

"Maybe it's not your dark tan," Dee Dee mused, "but maybe your dark, moody attitude."

"Yeah," Evie laughed. "Or, maybe cause you got caught trying to smuggle tequila in your handbag

"Or," Dee Dee laughed too. "Pot in your panties."

"Excuse me," Raquel informed the both of them. "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. "In the same day."

"Chicas, chicas," Dee Dee interrupted. "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 rodeo thing. I could be into getting my mariachi on." She stuck out her elbows and flapped them around.

"*Serio?*" Evie asked.

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

Tori, 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 Tori - - 'Ixnay on the Jose'. But other than that, Evie thought it would be fun to have Raquel to herself for an entire evening. Since Raquel 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. "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 12

Evie, Raquel, and Tori arrived at the *charreada* just as it was starting, and the small arena was nearly filled nearly to capacity with families, groups of teenage boys, and glassy eyed men already drunk on Corona. The ~~concrete~~ ^{make shift of plywood & concrete block} walls of the grandstand were draped with oversized *banderas* in red, white, and green, the colors of the Mexican flag. In the bleachers, ⁽³⁾ excited spectators ⁽²⁾ waved ⁽¹⁾ hundreds of more flags.

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." ^{*I've never seen so many Mexicans in one place.*}

"There's some space over there." Tori pointed towards the ~~lower~~ left end of the bottom bleachers with her chin. "I'm sure we can squeeze our fat asses in." ^{*Last semester was super hot*}

"Speak for yourself," Raquel threw Tori a look, gathered in her hands were three large clear plastic bags of kettle corn and *churritos*, as well as three *elotes* slathered in mayonnaise. One bag and one *elote* for each girl, *of course*.

As soon as she sat down, Raquel pulled a small glass bottle of Jack Daniel's from her bag. She took one of the sodas from the tray that Evie had been carrying, looked left, looked right and then topped it off with the whiskey.

Tori eyed the bottle and smiled. "Woman, I like your style." ^{*Time to get jacked-up!*}

"Want some?" Raquel asked.

"You bets," Tori held out her cup.

Raquel poured Tori even more J.D. than she had poured herself.

"Want some, Evie?" Raquel waved the glass bottle seductively.

"Uh, no, thanks," Evie winced with disapproval. "Whiskey gives me the runs."

+

"Ah, poor Eves," Raquel pouted her lips and feigned sympathy as she took a sip of her drink. "*Lo Sient*. I forgot to get some of that fancy ass Veuve for you."

Evie was about to say something, but then the first bull rider was released into the arena. The whole crowd jumped up from their seats to cheer him on. Evie, Raquel, and Tori followed their lead, but less enthusiastically. It was hard to get up from under all those snacks.

"This is Little Jess from Fontana!" A booming voice blared from the arena's speakers. "And if Lil' Jess can stay on Thunder 'til the whistle blows, well, Jessie ~~is~~ gonna be going home with his own bottle of tequila, courtesy of one of our proud sponsors, Oro Gold. Remember, folks when you want the best, you wanna go for the gold! What do you say, *hombres*?"

Hombres? Evie found herself cringing. *Where* did they find this MC?

"Give *me* the tequila!" Raquel roared. She held her Styrofoam cup out towards the arena in a military style salute. "I'm running out!"

The people sitting near them turned around and laughed with her. Or, Evie wondered, *at* her?

"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.

Raquel ignored Evie and took a big swig from her drink.

Evie checked the time on her cell phone. The show had just started, but it seemed like it was going to be a long night. She looked over at Raquel and watched Raquel suck the J.D. and coke through her straw. Seeing Raquel so intent on getting so much liquor in

her system bothered Evie. Why did every outing have to have booze involved? Evie wondered if ~~she was being unfair judging~~ Raquel. It was ^{After all,} because Raquel was such a party ^{puta} girl, that she was able to secure free ad bevs for Evie's party. And Evie surely didn't mind ~~that~~. But then again, ~~it was~~ a party, a ^{deserved such a Hench} major party, not just another Saturday night out. ^{was she being judgemental hypocritical}
^{party planning}

Raquel peered out through her overgrown bangs and nudged Evie. "Man," she told Evie, "Check out the *hombres* 'round here! *Que* fine, right Eves?"

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, tons of other guys were walking around in their own mariachi inspired duds — bolero jackets and tight fitting pencil pants with silver conchas stitched along the side seams. They were kinda sexy, in a mariachi rocker kind of way.

"Damn," Raquel raised one eyebrow and nudged Evie again. She actually ~~took~~ ^{removed} her lips from her straw to whistle under her breath. "Look at ~~that~~ piece of ass!" ^{to}

Both Evie and Tori looked over. Tori ~~laughed~~ ^{ed} covering her mouth. The so-called piece of ass belonged to none other than the biggest *nalgón* himself, Arturdo. ^{laughing}

Evie almost didn't recognize him at first ^{him} she was used to seeing Arturdo at the reserve, cranky and sweaty and wearing a worn out Pendleton and, of course, *those* boots. But tonight ^{he looked relaxed +} ~~he~~ was dressed up in black jeans, a black dress shirt, and a black cowboy hat. Has anyone called Pablo Montero, because his costume is missing.

"You've *got* to be kidding!" Evie also covered her mouth and laughed ~~at~~ Raquel. "That's, like, my boss at the reserve."

"What, are you serious?" Raquel leaned forward get a better look. "Damn, hook a sister up with some volunteer opportunities. I'm suddenly feeling in a very *giving* kind of mood. Ooh," she lowered her voice. "He's looking this way." She fluffed her long hair over her shoulders and took another swig of her Jack Daniels and Coke.

Evie turned her head to the side, hoping Arturdo wouldn't notice her or Tori. She suddenly regretted bringing Raquel to the *charreada*. Not only was she already getting loud and obnoxious (in front of the strangers in the crowd) but she was gonna make a fool of herself in front of Evie's "like, boss". And to top it all off, she was getting Tori drunk. Who was gonna drive them home?

Unfortunately, Arturdo did see Evie and Tori. ^d He waved to them. And both offered obligatory waves back. Evie hoped that would be it. Eye contact made, credit *should* be issued. But instead, Arturdo, in all his black-attire badness, made his way over to them.

"Hey," he actually smiled. "You two made it. Nice." He placed his polished boot on the rickety bleacher ^{aluminum bench} ~~seat~~ above them and balanced himself on his leg.

Nice? When was Arturdo ever happy to see Evie and Tori? It seemed like every time they were at the reserve, ^{he} Arturdo found it ^{necess point out} important to mention that it was more ~~work to show them~~ everything they were doing wrong (than it would be just to do it himself.)

"My name's Raquel," Raquel held her hand up all dainty-like, as if she were actually expecting him to lean over and 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 lived in Mexico City." ^{he smiled}

Evie was surprised that he remembered. Granted it was the wrong best friend, but still.

“Uh, *no*,” Raquel shot Evie a look. “I’m the *other* best friend.” She looked back at Arturdo and sipped her drink suggestively. “The *pretty* one, *La Bonita*.”

Arturdo looked at her cup and laughed. “You mean the drunk one, *La Boracha*.”

That comment made Evie LOL.

Raquel looked over at Evie from the corner of her eyes. “Well it’s better than being tagged *Turdo*,” she muttered under her breath.

Oh my God. Evie and Tori tried hard to contain their laughter to themselves. He could so *not* hear her say that.

“What did you say?” Arturdo asked as he tilted his cowboy hat slightly forward.

“Hey, Arturo,” Evie started. She hoped to distract him. “Thanks for asking us here. It’s pretty fun.” *She looks focused on activities in the arena.*

Yeah, right.

“Well, thanks for buying a ticket,” Arturdo said. “It all goes to a good cause. A large percentage of the ticket price helps rehabilitate the performance horses that have been hurt. If they don’t bet better, well, they don’t have the best future.” *he paused.*

“What do you mean?” Tori asked.

“I mean, they get put down.”

“*What?*” Evie looked over at Arturdo, alarmed. “Are you serious? They get killed?”

“Oh, yeah,” Arturdo answered, in an almost casual tone. “Their owners don’t think they’re as useful if they aren’t performing and making money.”

he looked into the arena as well.

"Wow," Evie looked out towards the arena. A row of horses was forming two lines in an elegant synchronized fashion. "I didn't know that."

"Yeah," Arturdo said. "See that horse down there?" He pointed to a dark caramel colored horse just entering the ring. "That's how Chamuco used to be, performing for the charreadas and for the drill team, but now he's old and blind. I don't know what's going to happen to him. He's always passed over during our adoption day clinic."

Evie took a deep breath. ~~It was all too much for her.~~ She looked over at the horse. She'd had *no* idea stuff like that happened. Sure, Chamuco got frightened easily, and yeah, he was old, but he didn't deserve to be *killed*. Evie felt sad.

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

"Ah, Josephina," he turned to face her. He took his boot off the bleacher and stood up. His energy seemed to have changed from relaxed to rigid. "You're back already?"

"Why? Am I interrupting something?" She eyed Evie, Raquel, and Tori coolly.

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

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

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

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

"Uh, no?" Josephina wrinkled her nose. "There are already enough stinky drunks here." She adjusted her tiara, er, hair band, and turned to Arturdo. "Turo, I still *have* to use a the bathroom and I'm not about to use the filthy outhouses they have here. Can't you take me somewhere?"

of course, Arturdo
didn't dress
up for
himself
on a
Sat.
night.

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

"Well, let's go then, anywhere other than here," Josephina looked around.

"There's nothing but ^{obnoxious} *borachos* around." She looked over at Raquel and Tori.

"*Pero querida*," Arturdo checked the time on his watch. "We'll miss the *escaramuzas*."

Josephina looked back at him, her eyes demanding the right answer.

"But I don't want you to be uncomfortable," Arturdo looked around and softened his tone. "I guess I can take you into Camarillo. We'll find a gas station or a Pollo Loco for you." ^{he} Arturdo put his arm around Josephina. "We'll be back," he told Evie, Tori, ^{and} Raquel. "Maybe we'll see you later."

"Yeah," Tori said. "Later."

As soon as Arturdo and Josephina left the bleachers, Raquel dove in.

"Oh. *My*. God," she exclaimed. "That girl talks like a total val, and what's with her get-up? Is she gonna go fox hunting or something?"

"Oh, she always dresses like that," Tori said. "She keeps her horse at the reserve."

"What's her name again?" Raquel asked. "Horsa-phina? ^{Betty La Fea} She was all getting in my face as if I wanted her man or something."

"Well," Evie started. "You *were* flirting with him."

Tori 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 Turdo?" Raquel observed. "My mack is dry, ay, ay."

"Blah," Tori waved her hand aside. "He just doesn't wanna argue with her. She can be pretty high maintenance."

"Or maybe," Evie suggested. "He wants to be, like, 'My Super Sweet Boyfriend.'"

"Please," Raquel said. "No guy is *that* sweet."

"Alex is." Evie didn't have to think for a second.

"Oh, yeah?" Raquel looked at her. "And where is Prince Charming now? He's in San Diego probably hooking up with some surf honeys as we speak. Has he even texted you?"

*In the last hour?
of course, Evie lied*

Evie didn't bother to respond. She knew what Raquel said was far from the truth.

She watched Arturdo and Horsephina walk from the grandstand arena towards the exit.

Arturdo took off his jacket and covered Horsephina's bare shoulders with it. 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, Evie wasn't

even able to do those simple things with him, and it wasn't like he was making any effort

to initiate any romance.

"*Vamos a ir hombres*," Raquel imitated the announcer.

"I *heard* that," Tori echoed Raquel's sentiment. "Now that Arturdo is gone, we can bail. Just lemme finish my drink."

Evie looked out at the horse that Arturdo had pointed out to her in the arena.

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

"Uh, yeah, I can drive," Evie offered dryly. Normally, she would have been excited to practice her driving, but her mood suddenly felt damp.

Raquel swirled the last bit of ice in her cup. "Okay, I'm ready to go."

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

Evie looked out to at the arena and watched the brown stallion trot to the center of the ring. His rider, a young girl in a cream colored Victorian dress, tapped his side with a riding crop. He instantly lowered his head as his front legs bowed in a courtesy. This, of course, garnered a tremendous applause from the adoring crowd. They were totally *encantada* with him.

"Aw," Raquel clicked her tongue. "He is *so* cute! Wouldn't you love to have a pony like that, Evie?"

"Yeah," Evie answered. The spotlight shone on the ^{*stallion*} horse. Evie walked down the bleacher steps to get a better look. Yes, he was the color of caramel, dark caramel and the hair on his mane was slighter lighter, but it was his eyes that captivated Evie. They were large and perfectly round, and so gentle looking, like ^{*one*} the stuffed animal's on Sabrina's bed. Ooh, Evie's heart ^{*felt her*} ~~got~~ all gooey. Whether he could do tricks or not, Evie didn't care. ^{*whether*} And just like the crowd around her, she was completely, totally *encantada*.

Chapter 13

"Brina?" Evie tapped softly on her sister's bedroom door. When Sabrina didn't answer, ^{she} Evie knocked again and held her ear to the door. But she heard nothing, not even the hum of the TV or the ^{her} computer. Evie was about to ^{knock} try one more time, but decided to give it a rest. She walked to the end of the hall and ^{towards} into her parents' bedroom. Their door ^{until Sabrina's} was open. ^{not wide}

"Mom?" Evie stood at the doorway.

"Come in, Evie," her mother was sitting on the edge of the bed. Her hair was wet from the shower after her morning swim and she was drying it with a towel. "*Que te molesta, Evie?*"

(Evie entered the room and took a seat on the linen chest at the foot of her parent's bed.)

"What's wrong with Sabrina?" she asked ^{as he} 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 early."

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

"She's going through a tough time," her mother sighed. "It's something we all go through. Heartbreak ... ^{big problems change} loss." She looked at Evie and smiled weakly. "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 fresh air and some good old-fashioned Pilates."

"~~Good~~ old fashioned?" Evie asked.

"You know what I mean," her mother said. "I'm gonna try to take her with me tonight. Why don't you come?"

"Nuh, uh. *No* way," Evie said. "The only way I'm *ever* gonna stretch like they do in Pilates is gonna be after some major Rip Van Winkle nap."

"E-ve-lina!" It was Lindsay calling from downstairs.

"You better get down there," her mother turned her head over and rubbed the back of her head with her towel. "It's her day off, but she came in ~~this morning~~ just to help you with your driving. Don't forget to thank her, ~~Evie~~ *Evie*."

"I know. I won't." Evie got up slowly and looked at her mother's hair. "Why don't you just use the hair dryer?"

"Ever since I went blonde I try not to," her mother replied, "I don't want anymore damage done ~~to my hair~~." She swung her head up and looked at Evie. "~~Listen~~ *hey*, why don't you practice in my car? Would you like that?"

"~~Uh~~ *nehen?*, your car?" Evie asked. She was *not* about to go there again. "No, it's okay," she told her mother. "I'm already sorta used to Lindsay's car. 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~~ *what?*," she replied. "Well, okay." She went back to drying her hair.

Evie went downstairs to meet Lindsay in the kitchen. *Why*, she wondered, would her mother offer her Mercedes? That was something her mother would *never* do, unless,

say, maybe things were pretty bad with Sabrina. Maybe she was using her car as a distraction? Maybe she was testing Evie? It was just a bit suspicious.

"*Estas listas?*" Lindsay asked as she took her car keys out of her purse and handed them to Evie.

"Yeah," Evie took the keys from her. "I'm ready."

The last time she had ^{went driving} been behind the wheel in Rio Estates was that fateful day ~~in~~ ^{her mother's Mercedes} when she had gotten in that (que to lower voice) *accidente*, ~~and~~ Evie felt the odd sensation of an unwanted *de ja vu*. But today would be different, she ^{hoped} figured. For one thing, she wasn't going to be distracted by a phone conversation with Dee Dee, and for another, it was a Sunday. According to Lindsay, Jesus put in double time as a co-pilot for those needing extra guidance.

"Now," Lindsay fastened her seat belt after she got into her car (JKL29K) with Evie. "What's the first thing you do?"

Evie reached for the radio dial. ^{ancient} "Make sure I got some tasty tunes on?"

"Evelina," Lindsay tapped her hand.

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

"Make sure all mirrors are adjusted correctly to the driver's height."

"*Correcto*," Lindsay pulled down her car's sun visor and put on her sunglasses. It was just a little after 9 a.m., ^{but} ~~and~~ ^{was already} the sun reflecting off the hood of the car.

As Evie backed out of the driveway and onto Camino del Rio, she felt a little shaky. She took a deep breath and told herself that she just had to relax.

"*Ay, no te ocupadas*, Evelina," Lindsay patted her arm. "Don't worry so. You're doing so well with your driving. 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 *I don't* go-getter," *gutsy*

"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 *did something* said. "She's just depressed."

"I don't know, Evie," Lindsay said. "She doesn't eat, and she just sleeps all the time." *Lindsay said*
she Lindsay looked out the window. "It's a sensitive time, and you should try to be extra nice and helpful."

"I *am* helpful," Evie frowned at Lindsay. "All the work I'm doing at the reserve. I do a lot, Linds."

"I know, *mi 'ja, claro que si*," Lindsay said. "I know you've been working hard, Everytime I pick you up, *ay*, you look so tired."

"Yeah, I am. *Very* tired." Evie felt the need to state her case one more time. "So, Lindsay, 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 reached over and *gripped* ~~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 nodded. "So, 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. "How come you've never told me about *charreadas*?"

"^{ina}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 ^{assured}~~always~~ been into horses," Evie told Lindsay. She looked down at her Rainbow flojos. She wasn't about to trade them in for cowboy boots just yet.

"For today, let's ^{just} concentrate on the driving," Lindsay said. "The sooner you learn to drive, the sooner --." She stopped herself.

"The sooner what?" Evie looked over at her.

"The sooner you get to drive," Lindsay simply replied.

"No, you were gonna say something else," Evie insisted. "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 gonna get my 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 party in Cherry Bomb, I do," Evie said.

"Cherry bomb?" Lindsay looked at her. "*Que es* cherry bomb?"

"That's what I'm gonna name my car," Evie told her. *smiled* "Cool, huh?"

"Where are you getting this idea that you're getting a car for your birthday?" Lindsay asked. "And I thought that you may not get your party."

"Who said that?" Evie asked. "Did you hear that, like, recently?"

"I thought I heard you're your mother talking to your dad and--."

"And what?"

"I don't know, I don't want to say anything," Lindsay got flustered. "But I thought I heard them talking about going up to Sabrina's school and I thought they were talking about that same weekend, *but I guess that can't be.*" *And new mind what?!*

"What!" Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. "You are not serious."

"Mi'ja, don't..." Lindsay reached for the gearshift. *but it was too late* The car instantly stalled.

"Oh, man," Evie realized that she had shifted too slowly. "I'm never gonna get it." *not going to*

"What aren't you going to get?" Lindsay asked

"Take your pick," Evie answered glumly.

Chapter 14

"You should have been there, Alex," Evie went on about the charreada as he drove her to the reserve. "It was amazing. The horses were so beautiful. They really are ~~these~~ incredible animals. God, I feel like such an idiot. I mean, I've been doing all this work at the reserve, and I guess I really had no idea why. I know why I need to work at the reserve, but I had no idea *why* my help was even needed. I can't believe people would just give up on ~~their~~ ^a horse, ~~their~~ ^{on} pet. Do you know what I mean?"

"Uh, huh," Alex said, but it seemed as though he wasn't really listening. "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. "Didn't you just hear me? That was Raquel and Tori's deal. And you know I had to go, to get the credit. It just happened that it turned out to be really cool, sorta educational."

"Educational?" Alex looked at her. "What's next? You're gonna join Mathletes?"

"You know, if I didn't know better," Evie threw him a sideways glance. "I would say you were jealous."

"Jealous?" Alex frowned. "Jealous of what?"

"That I'm doing different things, learning about different things."

"~~No~~ ^{at all}, I am ~~not~~ ^{then} jealous," Alex looked at her and smiled. "For reals. I'm actually glad it turned out okay for you. It just would have been cool if you had come to Baja."

"Well," Evie said. "It would have been cool if you could have waited and planned the Baja trip ^{on a} ~~for another~~ weekend." *that I could act go.*

unusually
When Alex pulled up at the reserve, Evie was oddly excited about her workday. She wanted to find out more about horses and *charreadas* from Arturo. But when she reached the stables, Tori had beaten her to the punch with follow up *charro* chit-chat.

"So, did you and Josephina have fun at the *charreada*?" Tori was asking Arturo. As Evie walked over to pull out flakes of alfalfa and oat hay.

the reader
"Oh, yes," Arturo smiled again, uncharacteristically. "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?" Tori asked.

"They aren't called tricks," Evie joined in. "They're called *suertes*."

"Right," Arturo looked at Evie, slightly surprised. "You know, the Mexican *charro* was the first cowboy. Not that many people know that."

enthusiastically
"Really?" Tori nodded, and it made Evie a little suspicious. It wasn't like her to be so conversational with Arturo. "That is *so* cool," Tori went on. "How come you aren't a *charro*? I mean, you totally could be one. You know so much about horses and stuff."

if
"It's the 'stuff' part that really isn't my thing," Arturo confessed. "I didn't follow the *charro* tradition. Besides, my whole family is still back in Colorado, and they all practice and perform together."

"You came out to California by yourself?" Tori asked.

"Yeah," Arturo answered. "I moved out here because I really wanted to go to Thatcher."

"And you left behind your whole family? And all your friends?" she asked.

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

"No," Tori laughed lightly. "I was just wondering, that's all."

Evie couldn't help but feel a bit curious too. Arturdo was a senior at Thatcher and only a few years older than she and Tori. She couldn't believe that someone would move halfway across the country just to ^{wake w/} help out some horses. She loved to surf, but she couldn't imagine moving to, say, Hawaii, just to be closer to some choice waves. But then again, after that cute ^{she} little caramel colored number had seen at the rodeo, oh, who knows. He was just too adorable.

"But come on," Tori tilted her head and ^{looked up} smirked at Arturdo. "Don't they have horses in Denver?"

Was she actually flirting with him?

"Of course," Arturdo furrowed his brow. "But Thatcher is one of the best equine schools in the country, and if I wanna study veterinary medicine at UC Davis, I need a high school that would give me the best transfer. I'm starting Davis ^{in the} this spring."

"My Grandma Chablis goes to UC Davis," Evie ^{added} said. "Wow, you might see her there."

"Chablis?"

^{explained} "Lmean, Chavella," Evie said. "We call her Chablis cause she teaches viticulture," Evie said. "Wine making."

"Uh, yeah," Arturdo smirked. "I *know* what viticulture is."

"Turrrro!"

It was Josephina calling out for Arturdo. Evie was surprised they hadn't heard her car (PRNCESS) pull up.

"We're over here," Arturdo 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 shined against her tanned legs, and spikey knee-high black leather boots. She topped off her whole look with a black velveteen derby hat.

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

Arturdo, how are you Arturdo
"Uh, hello?" Arturdo teased as he dropped enormous pills into the selected feed buckets.

silver
"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 there on time, we might as well not go at all."

stopped what he was doing
"Josephina," Arturdo exhaled. "We'll make it. I'm the one who made the reservations, remember? And we're only 25 minutes away."

[Evie wondered if Tori felt as suddenly uncomfortable as she did.]

"I guess Evie and Tori can take over," Arturdo 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.

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

"Okay, okay," Josephina checked the time again. "But do it quickly." *She worked*

me . . .

①
“I hope I didn’t interrupt you guys,” Josephina looked at Tori 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* and then complaining to Arturo about it. She looked over at Horsaphina and assessed damage control. “You look really pretty.” *Are you going out fancy?*

“Oh, yeah,” Horsaphina agreed as she smoothed out her dress and adjusted the silver bracelet on her wrist. *other* “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’ll get a regular chef, but I want Mayru. He’s the owner?”

“Oh, right,” Evie nodded.

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

[Neither Evie nor Tori 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.”

“Josephina,” Arturdo started. “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?” Josephina rebuffed. “They’re not some Red Wing work boots from, like, Wilbur’s Western Wear.”

“Josephina,” Arturdo pursed his lips. “If you want me to change it’s only going to make us even more late. Is that what you want?”

It seemed obvious to Evie that Josephina was working his last nerve.

“What *ever*?” Josephina just looked up at the sky and surrendered.

As soon as they left, Tori turned towards Evie and smiled smugly. “Pretty smart of us, huh?”

“Smart of us, what?” Evie asked.

“Kissing Turdo’s ass like that, pretending we were all into the rodeo and working here and stuff,” Tori said. “That part about your Grandma Chablis just about killed me.”

“But I *did* like the charreada,” Evie insisted. “And my Grandma Chablis does go to Davis. What are you talking about?”

“I don’t know about you, but I’m behind with my hours. If I don’t get the credit I need, I’m gonna have to retake one of my other classes. I’m thinking if I get on Turdo’s good side, he might be cool letting me slide. You have all the hours you need?”

“Uh,” Evie hesitated. She hadn’t really sat down and looked over all her hours. *She assumed*
“Yeah, I don’t know. I mean, I think I’m pretty much on the right track.” The way her body ached she at least *felt* that she had put in her share.

“Yeah,” Tori went back to work. “I’d hate to be doing all this for nothing.”

“yeah me too.”

Evie watched after Arturdo 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 was out of sight, Evie excused herself.

"Man, you better be right back," Tori 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 Arturdo. He wasn't such a bad guy. So he ^{was a} did come off a little ^{clicktator} serious at first, but it was pretty cool, no ^{maybe} 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 Arturdo's name.

Again, she got ^{Alex's} the 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 say. "Okay, so just let me know."

Something diff.

Chapter 15

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 ~~mesana~~ with a text:

Sat. Nite. Cool. Smthin diff.

"So, no surfing this weekend?" ^{not} he double-checked one last time with Evie ^{on It was} 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."

"Okay, but 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."

* * * * *

By Saturday night, Evie had decided on her favorite halter, the satin one with the yellow and green swirls, and a three-tiered satiny skirt she had bought at Tilly's. She even made the bold decision against wearing flojos (*gasp*) and slipped on some espadrilles (*sorta* satiny) that she d' borrowed from Dee Dee. Thanks to all the long hours

at the reserve, Evie was losing her tan. She went to her bathroom and looked through her cabinet for some foundation ~~but found nothing~~. She needed a darker cream. Maybe, *what!* Sabrina had something?

Evie went down the hall to Sabrina's room, but, like always, found the bedroom door closed.

she Evie was about to knock when she heard a sound coming from inside. Evie leaned closer. Was Sabrina *crying*? Evie caught her clenched fist just in time before it hit the bedroom door. *muffled noise the other side*

"But it's *not* getting better," Sabrina sobbed. "My family is driving me crazy. I should have just stayed back at Stanford. Here, I'm surrounded by friggin' idiots."

Evie couldn't believe what she was hearing. *Friggin' idiots?* Who was she talking about?

"No," Sabrina struggled to catch her breath. "I don't even talk to her. She's such a little spoiled brat that I might as well not have a sister at all."

Whoa. Evie pulled back from the door. Was she hearing right? Was Sabrina talking about her? No. She could *not* have heard right. She leaned in closer to the bedroom door and strained to hear more.

"Evelina!"

Evie looked up and found Lindsay, in the middle of the hallway, holding a small box of tile samples.

"You do *not* sneak around, trying to listen in on other people's conversations," Lindsay spoke sharply under her breath, "You are being very rude."

"But she's talking about me, us," Evie lowered her voice in protest.

"Evelina," Lindsay insisted. "Leave her alone."

Evie reluctantly moved away from Sabrina's door.

"I have to come into your room." Lindsay heaved the box of tiles to her left hip.

"Your mother wants to see which tiles she needs to order for your bathroom."

"Now?" Evie asked.

Lindsay adjusted the box again. "Your mother wants to place the order first thing in the morning, and I'm going to be leaving soon. We have to do it now."

"Okay..." Evie started back down the hall to her bedroom. There was no way she was going to argue with Lindsay. And God forbid, she sound like a *spoiled brat*.

Oh, *hurtful*.

As she entered her room with Lindsay, the bedroom's landline rang. Evie grabbed the receiver off the carpet floor.

"Hullo?" she asked.

"*Finally*." It was Raquel. "*What up, girl?* I called your cell and it went right to voice mail, and you didn't answer my text."

"My cell's charging." Evie went into her bathroom and walked past Lindsay, who was lining up the tile samples against the wall. Evie grabbed her make-up bag off the sink's counter and moved out of Lindsay's way.

"And then I've been calling the landline," Raquel continued. "And it just rings and rings. I didn't even get the voicemail."

"Sabrina's been on the phone." Evie was half listening as she sat on the edge of her bed and squirted a glob of foundation on her shoulders. She was going to have to settle for the orangish brown Sunburst foundation.

"What's wrong?" Raquel asked.

"Nothing," Evie tried to shake off the feeling. Sabrina's words stung something fierce. She smoothed the cream evenly across her skin. ^{neck, shoulders} "Raquel," Evie started. "Do you think I'm spoiled?"

"What?" she asked. "Who said that? Alex?"

"No. Nobody." Evie lowered her voice again and looked over at Lindsay, but she wasn't even paying attention. In typical "Lindsay Knows Best" fashion, she just stood in the bathroom with a disapproving look on her face as she looked over the tile samples.

"Actually," Evie started. "I just overheard Sabrina on the phone, and she told someone, I think one of her sorority sisters, that I was spoiled. A spoiled *brat*, to be precise."

^g "She said that?" Raquel asked. "I don't know. I mean, I guess someone might think you were spoiled, because you *do* get a lot of stuff that you want. ^{and -}"

"Me?" Evie was thrown off by Raquel's blunt reply. "That is so far from the truth. Who's the one schlepping horse crap around? Who's the one who may not have her own birthday party? On a year that there *is* actually going to be a February 29th?"

"It's really how you look at it," Raquel said. "I mean, of course, you should get the things you want. But some people might think you are spoiled, but I'm surprised it would be Sabrina saying that. I mean, doesn't she usually get her way?"

"And more," Evie agreed. "That girl gets the grades she wants, the car she wanted, and accepted into the school she wanted. She gets everything her way. Like even now, with her being home and everything, I totally have to walk on eggshells around her."

"Ugh, I could *not* deal," Raquel groaned. "That's why I am *so* glad that I'm an only child."

"You and Dee Dee, both," Evie said. *looked in her closet mirrors* Her neck and shoulders looked dark compared to the rest of her. She added some foundation to her face.

"But anyway," Raquel said. "Don't sweat over Sabrina. From what you tell me, *mood* she's just upset over that Robert dude."

"Yeah, I guess," Evie said. "God. It's just been a complete bummer of day." She looked over at Lindsay again. "I just heard about the car bill, from, you know."

"How much is it?" Raquel asked.

"Eleven hundred bucks," Evie said.

"*Eleven* hundred? Are you shitting me? I thought you said that the guy you hit had some crap little *piece of* car?"

"He did," Evie said. "*and* now he's gonna have one fine ass bumper. I don't know how I'm gonna pay for it. Grandma Chablis better come through."

"Well, I'd ask for an invoice *and* a receipt from this guy," Raquel said. "He's probably just gonna keep the money and never have his car worked on."

Evie got up from her bed and stood with her back towards the closet mirrors. She looked quickly over her shoulder, a' la red carpet *Teen People* pose. She had to do the checklist. No VPL, *check*. No unsightly bulge of back fat, *check*. No bac-...wait. Evie peered closer into the closet mirror and discovered a small, but still very noticeable, blemish. It was right below her left shoulder. Argh! The curse of mid-winter bacne! She instantly squeezed more Sunburst goop onto her finger and dabbed the offending *back* violator. But the foundation now made *that* section of her back look blotchy and uneven.

She decided to pull off her whole halter and give herself a thorough application of cover up, but just as she pulled her halter off, her mother walked in to her bedroom.

"Mom, do you mind?" Evie held the phone between her chin and shoulder and covered her chest with her arms. "I'm changing."

"Sorry, Evie." Her mother could have cared less. "The door was open and I already knew that Lindsay was in here." She brushed right past Evie. "I need to take a look at these tiles."

It was less about Evie's modesty and more about the incriminating 'RxE' inked near her left breast. Last semester, she, Dee Dee and Raquel had La Ley Cee, a tattoo artist who eschews the "over 18" requirement and will ink anyone with enough of an idea and enough cash. She loved her little RxE in blue black ink near her heart, but if Vicki Gomez ever found out that her youngest daughter had a tattoo *anywhere* on her body, there would only be one kind of party for Evie...a good-bye party.

"Hey," Raquel asked. "Did you get that fancy ass manicure for your date with Alex?"

"Oh, yeah," Evie looked at her fingernails, they were painted a deep shade of blue. "I got a hand job from Jonathon, just like Dee Dee recommended. Oh man, he's so good."

"Evie," Her mother, as well as Lindsay, looked over from the bathroom. "Who are you talking to?"

"Raquel," Evie said calmly. "And I'm talking about the *manicure* I got at Michael Kelley. They call them hand jobs, just in case you and Linds were eavesdropping and misunderstood me, *mother*."

"We weren't eavesdropping," her mother said as she glanced over at Evie's nails.

"But very nice, hand jo-, manicure."

"Evie!" her father called from downstairs. "Alex is here."

"Hey," Evie said to Raquel as she gave herself a heavy bronze dusting on her back and on her feet. "Romeo is here, gotta go."

"Hey, Evie," Raquel started.

"Yeah?"

"If you need to borrow money, you know, for that guy's car, I can totally lend it to you, and you wouldn't have to worry about paying me back for a while."

"What?" Evie asked. "How do you have so much money?" Sure, Raquel got a hefty allowance, more than her or Dee Dee, but eleven hundred dollars was a lot of lana, for anyone.

"I dunno," Raquel said. "I've just been spending less, I guess. Probably cause I don't have to carry Jose's cheap ass ^g."

Evie laughed. "Wow, Raquel. Thanks. I mean, that is so nice of you." She was touched by her offer. "But hopefully Grandma Chablis will come through and I won't have to put the *mordida* on you."

"Cool," Raquel said. "Well, just let me know."

"Okay," Evie got up from her bed. She was still a little taken by Raquel's offer. ^{quite}

"I better go."

"Lates," Raquel said. "Don't do anything I wouldn't do!"

As she headed downstairs, she felt fortunate (*not* spoiled) that she lived in a two-story home. There is nothing more *O.C.* than descending down a staircase to the arms of a waiting surfer boy.

But the minute Evie saw Alex at the bottom of the stairs, her fantasy went from *The O.C.* to *O. U. Gotta to be Shittin' Me*. Yes, Alex was waiting for her in the foyer, but not looking anything remotely like a Saturday Night Hottie. He was in his usual tattered ^{camo} camouflage cut-offs, the ones cut a little below his knees, and he was wearing his plastic flip flops, the "bin specials" that Evie knew all too well. He had obviously not taken the planning of their date as seriously as she had. He had sand around his ankles, and he ^g still stank from the leftover medicinal smelling sun block he must have slathered on earlier. Evie guessed that he must've still gone to Sea Street to catch that "oh so important" late afternoon swell.

"Hey," Alex looked over Evie with a puzzled look on his face. "You're all dressed up."

"Yeah," Evie said. He hadn't said she looked nice, just dressed up. Was that supposed to be a compliment? And why did he look so puzzled?

"Yeah, Evie," her father also looked over Evie. "And you got some color on you. Were you out in the sun today?"

Okay, maybe "dressed up" and "color" were male speak for cute?

"So, where are you two going?" her father asked Alex.

"I dunno," Alex answered in a tone that was a little too laid-back for Evie. "I've been at the beach all day. I'm pretty wiped out." He stretched his head side to side to prove his point. "I think we'll just take it easy." He looked at Evie. "Right, Evie?"

Evie managed a weak smile but said nothing. He could *not* be serious.

"Well, have fun you two," Evie's father walked them to the front door. "And Evie, don't forget your curfew."

"Do you think," Evie started. "That just tonight –"

"No," her father said. "12:30."

Evie walked alongside Alex towards his truck, and there was his long board in the flatbed – evidence that he *had* just come from the beach. She felt her chest fill up with heavy disappointment. She looked over at Alex.

"What?" he looked back at her and smiled. *confused. Confused.*

"Nothing." Evie looked away and felt slightly conflicted. Sometimes Alex would look at her, and his dark eyes would just penetrate hers, making her feel the way she had felt at Sea Street on the morning he had given her the abalone necklace. She suddenly felt guilty. Alex really *was* a sweet boyfriend, and maybe she *was* a spoiled brat. Just because he was dressed down didn't mean he hadn't put any thought into arranging a *different* little something special. The evening was just beginning. Maybe he played it off with her dad, you know, one guy trying to be cool with another guy type of thing? What, was he actually going to go into detail with her father about what he really wanted to do with Evie?

"Well, first, Mr. Gomez, I'm going to take Evie out to a very romantic, very expensive restaurant, where I will request the most secluded table in the whole house, just for the two of us. Then I am going to drive her out to The Shores, where we will stroll out to the most secluded area in the sand dunes, and I will spread out a blanket just for the two of us. Then Evie will cuddle up next to me as I crack open a bottle of Veuve (her

favorite) and pour it into two glass flutes that I brought with me because I had been planning this evening for a whole week. Then I will make a toast to our evening right before I pull out a book of poems that I have carefully chosen for Evie, but, I have to confess, the minute I look into her dark brown eyes, I'll—"

A long, slow whistle interrupted the satin halter-ripping scene in Evie's head. The whistle came from the front of Alex's truck. She squinted her eyes in the darkness and slowly made out the glow of a cigarette in the passenger seat of the cab.

No!

But yes. It was Mondo. She could *not* believe what she was seeing.

"Why is *Mondo* with you?" Evie struggled to keep her voice down to a whisper

"You wanted to do something different," Alex answered earnestly. "And it's just been a while since we all hung out together, and you were saying that --."

"*What?*" Evie forced herself to maintain her composure. "Are you serious?"

"Uh, yeah," Alex sounded confused. "Why?"

"*I said,*" Evie started. "That it had been a while since you and *I* hung out, spent time *together*. I wanted to go out, *out*, remember?"

"Evie," Alex sounded even more confused. "What exactly does going out, *out*" mean?"

"Just *forget* it." Evie was quickly losing her patience with Alex.

Mondo got out of the front cab just as they got to the truck

"Hey, G," he looked Evie over, making her feel slightly Sangro slutty. "Look at you all gussied up in all your shiny outfit and shit. What are you, the satin Latin or something?"

Mondo pulled the passenger seat forward so he could get in the back of the truck's cab. "So you ready to give the horse gig a break and just chill with Alex and me tonight?"

Alex and me? Grrrr. Evie couldn't help but feel hot with anger. What *was* Alex thinking, bringing Mondo along on their date?

"So, check it out," he took off the white ^{*knit*} cap he was wearing. "Chop job. I bit your style, from last semester."

Last year, Evie had cut and dyed her own hair herself. She was now gratefully relieved that it was growing back to a length she was comfortable with. Mondo's hair, however, was newly buzzed and dyed ^{*a*} Tweety Bird blond.

"Check out the back," Mondo turned his head to show off a separate dye job, a large question mark in deep jet black, smack center on the back of his head.

Evie couldn't keep from laughing. "Why would you have a question mark on the back of your head?" She asked. "What, are you trying to create some new Batman character?"

^{*Mondo frowned*} "What? *No*. It stands for 'Whaddya need?'" ^{*he*} Mondo ran his hand over ^{*his*} a freshly shorn scalp. "Check it out, my cousin just got back from Amsterdam and he told me that, like, all the cafes have little areas with designated question mark signs. Like, you can get *anything* you want there. You know what I mean? Cool, huh?"

"Yeah," ^{*Evie*} Evie fastened her seat belt. "I guess in Amsterdam."

"So," ^{*Mondo*} Alex rubbed his hands together and leaned forward between Evie's and Alex's seats. "What's up for this evening?"

Evie decided to stick to her guns. She was going to get her fancy dinner at Koi whether it killed her, or, more appropriately, killed Mondo's date with Alex.

Evie feigned a smile. "I was thinking we'd go get sushi."

"Sushi?" Mondo smirked. "Uh, no thanks," He held his nose and dropped the sides of his mouth. "I had sushi last night, if you know what I mean." He looked at Alex. The look in his eyes said everything.

You have got to be kidding.

"Mondo," Alex reprimanded him as he started his truck. "Come on, there's a lady present."

"Yeah," Mondo looked at Alex in the rearview mirror. "That's what *I* thought. Last night."

Alex started to pull out of the driveway. "So, you want sushi, Evie?"

Not after Mondo's inexcuseable one-liner.

"You know," Mondo chimed in as he flicked his cigarette butt out the window. "I could actually go for some seafood. We should go to Otani's. They got kick ass tempura."

"*Actually*," Evie tried to lure Alex from siding with Mondo. "I was thinking of Koi."

"Koi?" Mondo frowned as he leaned forward, between Evie and Alex. "You mean that fancy ass place that took over where the E Bar used to be?"

"Yeah," Evie said.

"Nah," Mondo said. "We don't wanna do Koi. It's all SUV ~~scum~~. We gotta go to Otani's." He leaned back in his seat and looked at Alex in the rearview mirror again.

Vermi

"Dude, they have a waitress with a rack *this* big." He made a gesture over his chest like he was balancing two imaginary cannon balls.

Alex couldn't help but chuckle as he drove down Camino del Rio.

Evie shot him a look. "*Alex*."

"Oh, sorry, cutie," Alex straightened his smile and rubbed her arm. "Look, we'll go to Koi. Whatever you want."

"Whatever *she* wants?" Mondo looked at Alex and then at Evie. "Talk about spoiled milk."

Evie crossed her arms over her chest. *Spoiled?*

Was Evie just being *sentida*, or was everything that came out of Mondo's mouth just truly inappropriate?

* * * * *

separate scene

There was over an hour wait for a table at Koi.

"We can't seat you any sooner without a reservation," the ~~host~~ *matre'd* told the three of them. "And," he looked over Alex and Mondo's feet. "We have a dress code. No flip flops."

"You gotta be kidding," Mondo protested. "Dude, this is friggin' So Cal, everyone wears flip flops."

"Not during dinner hours," the ~~host~~ *stood his ground* ~~said shaking his head~~ *rock*

Evie looked around the restaurant. A stone brick fireplace ~~stood~~ *large* outside in the patio, and water trickled from decorative bamboo chutes into a kidney-shaped pond filled *down*

with bright orange and yellow koi fish. ^{Evie} She also noticed the full moon, large with hues of soft yellow, pink, and beige. ^{she} Evie couldn't stop thinking how much more romantic it would be to snuggle with Alex on one of the wicker love seats and just inhale the beauty, *alone.*

"Why don't we just wait?" Evie suggested. "We can get some appetizers or something. An hour will go by fast."

"Dude," Mondo pulled Alex aside. "That monkey totally dissed us. I ain't gonna shoot my wad here." He seemed to have already made the decision for the three of them as he started back towards the front doors with his fists deep in the pockets of his baggy cords.

"Sushi is sushi," Alex shrugged his shoulders apologetically. "We can come here another time, Eves. Promise."

* * * * *

Alex sat between Evie and Mondo at the counter at Otani's. It was a short counter with yellowed, chipped Formica and a sloppy pile of stained, plastic menus at the far end. The diners were far from SUV ^{vermin} ~~scum~~ and were made up more of aging surf *veteranos* and leather skinned longshoremen. Both groups, Evie noticed, wore tattooed sleeves depicting their ^{hattles} life with the Pacific Ocean.

^{time serve} ~~serve~~ ^{Served} Otani's was cheap eating, and you could fill up if you had a little cash. Cash.

Otani's did not take credit cards, and Alex had forgotten his wallet and only had three

bucks on him. Evie's pride refused to let her offer any money towards the meal. The three of them shared one (1) tempura shrimp boat with a complimentary order of sticky white rice, and it actually turned out to be a good thing that Mondo did tag along. It allowed Evie to order a diet soda.

As they were finishing up their meal, Mondo looked past Alex and eyed Evie's shoulders as if he were seeing them for the first time.

"What's up with your skin, ^oEyes?" he asked.

Evie rubbed her shoulders. "I always get goose bumps when it gets a little cold."

"No," Mondo looked her over. "It looks like you got dirt or something smudged on them." He reached over, across Alex, to brush off whatever he thought was on Evie's skin.

"It's not dirt, Mondo," she pulled away from him. "It's bronzer."

"Bronzer?" Mondo looked confused. "For what? It's getting all over your shirt."

"Never mind, *Mondo*." Evie hugged her arms across her chest and placed her hands on opposite shoulders. It was cold in Otani's, and she remembered seeing a jacket in Alex's truck.

"Alex," she started. "Don't you have a jacket in your truck? I thought I saw one."

"Uh, huh," Alex played with the ice in his Styrofoam cup with his straw. "I thought I'd need it, but I'm okay."

"Do you mind if I wear it?" Evie asked.

"Nuh, uh," he said as put his hand in his pants' pocket and pulled out his car keys.

"But try not to get all that make up on it."

"Oh," Evie didn't take the keys. "Never mind."

of the 20 bucks he had

-It's not a shirt
it's a hat
where it is....

"Dude," Mondo nudged Alex to look over at the group of women who had just entered Otani's. "We're talking boulders at 3 o'clock. *Your* 3 o'clock."

"Mondo," Alex threw him a ^{sharp look} sideways glance, but before doing so, Evie noticed that Alex did ^{glance} look over towards the women.

"Hey," Mondo suddenly said to Evie. "You ate more than your fair share."

"Huh?" Evie saw that he was now looking over ^{the single} her paper plate. *in front of Alex.*

"Look," Mondo counted the shrimp tails on her plate with the end of his wooden chopstick. "Alex and I only have three tails each, but you've got, like, five."

"Mondo," Evie couldn't believe what he was implying. She looked down on her plate. "It's just batter."

"No, it ain't." Mondo pressed down on the tails with his chopstick.

"What, you want me to burp them back up?" Evie asked. Could the tension between her and Mondo get any fiercer? She pushed her paper plate away from him. "Stop it."

"So," Alex stretched back, oblivious to how annoying Mondo was to Evie.

"What's up for the rest of the evening?"

Evie hoped that she didn't hear him correctly. Hadn't he planned *anything*?

"Check it out," Mondo started after he finally had stopped counting shrimp tails.

"A buddy of mine was telling me about a party over on Hemlock. Should be pretty K.B."

"What about my board?" Alex rubbed the space between his eyes and yawned. "I don't wanna leave it out at some party."

"Yeah, I'm not really in the mood for a party, either," Evie said as her stomach growled. Hmm, maybe pride wasn't such an honorable thing. "But maybe, if you really

*Time to
use her twenty?*

she told Mondo
want to go, we could drop you off.” She looked over at Alex’s Nixon. It was only 10 p.m. She still had a good two and a half hours before she had to be home. She and Alex could still have *some* time to themselves.

“*We*?” Mondo looked at Evie. “When did you start sharing Alex’s pink slip? You don’t even drive.”

“I know,” Evie said. “I’m just saying that we might do something else.”

“But Eves, if you don’t wanna go to a party,” Alex asked her. “What do you wanna do?”

“I don’t know,” Evie hated being put in the position of activities director, and *why* was Alex not backing her up? “I thought we could go to the pier, walk around. There’s a full moon tonight.”

“Whoa,” Mondo pressed two fingers on the side of his neck. “I hope my pacemaker can keep up with this excitement.” He looked at Alex. “Dude, come on, let’s go check out the party. Hey, you know who’s gonna be there?”

“Who?” Alex asked.

“Our boy, Jose.”

The minute Evie heard the name, Jose, her stomach went from empty to numb.

“I haven’t seen that clown in weeks,” Alex chewed lazily on the end of his plastic straw. “What’s he been up to?”

box cartoon of
“Maintaining,” Mondo casually pulled out a cigarette. “So he says.”

“Alex,” Evie leaned her head to the left and looked up at him. “Can’t we just go for a walk tonight? Like on the pier? It’s so nice out.”

There was no way she wanted to see Jose, even at some mellow, kick back party. Not only had Jose cheated on Raquel, but he had also practically molested Evie at a Sangro party and almost decked her in the school's parking lot. Why would Alex, her own boyfriend, even want to be in the same room with Jose?

Both Evie and Mondo waited for an answer from Alex as he continued chewing on the end of his straw.

"Dude," Mondo stretched his arm around the back of his stool. "You know, I'll do whatever you want. I'm easy."

At about half past 11 p.m., Evie returned home. Her so-called date with Alex was officially over, and Evie was dropped off one full hour before her 12:30 a.m. curfew. No such thing had ever, ever, happened during the so-called best years of Evie Gomez's life.

"The whole evening sounds completely wretched," Dee Dee sympathized. She called Evie as soon as she got her text. "And Alejandro? Did *nada*?"

"Nothing," Evie was embarrassed to admit. She knew that Dee Dee was already comparing Alex to Rocio. "Once he was with Mondo, it was like I didn't even exist. They were too busy yucking it up and checking out girls."

"That is so disgusting," Dee Dee said. "What the hell is wrong with Alejandro?"

"I have no idea." Evie was already in bed, nibbling on a flakey hornito that her father had brought home. "So, what are you doing home on a Saturday night?" she asked.

"No Hermana powwow?"

big group hug

"I have a brunch tomorrow," Dee Dee said. "With some of the other Hermana candidates. I should be in bed already, but I've got this avocado mask on and I wanted to give it another 20 minutes."

"*Another* brunch?" Evie asked.

"No, this is the first one," Dee Dee said. "The last Hermana get-together was an informal meet and greet and after that, the second get-together was more of mixer." Dee Dee took a breath. "*Oye*, have you seen Josephina? Has she said anything about me?"

Ever since Evie had told Dee Dee that she had met Josephina, Arturo's girlfriend and senior Hermana member, Dee Dee was always trying to dig up bits and pieces about her possible future as a Hermana debutante.

"No, *Dee Dee*," Evie said. "I told you, she never talks about *anything*. She just *asks* things. The girl talks in question marks. But have you talked to Raquel?" she asked. "I texted her but didn't hear back."

"I talked to her a few hours ago," Dee Dee said. "She was on her way to some house party. A house *arrest* party."

"Huh?"

"Exactly," Dee Dee said. "One of Davey Mitchell's little friends got in trouble for breaking his probation, so he's tied to his house, with his mother and an ankle bracelet. All the Bard Boys took ^{*the*} ~~a~~ party to him,"

"Are you serious?" Evie laughed.

"Yeah, he isn't allowed to go anywhere over 500 feet away from his house without checking in with his P.O."

It was funny to hear Dee Dee talk so T.V. cop shop. "So where was this party?"

Evie asked.

"Some place on Hemlock," Dee Dee said.

"On Hemlock?" Evie repeated.

"Yeah," Dee Dee said. "Why?"

Evie suddenly felt empty. "No reason." *me*

Chapter 16

Gomez
"Evie," Alex threw her a sideways glance as they drove to school together. "How long you gonna beef with me?"

It was Monday morning and Evie was still feeling tender from the Saturday date fiasco with Alex,

"I'm not beefing," Evie tried to answer casually, but it was no use. He hadn't even *apologized*. Unless, that is, you counted the text message she received the morning after.

Mrng Gomez. Cool prty

@ Hemlck. Srry u mssd it.

His text was less of an apology and more of an observation. So he went to a "cool party" and he was "sorry she missed it"? BFD. She couldn't hide her aggravation from him. *a* She had remained silent for pretty much the whole drive. She kept her arms crossed over her chest and didn't add anything to *his comments* ~~their conversation~~ except an occasional mild "uh, huh" to ~~something he'd said~~.

"Saturday night was so not my fault," Alex insisted. "I can't control Mondo."

"But you can control whether or not he comes with us on a date," Evie refused to look at Alex. *him + instead* She looked out her window and focused on the fascinating scenery -- oil derricks and lemon groves that lined Highway 33 into Ojai.

"How was I supposed to know we were on a *date*?" Alex was perplexed. "You told me that you wanted to go out, *out*, and that you wanted to do something *different*. To me, hanging out with you and Mondo is different. You're my two favorite buds."

"That's just it, Alex," Evie said. "I'm not your bud. I'm your girlfriend."

"But you're also my bud," Alex said. "I don't get it. Why do things have to be so different now that we're a couple? You're not trying to change me are you? Like mold me into a little version of what you think is ideal?"

"What? Of course not."

Evie didn't want him to change. She liked ^{Alex}him for who he was and what he was about. And that was the reason why she thought he would make a great boyfriend, ^{her} boyfriend. So why wouldn't he act like it?

"I don't get it, Evie," Alex continued. "Sometimes I don't get you."

Evie glanced over at Alex from the corner of her eyes. How ⁽²⁾could she have *not* have noticed how cute he was before when they were just Flojo friends? She ⁽¹⁾looked at the outline of his profile. When Evie had started Villanueva and had been introduced to ^{him} Alex, he had a wide medical bandage across the bridge of his nose. He also had cotton splints stuffed up his nostrils. Evie had figured that he was just like the other vanity plates at Villanueva and that he had also gotten a nose job. It wasn't until later that she learned that the bandages were from a surfing accident -- some newbie's foamboard had flung up right into his face there ^{ed}by shattering his nose and cheekbones. He was supposed to have kept the bandages ^{adhered}on and splints ^{in place for}in a good 1 ½ weeks after his surgery, but upon hearing that some south westerly swell was coming in at the Sea Street break, Alex yanked the splints out himself, right in the school's parking lot. He just *had* to catch that swell. The yanking act alone made Evie think he was just about the coolest guy. And cool guys can make cool boyfriends, right? But why, she wondered, couldn't he be cool enough and just

his company was
tell Mondo that he was not wanted on their dates? She studied *Alex* his profile more. Sigh. He was quite handsome.

"I'm sorry, Alex," Evie tugged on his elbow. "I just wish, sometimes, we could do things more, I dunno, romantic. You know what I mean?"

But Alex didn't say anything back except "uh, huh" as he turned up Monte Carlo 76 on his iPod.

They pulled into Villanueva, and before Evie hadn't even gotten out of Alex's she received a text from Dee Dee.

Rocio Here! OMG.

Lts to tell!

Dee Dee was *so* excited about having Rocio in Rio Estates and she wanted to do a girl's only lunch off campus to tell Evie and Raquel all about him. As if they hadn't heard enough already. But Evie figured it would be a good breather from Alex. Eating lunch apart might give them time to think. She texted him by the start of first period.

Goin to O-hi w/

the grls 4 lunch.

To which he responded:

No prob

Of course she read more into his two-word text. *Much* more. 'No prob' as in 'No problem. I really don't care what you do?' Any textlator could translate Alex's simple six characters (seven, if you included the space) to mean that he was annoyed with Evie. It took everything in her power not to follow up with a ^{response} ~~follow up text~~. During class, she found herself ^{checking} ~~opening~~ her cell ~~over and over~~ just to re-read the two words and see if she could glean their deeper meaning. She looked around the classroom, wishing she had either Dee Dee or Raquel in civics to help her decipher his cryptic text. Who, she scanned the classroom, could she trust with such personal information? No one. She snapped her cell shut. She just would *not* think about it. But four minutes later, she was going crazy. She opened her cell again.

"Hey," she leaned over to September Valdez, who sat next her. September was a junior and had had many boyfriends during her reign at Villanueva, she was also the vice president of Villanueva's ^{Poetry} book club, so she *knew* how to read between the lines. "What do you think this means?" Evie showed her Alex's message.

"Who sent it?" September took Evie's cell and propped it up inside her civics book, away from Vasquez-Reyes Alarcon. She studied the message.

"Alex sent it," Evie whispered from the side of her mouth. She kept her eyes focused on Vaquez. The last thing she wanted was her phone to be taken away, not at this crucial time in her life.

"Alex, as in your boyfriend Alex?" September asked.

"Uh, huh," Evie ~~said~~.

"No smiley face or heart," September looked it over and shook her head.

"Hmmm...it doesn't look good." She handed the phone back to Evie as soon as Vasquez

Perhaps
her
Evie?

name?
X-ray vision assuming he didn't
have.

Reyes-Alarcon turned his back to face the dry board. Evie turned her phone off and felt her stomach sink. September knew what she was talking about.

* * * * *

new scene

"So, he got in last night," Dee Dee went on about Rocio as she, Evie, and Raquel headed out of the student parking lot in Jumile. "He's staying in our guest room and *ay*, it was *so* hard to leave him this morning."

"He slept at your house?" Evie asked, from the backseat.

"Yes, and it was *unbearable*," Dee Dee cranked up ~~Pastilina Mosh~~ ^{RBD} on her iPod. "I haven't seen him in over four months, and I just wanted to sneak ^{to} in the guest room and be with him the whole night." She pulled out on to Ventura Avenue and made a left, towards O-hi Frostie.

"So why didn't you?" Raquel immediately turned the volume down, way down. She hated ~~P. Mosh~~ ^{RBD}. "If I had some fine ass *papi chulo*, as you claim he is, under my roof, that I hadn't seen for months, you best know I'd be giving him a big ol' grand welcome, *Americana* style."

"Raquel, you're scandalous!" Dee Dee turned up the volume and gave Raquel a look. "I *can't* sleep in the same bed with Rocio. My parents would freak seeing us come out of the same bedroom in the morning."

"What you gotta do is set an alarm clock in his room," Raquel began. "Like, set it for an hour earlier, before your parents wake up. But you gotta make *sure* you wake up

and get out of the room. Also, make sure you don't go in the room wearing any perfume or that hair stuff of yours that's gonna leave girl stink behind."

"You've obviously done this before," Evie said.

"You could say that," Raquel ~~gave a sly grin~~ and turned to face Evie. *w/ a sly grin*

"You know, Evie," she started, "I think it was pretty shitty how Alex treated you Saturday night. I mean, I don't know, maybe you need to teach him a lesson, like light some fire under his ass."

"And how would I do that?" Evie asked.

"You should go out with some other dude," Raquel said. "Just for kicks."

"Raquel," Evie said. "I am *not* going to do something like that. That is *so* not me."

"Well, you never know..." Raquel said. *"But I do."*

"Didn't you say that Rocio was gonna look into Stanford?" Evie asked Dee Dee.

Evie really didn't care where Rocio went to college, but she just didn't want to talk about Alex anymore. *esp. w/ Raq.*

"Yeah," Dee Dee lit up a Midnight Berry at the first stoplight they came to. "In fact, he should talk with Sabrina. She would be the perfect person to talk with."

"Not right now," Evie looked out Jumile's window. "She's not the best person for anything." Evie still hadn't talked to her sister about what she had overheard her say on the phone that afternoon. *(Sabrina's harsh words still stung.) grudge*

"Sabrina is *still* depressed?" Dee Dee looked at Evie in her rearview mirror. "I can't believe it."

"I know," Raquel teased Dee Dee. "Looks like there has to be a recount for your ~~winning~~ American Idol."

"I wouldn't say she's *my idol*," Dee Dee took a pull from her cigarette. "But, well, yeah, she's up there. Sabrina's the best." Dee Dee looked at Evie in the rearview mirror again. "I was actually," she started hesitantly, "sorta hoping that she could write me a recommendation letter, for Las Hermanas."

"No way," Evie said. "Now is not a good time to ask Sabrina for *anything*."