

## Chapter 26

The next afternoon, Evie was given her walking papers. Literally.

"I'm sorry," her driving instructor wrote a big fat 72 in blue ink on the score sheet. "Your biggest problems were parallel parking, gear shifting, and speed. You need to work on those." *but you had an immediate fail when I had to tell you to put on your seat belt*

Evie didn't say anything as she reluctantly took the paperwork from her instructor and headed back into the DMV office, where her mother and Lindsay were waiting. She swung open the glass door, and they both stood up from the plastic chairs they had been sitting on. They were both smiling, as if they were anticipating good news. But once they saw Evie's face, they both just *knew*.

"How did it go, *ma'ja*?" her mother asked anyway.

"I didn't pass," Evie held out her score sheet. She was on the verge of tears. She nervously rubbed the side of her face and looked around the DMV. People were either slouched over the main counters, lamenting to stone faced clerks, or they were slouched

paperwork  
over tables and pulling their hair out as they struggled with the written part of the driving test. Yes. The DMV was an evil, ugly place.

"Blah," her mother took the score sheet, looked it over, and clicked her tongue.

"So you'll take it again. No problem."

"Well, you did your best, Evelina." Lindsay pulled out her car keys to drive them home. Evie couldn't help but look down at the key ring. Did Lindsay *have* to flaunt them *so* soon after her failure?

DMV  
They left the DMV office and went around the side of the building to get Lindsay's car. Evie took a seat in the back and looked out the window. How could she *seat hurt?* have flunked her test? Her parents had paid the California Driving School a lot of money to teach her how to drive, and she had spent a lot of time practicing with her father and Lindsay. She must have failed, she figured, simply because she had had practically only three hours of sleep. She had left Raquel's house at nearly two a.m. and didn't fall asleep until nearly five in the morning. *Of course.* She was in a daze from sleep deprivation. It was not her fault. She *was* a good driver. How could anyone have expected her to pass a driving test in her condition?

*f showing 4 wheel*  
As Lindsay drove downtown, every driver on the road seemed to be boasting their independence to Evie *(as they whizzed along down Vineyard Avenue in their cars)*. They were free and liberated, *↓* not confined to the backseat like she was. Evie wondered if she would ever be allowed to participate in such an exclusive parade. Her stomach started to hurt.

"Mom," she leaned forward from the back seat. "Do you think I could just go home?"

She was so not in the mood for school. Raquel would still be pissed off at her, and  
Dee Dee was probably off somewhere with Rocio picking out China patterns. And Alex?  
Yeah, right. Mr. Nvr Mnd. Like he really cared. *self rly and card card*

"Evie," her mother turned around to face her. "You can't miss school just  
because you didn't pass your driving test,"

"It's not that," Evie's held her side and leaned into the back seat's fabric  
upholstery. "I just really, really don't feel good. I didn't sleep ~~at all~~ last night, and I feel  
sick."

"Oh, I don't know," her mother looked at Lindsay and then back at Evie. "But  
you do look really tired."

*when the reach their home +*  
They pulled into the Gomez's driveway, Lindsay kept her sedan running as Evie  
got out.

"We're going to meet ~~with~~ your father," her mother told her. "It's better if he  
doesn't know that I'm letting you skip school, so don't say anything when he gets home."

"I won't," Evie got her backpack from the car's floor. "Are you gonna tell him I  
flunked my test?" *+ Scratch her . . .*

"I'm going to have to," her mother replied. "Are you going to be okay?"

"Yeah," Evie yawned. "I really just need some sleep."

"Okay, *mu'ja*." Her mother looked worried. "I have my cell, and you know your  
sister ~~is~~ home if you need anything."

"Okay," Evie said. *agreed*

Yeah right, Sabrina would be the *last* person she would go to if she needed  
anything. *Evie the mom*

When <sup>she</sup> Evie got inside the house, all she wanted to do was go to the den, grab the <sup>multi</sup> afghan, a` la Lindsay, and snuggle in front of the <sup>Plasma</sup> television. Maybe *People's Court* was on. Now that would be great. The way Judge Milian lashed out Cuban dichos and <sup>and</sup> <sup>Served</sup> gave costly penalties to poorly prepared defendants always made Evie feel better about her own problems. <sup>humiliating</sup>

But when she stepped down into to the den, <sup>she</sup> Evie was surprised to find Sabrina there. She was in a pajama top and sweat bottoms, spread out on the den's brown leather couch <sup>and</sup> covered with Lindsay's crocheted afghan. Her feet where propped up on the coffee table.

"What are you doing here?" Evie asked as she crossed over her legs.

She didn't mean to come across as accusatory as she might have sounded. It was just that since Sabrina had been home, she *never* left her room. <sup>And of course,</sup> Also, Evie still held a grudge over the smack she had overheard Sabrina say about her on the phone.

"Last I checked," Sabrina didn't bother to look up. "This *was* my house, too."

<sup>e</sup> "No, I mean, you're usually in your room." Evie flopped down on the matching leather loveseat and kicked up her own feet on the coffee table. Their mother had insisted there was to be no 'flopping' or 'kicking up' on the den's expensive, mid-century California Mission furniture. But their mother wasn't around at the moment.

Sabrina kept her eyes on the Plasma screen. She was watching a Korean soap opera with no subtitles. She laughed along with the programmed laugh track.

Evie looked around. "Where the remote?" she asked. "I wanna watch *People's Court*."

"Evie, don't," Sabrina reached for the channel changer on the coffee table. "I'm watching this."

"Like you can really understand what's going on."

"Of course I do, or else I wouldn't be watching it," Sabrina replied.

"What?" Evie started sarcastically. "Don't tell me you're now president of the Korean Club?"

*Stanford*

"Evie," Sabrina still didn't look at her, but rather reclined her head farther back onto the couch. "Just let me be. I've been in my room all morning, and I just wanted to take advantage of no one being home today. Or I *thought* no one was gonna be home. Why aren't you in school?"

"I'm sick," Evie cleared her throat for effect.

"You don't seem sick," Sabrina finally looked over at her. "And if you are, shouldn't you be in bed?"

"Well, you don't seem sick either," Evie snapped. "Shouldn't *you* be back at Stanford? So you don't have to be here? Surrounded by *friggin' idiots*?"

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

"You know what I mean," Evie said. "I *heard* you."

"Heard me, what?" Sabrina asked.

"I heard you, last week," Evie continued. "You were on the phone basically talking smack about me, saying how much you hate being here and calling me a spoiled brat."

Sabrina turned away from Evie and looked back at the T.V. She said nothing.

*One Mississippi, two Mississippi...* Evie counted in her head.

"Evie," Sabrina finally sighed. "You just wouldn't understand."

"Oh," Evie said. "And that's because I'm such a friggin' idiot or a spoiled brat?"

"No. Evie. It's just," her sister started. "I've been having a really, really hard time and..."

"And what?" Evie wasn't so convinced that Suprema could ever have such a hard time at anything.

"Evie, I don't want to get into it," Sabrina continued. "For the last month, I've had to have an answer for everything and everyone. *Why* was I breaking up with Robert? *Why* was I going back home? *When* was I going back to school? It's like everyone wanted a tidy little answer tied up in a perfect little bow, and you know what? I don't *have* the answers. I'm tired. I just want to, I don't know...chill."

*Chill?* Did that word actually exist in Sabrina's vocabulary?

*the dictionary of Suprema.*

"~~You don't know,~~" Sabrina said, "Maybe you don't understand. I mean, you've always been the baby of the family, the favorite and --."

"The *favorite*?" Evie gawked. "*Me*?"

"Uh, yeah," Sabrina said. "You."

"You're crazy," Evie told her. "You're the one everyone just idolizes. Mom, Dad, Lindsay, Dee Dee's dad...even A through H."

"A through H?" Sabrina pursed her lips and slowly cracked a smile. "I haven't heard that name in years. He's still at Nueva? You call him that too?"

"Yeah," Evie felt the ice thawing. "I mean, everyone does."

"Does he still clean his glasses, over and over again?" Sabrina asked. "Like obsessive compulsive?"

*what?*

*the cousin*

*answered slowly*

"Oh, my God," Evie laughed. "*Yes*. I don't think he ever pays attention to what anyone is saying."

"Oh, he's paying attention all right," Sabrina said. "But only if you're a female student. He's the biggest perv."

"*What?*" Evie balked. "A Through H? Gross! He's like three hundred years old. That is *so* not true!"

"It *is* true," Sabrina insisted. "We used to say that A through H stood for Ass and Hiney. That was his specialty."

Sabrina slapped her hands together and let out a high-pitched laugh. Evie knew that laugh. It sounded like a baby seal crying out for his mother. → ? *more*

"Oh, my God," Sabrina said. "Those were some fun times, back at Villanueva. I wish I was back there, when life was much more chill."

There was that word again.

"Chill?" Evie asked. "Are you sure we went to the same school?"

"You just have a different circle of friends than I had," Sabrina said. "I was always with the square kids, the future CPAs of the world." She rolled her eyes. "I don't know, I think maybe because I am the oldest, mom and dad were tougher on me. Mom was so strict with me when I was at Nueva. I wasn't allowed to date, or hang out at Sea Street. And to be running around with someone like Raquel when I was fifteen? No way."

"Fifteen and three quarters," Evie corrected her. "I'm almost sixteen."

"*A little less sixteen*," her sister smiled at her.

"Hey, I love that song," Evie said. She was surprised that her sister knew of it.

"Yeah, one of my sisters at Stanford always played Fallout Boy," Sabrina said. *held out the remote*  
She suddenly turned down the volume on the Plasma. "Eves, I'm sorry about what you heard that day on the phone. I've just been out of my mind. I don't like being here, but it really doesn't have anything to do with you. Mom and Dad are really getting on my case. Mom especially. She can be so stifling."

"Tell me about it." Evie was surprised that her sister shared the same sentiment. She had always thought that the two "Go-mez Girls" consisted of her mother and Sabrina. She was the odd one out.

"I just feel like I am letting everyone down," Sabrina continued. "I don't need to be reminded how much Stanford is costing mom and dad, or how I didn't love Robert enough."

"Is that why you broke up?" Evie asked. "You don't love him anymore?"

"No, I do love him," Sabrina sighed and curled her legs onto the couch. "But he was going to start grad school this spring, in Massachusetts, and he wanted me to transfer schools so I could be closer to him. At first I was into the idea, but then I just felt like I was losing a part, a big part, of myself. I wasn't Sabrina Gomez anymore. I was Robert Ramirez's girlfriend." She shook her head. "I wasn't about to leave my sorority sisters, my friends, my family...California."

"In that order, right?" Evie smirked.

"No," Sabrina threw Evie a sideways glance. "But God, Evie, Robert was, like, so *care about* insulted, and he would go on and on about me not going with him, as if I didn't love him enough or something. I grew up wanting to be a Stanford grad, not some grad student's

## Chapter 27

*Tvorless coming?*

When their mother and Lindsay got back, Evie and Sabrina were still in the den. *on the coffee table* They had created a feast of canned bean dip and bagel chips and were watching old episodes of Laguna Beach that Evie had TiVo'd.

"One of my sisters went out with Jason," Sabrina told Evie. "Just one date, but *it was enough.* she said he was *really* cheap."

"No way," Evie dunked her chip into the bean dip. "*Serio?*"

"Yes," Sabrina said. "He practically wanted her to order from the kid's menu, and *then* he asked for a doggie bag for their *bread.*"

"Oh. *My.* God," Evie laughed. "That's messed up."

"And he was so short," Sabrina laughed with her. "Talk about trial size!"

"It is *so* nice to see you ~~out of your room and to see you two together,~~" their mother *said* told Sabrina as she came down into the den. (Both she and Evie had taken their feet off the coffee table. ) *→*

Vicki Gomez joined them on the couch. "I'm going to call your father. Maybe we could barbeque tonight."

"None for me," Sabrina lifted her pajama top and patted her belly. "I'm already full."

"Yeah, me too," Evie said. It ~~was cool to see that her sister was eating again.~~

"Oh, I think we should," Vicki Gomez insisted. "We could barbeque some tri-tip."

Sabrina looked at Evie and discreetly held her neck with her hand, in a choking position.

"But what about your South Cal diet?" Evie asked their mother.

Vicki Gomez waved her hand aside. "Oh, I'm not concerned with that anymore." She took a large bagel chip from the bag and dipped it into the can of bean dip.

(Evie felt worried. It was not a good sign that her mother was off her diet. She had started the diet because of the Sixteeners. *more*)

Just then the phone rang, and Vicki Gomez got up from the couch to get the cordless from the kitchen counter. *their mother*

"Hi, Kitty," she sang into the receiver. "You know, I was going to call you, I was *just* at --"

Evie sank into the *couch* loveseat. Uh, oh. She *had* *ed* *finally* *gonna* *call* ~~was~~ wondering when Kitty was ~~going~~ to call to complain about her being over at the Diazes so late, or rather, so early in the morning. *in house*

"What?" Vicki Gomez looked over at Evie in complete astonishment. "Kitty, *no*. I am so sorry."

Evie squirmed on the *couch* ~~den's~~ loveseat. Should she make a run for her bedroom...window? Her mother was obviously hearing about last night's activities.

"Kitty, no, of course, not," Vicki Gomez continued. "I won't say a word. You have my promise. Yes, she's right here." She looked over at Evie again, just as she was getting up. *to leave*

Evie was confused. What was going on? What *was* Kitty telling her?

After a few more "oh nos" and "of course, nots" Vicki Gomez hung up the phone.

"What happened?" Evie cautiously asked her mother. "What did Kitty say?"

"Raquel hasn't been feeling well," her mother said hesitantly. "So, Kitty's going," she paused. "So Kitty's going to check her into Isla del Mar."

"Isla *del Mar*?" Evie was taken aback.

Sabrina looked up. "What? Why?"

Isla del Mar was a center on the northeast hills of the county that treated people for addiction or depression. Sometimes, last semester, the Flojos, Evie, Raquel, Mondo, Alex, and Jose would cram into Mondo's Maurader and make their way up the winding road to Isla's parking lot. It was relaxing to sit and lean against the long, high stucco wall of the in-patient entry building and take in the panoramic view of the city and the ocean. If you went at night, which they often did, you could see the offshore oil rigs twinkling in the distance. However, Evie never dreamed that one of *their own* would be on the inside of the same building.

"Kitty said Raquel got in trouble, again."

"In trouble with what?"

Her mother didn't answer.

"Mom," Evie said. "Tell me. She's my best friend."

"Evie, I told Kitty I wouldn't say anything, but now I'm thinking that you need to know and that I need to know."

*Need to* "Know what?" Evie asked. Why was her mother talking in riddles?

"Did you know that Raquel was dealing drugs?"

"What?" Evie exclaimed. "No!"

"Are you being honest with me?" Her mother looked at her sternly. Even Sabrina looked at Evie, wide-eyed with curiosity.

"Mom, no," Evie insisted. "I swear I didn't. What are you talking about?"

"Evie, don't swear," her mother said.

"No, I mean, I promise, *promise* that I didn't know anything about this. I had no idea."

"None of your friends do or deal drugs?"

Uh, oh. Evie thought of Mondo. He sold pot, but was he really a friend? Sure they had hung out in the same clique last semester, but was Mondo really a friend now? Not that much, really, anymore. *Question mark*

"Friends?" Evie asked. "No, but I do know of people at school who sell pot and stuff, but they aren't my friends."

Evie's mother put her hands on the kitchen counter and took a deep breath.

"Evie, it's pretty serious. Raquel could end up at the CYA or something, so it's better she get help now. Kitty and Charlie want to curb it before it gets out of control, but frankly, I think they should have done something a lot earlier."

"Mom, how could you say that?" Sabrina shook her head. "You just said that Raquel's in serious trouble, and now all you can be is judgmental towards Kitty and Charlie?"

"I'm just saying it might be too late," their mother tried to explain. "Raquel has had problems long before this, and you'd think, with Kitty being the head of Las Madrinas and everything, that she would have been a little more pro-active."

"What's gonna happen to her?" Evie asked.

*They are*  
"Kitty is going to take her to Isla tomorrow morning."

"Tomorrow?" Evie asked. "Already? What's the rush?"

"I don't know exactly," their mother confessed. "They wanted to take her in today, but they needed to get some things at home in order first."

"Well, I'm going over then," Evie got up from the *sofa* and started for the kitchen door. *love seat*

"Evie, don't." Her mother blocked her with her arm. "You need to leave her alone."

"*What?*" Evie balked. "My best friend is going away, and you're telling me I can't see her before she leaves?"

"Evie," her mother said. "You can't go over now. Give this time to Kitty and Charlie. That's all I'm saying."

Evie brushed past her mother and stormed up to her room. Could this day get any more jacked *up*? Just as she was about to flop onto her bed (on which flopping *was* allowed), her mother called out from downstairs

"E-vie! Vi-si-tor!"

*Lindsay*  
Visitor? Her mother practically sang the announcement. Who would be visiting now? Why did her mother sound – wait, it *must* be . . . Raquel.

Evie rushed ~~from her room and~~ headed downstairs, but instead, to her shock, she didn't find Raquel in the foyer. It was Arturo.

*down*  
"Hey, Evie," Arturo said nervously as she came into the foyer.

What was *he* doing at *her* house? Do stalkers wear cowboy boots?

"Oh, hey, Arturo," Evie answered. "Um, how did you know where I lived?"

"Your address was on your file card," Arturo explained. "I'm sorry to just drop by, but you forgot your backpack." He lifted Evie's bag from the foyer's wooden slat bench. "You took off so fast yesterday."

"Oh, yeah. Sorry about that." Evie took her backpack from him. Okay, so he wasn't a stalker, but he had hunted her down, sorta. "I hadn't even noticed it was missing."

Arturo laughed. "Oh, so I can see why you need extra credit for school."

"No," Evie felt embarrassed. "It's just been a rough two days."

"Oh. Sorry," Arturo looked down at the floor and then down the hallway. "I didn't want to make things complicated. I hope I wasn't disrespectful, you know, about..."

"No, it was okay," Evie said.

"Just okay?" Arturo winced playfully.

"No, I mean, it was nice." Evie lowered her voice and looked down the hall. She didn't want her mother overhearing what was up with her.

"I meant all those things I said," Arturo told her. "I don't want you think that you were some kind of rebound or anything. I have always been, I don't know, sorta *intrigued* by you."

"Intrigued? By *me*?" Evie couldn't quite believe him.

"Yeah, why not?" he asked. "From that first day I met you, I thought you were really cute, but I didn't know what to do. I was still with Josephina, and I knew you were with someone."

"How did you know I had a boyfriend?" Evie asked. "I don't think I ever mentioned it."

"That shell necklace," he said.

Evie raised her eyebrows.

"~~Well~~<sup>Free</sup>, it looked homemade and seemed sorta special to you. Girls usually don't wear the same necklace, every day."

Evie smiled. "Sure they do, that is if the necklace *is* special."

"My point exactly," Arturo ~~said~~. ~~He~~ looked around Evie's house. Evie felt she should ask him to hang out for a while, but she really didn't want to ~~ask~~. She wanted to find some way to get over to Raquel's as soon as possible.

"So are you gonna be at the reserve on Wednesday?" Arturo asked.

"I don't know," Evie said. "I mean, my best friend is going away and —"

"Back to Mexico?"

"No. I mean, yes. Dee Dee might be going away too. I've just got a lot of things on my mind, and my birthday is coming up, and I'm not having the party I thought I was going to have. Everything is just a mess."

"Your birthday?" he asked. "When is your birthday?"

Was Arturo the only person in Ventura County who didn't know about Evie's birthday and possible party at Dukes?

"In about a week and a half," she said. "But I don't know if it's even gonna happen. I have so much work to do, and I haven't started any of it."

“Well, if you’re not gonna be at this reserve this week, can I get your number?”

He pulled out his cell phone from his jacket’s front pocket. “I mean, at the very least let me take you out for your birthday.”

“Okay, that would be cool.” Evie took his phone and punched in her number.

“You can text me,”

“I don’t do text,” he watched over Evie’s shoulder as she punched in her name.

“I’d just rather hear your voice.”

After Arturo left, Evie’s mother joined her in the great room.

“Is that your boss? From the reserve?” her mother asked. “He’s very handsome. I like his cowboy boots!”

“He’s not really my boss,” Evie said. “He’s just in charge of things.”

*Unlike* Alex, Evie thought. With all that had been going on, she suddenly missed him even more. Alex was really great when it came to listening to her problems. So he didn’t know how to really plan evenings out on the town, or sometimes he didn’t know how to dress, but he was really a sweet person. How could she have gotten into a lip lock with Arturo? She had made a big mistake. She wanted Alex. She had to get Alex back. But how?

## Chapter 28

7am  
on the door step  
The next morning  
"I *knew* something was up with Raquel," Dee Dee told Evie ~~later on the phone~~  
~~that night~~. "Didn't I tell you? Remember in the counseling office? That day we were looking for a job for you?"

"I know," Evie agreed somberly. She remembered that day very clearly. She had also felt that Raquel was going off a little on the deep end, but thought that maybe Alex was right when he had said that perhaps Raquel was just going through a phase.

"No wonder she had so much money lately," Dee Dee said. "Do you think she used drug money to buy my purse and your gown at Decade?"

"Ew," Evie winced. She didn't like the idea of wearing a dress that came from ~~some drug deal~~ *blotched or successful*. "I didn't even think of that."

"I can't believe her parents are sending her to Isla. I mean, don't you think that is a little severe? ~~We have to go see her tomorrow, before she leaves.~~" Dee Dee clicked her tongue. "Oh, God, poor Raquel," Dee Dee clicked her tongue.

*I can't believe her pa  
I would just tunk -"*  
The front door opened.

## Chapter 29

*Kitty Diaz*  
"Lo siento, girls," Raquel's mother was standing in the doorway of the Diazes house. *(It was early the next morning, just around 7 a.m.)* *she* Kitty Diaz shook her head at Evie and Dee Dee. "Raquel's still sleeping."

"What time is she leaving for Isla?" Evie asked

*Very tired*  
"We're gonna leave around ten," Kitty Diaz answered. She looked tired. *each* eye *5* had a moon of darkness under it. Her hair, cut in a bob style, was flat on one side.

"Can we wait until she gets up?" Evie felt anxious. "Or maybe you could wake her up and tell her that we're here?"

"No, Evie, I can't," Kitty yawned, forgetting to cover her mouth. "You girls go to school. You'll be able to see Raquel soon enough."

"Ay, Kitty," Raquel's father came to the door. "Let them see Raquel. They are her best friends, her amuegitas."

"Charlie..." Kitty looked up at him.

"Just let them see her," Charlie Diaz widened the door. "Come in girls. Go see Raquel."

When Evie and Dee Dee got to Raquel's bedroom, her door was slightly open. *photo*  
*as usual* The window shades *(→ the three girls)* were pulled down, and only the screen saver on her computer screen offered light.

"Raquel?" Evie whispered through the darkness.

Dee Dee pushed open the door, and both girls peered in. Raquel lay on her side in *canopy* bed, under an array of black clothing, her Black Molly Monster, and a couple of *Kerrang!* magazine scattered about.

"She's asleep," Dee Dee whispered to Evie. "We should just go."

"Wait," Raquel turned over under her ~~comforter~~ *Roxy bedspread*.

Dee Dee looked at Evie wide eyed. They both wanted to see Raquel, but neither of them had actually rehearsed what they were going to say to her. They walked into the room towards her ~~bed~~ *g*.

"Hey, Raquel," Evie said softly as she sat down on the side of Raquel's ~~canopy~~ *g* bed. "How you doing?"

"How do you *think* I'm doing? My parents are trying to get rid of me," (Raquel *only* answered. Her head was on the pillow, turned sideways. )

"Raquel, your parent's aren't trying to get rid of you," Dee Dee said. "They just want you to get better. We all want you to be in a better place."

"And ~~the~~ *^ better* best place is some friggin' *psycho* hospital?" Raquel asked. "Why don't they just send me to Hawaii for a few months? Yeah, I could hang with that."

"Why?" Evie found herself asking. "You have connections there?" The words *had* slipped out before she knew it. She felt angry. Raquel had fucked up, big time and she was trying to be all funny about it.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Raquel looked up from ~~her~~ ~~her~~ ~~pillow~~ at Evie.

"Raquel," Evie started. "*Why* were you dealing? Is that how you bought my dress? With your drug money?"

Raquel rolled her eyes and clicked her tongue. "Oh, come on. You don't have to be all dramatic, *drug money*. I put your dress on my credit card. Dee Dee's purse, too. I don't deposit cash. *fonta* Is that what you are so concerned about? That your two ~~thousand~~ *g* ~~dollar~~ gown didn't come from the right kind of money? Please. "

"Where you selling with Mondo?" Dee Dee asked.

"Mondo?" Raquel rolled her eyes again. "Hell, no. And I wasn't doing anything major, just peddling some pot now and then for Davey."

"Davey?" Evie exclaimed. "Raquel, you have *got* to get a grip. I mean, why the hell are you helping *Davey*?"

Raquel put her head back on the pillow, closed her eyes and sighed.

"Raquel," Evie started. "I don't get it. I mean, we can all go off the path once in a while, but what's going on?"

Raquel still didn't answer. She pulled her blankets up to her neck and *although she* ~~even with~~ *to well* *had* her eyes closed, Evie could see that they started ~~tear~~ up. "You guys wouldn't understand," Raquel ~~said~~ *o*.

Evie felt another one of those moments coming on. Hadn't Sabrina just told her the same thing last week? Why did people, people whom she *thought* she was close with, think she couldn't possibly understand them? *anything*

"Raquel..." Evie started

"No, I mean it," Raquel interrupted. "You guys are all into your own things. Dee Dee's with Rocio, and you've got your surfing and horse thing. I don't have anything. Before I used to have Jose, and we were Flojos, and we used to hang out and it was fun."

But now I don't even have that. And, I don't know, sometimes I really miss Jose. I miss being Jose's girlfriend."

"Jose?" Evie asked. "How could you possibly miss him? He was a <sup>so</sup> jerk."

Raquel looked at her. "Don't you think that Alex was a jerk at times and don't you still miss him?"

"Yeah, but..." Evie started.

"Yeah, nothing," Raquel said. "I'm not saying how I feel makes sense. I'm just telling you how I feel. I don't know. Jose just made me feel good. Not all the time, but a lot of the time he did."

"And so now selling dope makes you feel good?" Evie asked. "Don't you think that's a little too stupid <sup>snapped</sup> ~~ghetto~~ <sup>harris</sup> ghetto, Raquel?"

"Evie," Dee Dee looked at her. "Give Raquel a break. We came here to be supportive, not to be judgmental."

"I'm not being judgmental," Evie tried to defend herself. But in a way, she knew that she was being critical. She looked at Raquel "Yeah, I guess you're right, I guess I don't understand." <sup>shook her head</sup>

"It's sorta like how Sabrina is depressed and she just sleeps a lot," Dee Dee tried to explain. "But maybe with Raquel, she had to do something different, something that's more Raquel, I don't know, more *scandalosa*."

"I <sup>g</sup> ~~don't~~ think I was doing anything that scandalous," Raquel defended herself. "I mean, who doesn't sell pot once in awhile?"

"I don't," Dee Dee said.

"Yeah, and neither do I," Evie said. "Raquel, you were getting out of control."

Raquel frowned and shook her head.

*rolled her eyes again*

"Raq," Dee Dee started. "I wasn't gonna say anything, but my dad got really mad that night you called our house and you were drunk."

"Oh, well, yeah," Raquel looked awkward. "Of course, but I apologized to him. Remember I called the next day. He was cool about it."

"Yeah, but I mean, he was really put off and I wasn't gonna say anything but he and Graciela had a dinner party for Rocio and--" Dee Dee seemed unsure if she should continue.

*about this either*

"And what?" Raquel asked. "What's the big mystery?"

"They had this dinner for Rocio and his parents and my dad, he didn't want you to come. He was afraid that you would make a scene or something."

"What?" Raquel's eyebrows raised. "Your dad thought that? That I would make a ~~scene?~~"

"Uh, huh," Dee Dee admitted.

"Was Evie invited? Did she go?" Raquel looked over at Evie.

"Well, yeah," Dee Dee answered.

"I'm sorry," Evie told Raquel. "I didn't want to hurt your feelings."

"Wow, I feel like shit. I always thought your dad liked me."

"He does," Dee Dee said. "But he doesn't like the way you can act sometimes. It didn't help that you were spending so much time with Davey."

"Yeah, I guess," Evie said. "He hasn't been the best influence."

*Sharply*

"Yeah, but she didn't want go with him," Evie continued. "He got all mad at her. And now she's just taking a break from him and just about everything. She says she needs to focus on who *she* is and what she wants."

"Which is?" Dee Dee asked

"I dunno, I guess being a good president for her sorority, doing better on the tennis team, stuff like that."

"But that's easy for her," Raquel said. "But I'm not good at anything. I mean, what could I possibly focus on?"

"Raquel," Evie started. "*Of course*, you're good at stuff. I mean, think about it, last semester, as Flojos, all we did was hang out. We really did nothing. I would *think* about surfing, but now I'm actually doing it. It's just a matter of doing what you're thinking about."

"Well, I think about being with boys," Raquel said.

"I guess we gotta work on finding you a new hobby," Evie shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm serious, Evie. You have two dudes totally in love with you and I have no one."

"I wouldn't say I have two guys," Evie said. If two dudes were so totally in love with her, why did she feel lonely? "Alex isn't talking to me and I don't know where I stand with Arturo. But he did say that he might take me out to dinner for my birthday."

"What's going on with your party?"

"I'm still working on it," Evie said. But in reality, she knew she had some work ahead of her.

"So, you ain't into Turdo?" Raquel asked.

"No," Evie shook her head. "I mean, I'm into a guy that's gonna treat me sweet and special, but I really wish *Alex* was that guy. I don't know. I think I like Arturo more because of what he stands for, but I'm really not into *him*. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah," Dee Dee said slowly. "It does."

"Girls," Kitty knocked on the doorjamb of Raquel's room. "You better get going if you don't want to be late for school."

*+ me*  
— *okay - she looked not at Bee.*  
"Okay, ~~Raquel,~~ Dee Dee exhaled. ~~"We better go."~~

*Raq*  
"We'll call you the very first day they let us," Evie leaned in to hug her goodbye.

*suddenly*  
*Promise* "The very first day?" Raquel asked. Her eyes had a profound look of fear in them.

"The very first day," Evie said. "*Promise.*"

"Okay," Raquel sighed. ~~She seemed a bit more at ease.~~

*more*  
Dee Dee and Evie said good bye and reluctantly left.

*+ Evie*  
"I hope Raquel is gonna be okay," Dee Dee said as she got into Jumile. "I mean, she seems okay to me, making little jokes and stuff."

"Yeah," Evie threw her backpack in the back seat and got into the passenger seat.

"I just hope she takes things seriously."

*Defense mech.*  
"So, I don't understand. Why wouldn't your sister just move with Robert?" Dee Dee started Jumile. "I ~~thought she loved him?~~ I just always imagined they were, like, the college sweethearts that would get married and living happily ever after."

"I'm sure Sabrina wants to live happily ever after, but she wants to live happily right *now*."

"Hmm...interesting," Dee Dee headed towards the main exit gate of Rio Estates,

As she drove past the gate, the morning mail truck was just entering. Evie looked after it. She wondered if this would be the week she would receive her quality check. Dee Dee hadn't even started her essay and she had yet to turn in her hours to Vasquez-Reyes Alarcon. She calculated the calendar days in her head. If all was on schedule, and if the inept student intern working in the counselor's office was on top of things, this <sup>yes</sup> week she'd be getting her quality check.

"Hey, Dee Dee," Evie asked. "You still like to write a lot, right?"

"Yeah," Dee Dee answered. "I told you, When I was in Mexico Rocio and I were always writing each other back and forth."

"In both Spanish <sup>or</sup> and English, right?" Evie aksed.

"Both," Dee answered.

"Good," Evie said. It was time to put Dee Dee to work.

## Chapter 30

On Wednesday, Evie skipped working at the reserve and asked Dee Dee over after dinner.

"You have to help me write this," Evie said as she <sup>pushed aside</sup> moved her mother's clothing and kitchenware catalogues and placed a bag and some pens on the dining room table,

"Help you?" Dee Dee placed her <sup>now favorite</sup> beloved vintage quilted bag on one of the dining room chairs. "I thought I was going to write the whole essay for you." She looked at the pens. "And we should be at your computer. I'm not doing <sup>this</sup> it by hand."

"No," Evie pulled out two flat boxes from the Lautzenhauser's bag. "Didn't you get my text?"

"Yeah, why do you think I am here?" Dee Dee took a seat.

"No," Evie shook her head in frustration. "Dee Dee, I need to write a letter, to Alex."

"A letter? To Alex?" Dee Dee's eyes widened. "What?"

"Yes," Evie suddenly felt awkward. "You said you used to write all those letters to Rocio when you lived in Mexico, and this is my last hope. Alex won't answer my texts, or my IMs, or my phone calls. I'm thinking I could write him a letter and tell him

how sorry I am and what a stupid mistake I made. I don't know, I just need to tell him everything that I feel badly about."

"But what about your extra credit essay?" Dee Dee asked. "You have to give me adequate time if you want a good paper." *Evie*  
*When is it do?"*

"I know, I know," Evie said. "But I'm sure you'll be able to just whip it out, you're good like that."

"I know but—" *fe* But right now you gotta help me write this letter to Alex. I haven't had a decent night's sleep since he broke up with me."

"Are you going to mail it?" Dee Dee asked. *That's what Rocir + I*

"I don't think so," Evie said. "If for some reason he doesn't get it, I would never know. It would just *kill* me. And then what would I do? Ask him if he ever got my letter? That would just defeat the whole purpose of wanting to do something so unexpected and personal. I think I'm just gonna slip it in his locker."

"*Oh,*" Dee Dee's mouth formed a syrupy, *Pout* ~~pouty~~ smile. "This is *so* romantic." She looked over the boxes of stationary. "This is the paper you picked out?"

"Yeah," Evie showed her the two different styles. "This one," she pointed out one box that had a border of pineapples and mangos, "is like the 'fun Evie.' It'll remind him what he's missing out on."

"Or make him crave fruit salad," Dee Dee mused.

*Evie ignored her.* "And this," she held up the other box. "This is, like, the 'romantic side of Evie.' I know guys don't go for all the pink girly stuff, but I don't want him continuing you to think that I'm just his bud, like, another dude dropping him a note."

Dee Dee laughed. "I don't think *dudes* write each other, Evie."

"Dee Dee," Evie frowned. "Quit making fun<sup>g</sup>. This is serious to me!"

"Okay, okay," Dee Dee put her hand on Evie's shoulder and squeezed it. "So sorry, ADA."

"So which one should I use?" Evie asked.

"I say use a sheet of paper from your spiral," Dee Dee said. "It's more you."

Evie took Dee Dee's hand off her shoulder and slumped back in her chair.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" Dee Dee raised her hands in protest. "I couldn't resist. Besides, Raquel isn't around. Someone has to keep up with the yuk-yuks."

"Well, not at my expense," Evie sat back up in her chair and started to open both boxes. "So, what kind of stationary did you use when you wrote to Rocio?" she asked

"Oh, I wrote him on <sup>expensive</sup> parchment-like paper. It was <sup>peach colored</sup> scented."

"Scented?" Evie asked. "Like what?"

"Like <sup>peaches</sup> ~~straw~~berries," Dee Dee said. "And then I would spray some of my own perfume in the air and wave the paper through it."

"Ew," Evie grimaced. "How do you think it smelled after a few days in the mail?"

"I guess it smelled very *enticing*," Dee Dee smiled, "because he *always* wrote back."

Evie decided on the stationary with the fruit border. Just as she and Dee Dee worked on composing a letter that would lure Alex back to her, Evie's mother and Sabrina came into the kitchen.

"Hello, Dela," Evie's mother called out from over the counter.

"Hi Vicki," Dee Dee looked over. "Hey, Sabrina,"

"Hey, Dees," Sabrina helped herself to some pan dulce from a box on the counter.

"Long time no see."

"Yeah," Dee Dee smiled, somewhat nervously. "So how's Stanford?" She appeared to Evie to be "Sabrina struck."

"I love it," Sabrina said simply. "I love that it's far away right now."

<sup>e</sup>  
"But who's running your sorority while you are out here?" Dee Dee asked.

"Oh, we got a VP to take care of that," Sabrina crinkled her nose and waved her hand aside. "As the president, you pretty much just delegate. It's nothing like when I was a Hermana. We were all running around doing everything on our own – fundraisers, workshops, community services. Now *that* was a lot of work, but all so worth it. I loved those times."

*Evie's note*  
"Dee Dee's going to be a Hermana," ~~Vicki~~ Gomez said.

"Really?" Sabrina's face lit up. She started towards the dining room table. "Wow, congratulations! Wait, when did you get nominated?"

"Well, I haven't, yet," Dee Dee admitted.

"And you can't be nominated if you're living in another country," Evie said. Okay, just a *little* jabby.

"What do you mean?" Sabrina took a bite of her sweet bread and looked at Dee Dee. "Are you going somewhere?"

"Well," Dee Dee started timidly. "I might have to go back to Mexico."

"*What?*" Vicki Gomez's mouth dropped. She joined them at the dining room table. "You're moving back to Mexico City? I just saw Graciela at the country club today, and she said nothing about this. *Nothing.*"

## Chapter 31

By the she was already not pink  
Evie arrived at Duke's feeling like a princess. She was wearing her halter gown, hot pink jeweled flojos, and perched on top of her head was an elegant, but understated tiara. How could she not? Her royal A hot pink toe job and hand job completed the look. And to top it all off, her father had rented the copper convertible Camaro (ANGELS) that was used in a Go Betty Go video just to drive Evie, Sabrina and Dee Dee to the party. When they all got out of the Duke's car at the valet station, Evie caught a glimpse of herself in one of the restaurant glass doors -- She smiled at her reflection. Forget princess, how about rock star?

As she, Dee Dee, and Sabrina made their way through the lobby's entrance, Evie really did feel like a rock star as the throngs of people—friends, family (Even A through H was in attendance. Ew, how did he get in?)—crowded around her, tugging on and wishing her happy birthday. trying in vain to be heard over People had to scream over DJ Chancla's bass driven surf music just to be heard. have their birthday greetings

"Mahalo! Evie!"

"Feliz Cumpleanos!"

"You look hot!"

"Happy Birthday, mi 'ja!"

Evie looked over and saw the tiny white-haired lady in a cream colored pantsuit among a mob of Hawaiian print shirts and short dresses.

"Grandma?" Evie was caught off guard. She couldn't believe that Grandma Chablis would take a break from college lectures and her *quintana* lifestyle just to attend a grandchild's birthday party. "What are you doing here?!"

The buffet was out of control <sup>with</sup> and a mad fusion of *lechón*, Huli Huli chicken, Mango BBQ pork ribs, and pineapples filled with Mexican rice.

Even Sabrina couldn't resist.

"Damn," Sabrina was the first guest to help herself to a plate. "I think I've gained, like, ten pounds just *looking* at it." <sup>all this</sup>

Later, Evie danced in <sup>the middle of the dance floor</sup> a circle with Dee Dee and some other friends from school,

fanning her face with her hand. The dance floor had become so hot that Evie's curls <sup>became</sup> were

limp and stringy even though Dee Dee had her curls would retain their perfect spiral all

night. <sup>her</sup> Evie's back and neck <sup>became</sup> were drenched with sweat and every now and then, she'd

grab her <sup>gown</sup> dress by the back zipper and tug the fabric a bit, hoping to get some <sup>at silk</sup> air

circulation going, but it just wasn't cutting it. She glanced down and noticed ~~barbecue~~

<sup>sauce</sup> sauce, ~~from the~~ Mango BBQ pork ribs, spattered on her precious silk gown. Oh, my God,

how long had that *mancha* been there? She was formally defeated. She <sup>Smack center</sup> had to take a

break from dancing. . She left the dance floor and grabbed a cocktail napkin from the bar. <sup>After</sup>

dipping it into one of the many glasses of water that lined the bar, <sup>she</sup> and then worked on the

splotch. But it only spread out into a bigger and darker stain. Oh, well, Evie figured. Just

<sup>Epic</sup> add a dry cleaning bill to her already growing debt.

Evie looked around her party. As the birthday girl, she had taken the first whack

at the custom made <sup>pineapple shaped</sup> piñata, cut the two-foot high mango and whipped cream birthday

cake (from her father's bakery, *claro*), and introduced the line of sexy Polynesian

<sup>q</sup> dancers. She still had to unwrap the pyramid of gifts piled up on one of the large banquet

tables. She dampened another napkin and wiped her neck as she headed outside to the

balcony. Some fresh air was in order.

"Where are you going, Evelina?" Lindsay asked. She was sitting with her husband Alfredo at one of the small booths.

"I need some air."

<sup>g</sup>  
"A<sup>g</sup>, are you okay?" Lindsay looked alarmed.

<sup>will</sup>  
"Oh, yeah, Linds," Evie started. "Don't worry. Oh, also, don't worry about the car. My grandma gave me the money for--"

<sup>g</sup>  
Alfredo turned away from looking at the dance floor and looked up at Evie.

<sup>g</sup>  
"Okay, Evelina," Lindsay interrupted her as she directed a sharp glance ~~with her~~ eyes towards her husband. It was clear that she didn't want him to know what had happened. <sup>a month and a half earlier</sup> Perhaps she never told him that she had paid for body work at Williams.

<sup>enjoy the air</sup>  
"Well, ~~have a nice break!~~ <sup>ocean!</sup> The <sup>hirsels</sup>

"Okay," Evie smiled and headed out towards the balcony.

<sup>knowingly</sup>  
Even with the waves roaring below, Evie picked up on the sound of soft laughter.

<sup>Once on the balcony +</sup>  
She looked over and realized that she wasn't alone ~~on the balcony~~. Tori was at the other end of the balcony with a boy. Evie recognized him as one of the skater boys from Oh-hi Frostie. <sup>she who had paid \$</sup>

<sup>Epic</sup>  
"Hey, Eves," Tori said. "~~Killer~~ party. I mean, it's like *the best*."

"Oh, thanks," Evie smiled. "Hey, sorry about the booze thing," she started to tell both of them awkwardly. "It sorta all just fell through."

Once Raquel wasn't coming to the party, Bartender Petey wasn't so eager to please a bunch of kids he didn't know. (He still had the stash of liquor that Raquel had secured weeks earlier, but who knew what he was going to do with it.) <sup>e?</sup>

"No problemo," the boy lifted his Lava Flow, one of the many specialty non-alkie drinks from Duke's. "We partied before we came here."

*Evie said*  
"Oh, cool. And I can totally give you and your friends your money back."

"Nah, don't even worry," the boy said. "Think of it as our birthday gift to you."

*knip*  
Tori put her arm around the boy's waist. "Well, we're gonna head back in."

"Oh, yeah," Evie forced a smile. "Well, I'm glad you're having fun. I just came out for some air."

After they left Evie turned away and faced out towards the ocean. Suddenly her chest felt heavy and her stomach felt empty, *U* despite all the food. *She had eaten w/ her* Alex wasn't at her party and it was hitting her hard. When she had decided to have her sixteenera at Duke's, she had fantasies of sharing a romantic moment out on the balcony, just like Tori and skater boy. Now, Alex was nowhere near the balcony, and she was, obviously, nowhere near his thoughts. He never responded to her letter. He hadn't even acknowledged its existence.

*How could he not*  
And after she had poured her entire heart onto paper? Paper lined with mangoes and pineapples?

She looked back at her guests through the picture windows of Duke's. She had so many *great* friends, yet not one of them really knew how she was feeling. Evie turned back to look out over the balcony's ledge. She folded her hands, rested her head on them, and took a deep breath. It was great, *awesome*, to have the sixteenera of her dreams, but the fun she was having just made her more aware of the party's two big, gaping holes. Alex was not with her, and neither was Raquel.

All of a sudden, Evie heard a long low whistle. She *knew* that whistle. *Ugh*, Mondo. She was not in the mood for him at the moment. She pretended not to hear him and didn't turn around.

*Go away Mondo...*

He whistled again.

Evie pushed up from the ledge. She got ready to throw him a smirk and a smart remark, but when she turned around, she couldn't believe who was standing in front of her.

  
~~It was~~ Alex.

Evie's stomach flipped, and then it flopped. And then it flopped again.

"Hey, Evie," Alex smiled, hesitantly. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I haven't returned your calls and texts and everything." He looked around the balcony.

"No, no," Evie started. "*I'm* sorry!" She wanted to reach out and embrace him but wasn't sure if she should. He just stood there and she just stood there, as if they both really didn't know what to do.

"Please, Alex," she continued. "You have to know that it was nothing with Arturo. I know that sounds cliché, but really, I was just stupid and maybe I was a little mad about that night with Mondo and the night--."

Alex held up his hand. "No, no. I haven't been the best boyfriend. Really. And *I'm* sorry."

"No, *I'm* sorry," Evie practically cried.

"Okay," Alex laughed. "We're *both* sorry."

Alex reached for Evie and put his arms around her shoulders. He held her tight, and Evie was overwhelmed with how good he felt. His hair was slightly damp, and she smelled the tiniest hint of cologne (fresh and sea breezy!). He was wearing a sports jacket <sup>n oversized</sup> and dark slacks. Evie glanced down and saw he was wearing flojos, brand new O'Neills. <sup>liked tooked stfff a brand new</sup> Cute. <sup>Evie new he probably felt uncomfortable.</sup>

"Oh, Evie," he whispered into her ear. "I got your letter. I have never gotten anything like that before in my life. I mean, all the things you said, what you wrote. I just couldn't believe it, and I didn't know how to respond. I mean, I didn't wanna just call or send a stupid text. I wanted to see you in person. I wanted it to be perfect, and I wanted" he paused, "to give you this."

He reached into his jacket's pocket and pulled out a small white box. His neck instantly turned pink. Evie knew that shade of nervous pink. "I think this would *really* go with your outfit." He looked <sup>her</sup> Evie over. "Wow, Evie. You look *so* beautiful. Really."

Evie now felt as though <sup>nervous</sup> her neck was turning pink. Alex had never called her beautiful. He had called her cute and, one time in a text, he had called her sexy, but never beautiful. She loved hearing <sup>him say it.</sup> it. She took the box from him, and when she opened it, she couldn't believe what she found – set on a blue velvet backing was a single gold charm – two miniature flip flops, one slightly over the other, and each topped with a small pearl where the straps connected. The charm was attached to a thin gold chain.

"Oh, my God, Alex," Evie's mouth dropped open. "This is *so* cool. I can't believe it. I've *never* seen anything like this."

"I was hoping you'd say that," he scratched the side of his face nervously. "I drove down to LA after I got your letter, and I was looking through all the shops on

"Friggin' Mondo," Evie laughed. "*That's something* charm Raquel would wear."

*Raquel!*

"Dee Dee, what time is it?" Evie suddenly felt panicky.

"That's why I came out," Dee Dee said. "We should get going if we're gonna make in back in time for you to open presents."

"What, you're bailing on your own party?" Alex asked.

"We gotta go to Isla del Mar," Evie told him. "Raquel's there."

"What?" Alex's face dropped. "Are you serious? Since when?"

"Since last week," Evie answered somberly. "We *have* to see her, tonight."

"Uh, can I go with you?" Alex asked.

Evie looked at Dee Dee. She didn't know how to answer him.

"I don't know," Evie said. "It's sorta just a girl thing."

"Come on, Evie," Alex asked. "Raquel's my friend too. Can't you make it, like, a Flojo thing?"

"*Hey*, but then *I* wouldn't get to go," Dee Dee said.

"Okay, Okay," Evie laughed. "Let's all just go, but let's go *now*." She took Alex's hand and headed back into the restaurant.

"Yeah, we better hurry," Dee Dee checked the time on her cell phone as they pushed through the crowd. "We have just about an hour."

"We are *so* not gonna make it," Alex shook his head.

"Yes, we will," Evie yelled over the music. "We gotta at least try."

Evie, Dee Dee, and Alex sped north in Jumile on Pacific Coast Highway towards Isla del Mar.

"God, I hope we make it," Dee Dee said.

"We will, we will," Evie said.

"So, do you think that Cherry Bomb will be waiting for you when you get back to Duke's?" Dee Dee asked.

"I have no idea," Evie said. "I haven't even been able to think. I mean, I just can't believe I still got my party."

"Why?" Dee Dee asked. "You worked your *not* *all* *nalgas* off. You did your work and you wrote, well, most of, your essay. *All by the deadline*. That was the deal, right?"

"I dunno," Evie said. "Just everything has been crazy and it was such a last minute sprint to get this party. My parents were so stressed."

"Well, you could have turned your work a bit earlier," Dee Dee said.

"I know, I know," Evie. "But you know how plans can get rearranged at the last minute."

"Oh, yeah," Dee Dee raised her eyebrows in agreement. "I mean, I can't believe I didn't go back to D.F." *uh,* *w, Rocio*

"You were gonna move back to Mexico?" Alex asked from the backseat.

"No," Dee Dee looked at Evie. "Not really, <sup>"))</sup> ~~it~~ was just a thought."

"Hey Eve," Alex started. "So what's the grand total from Grandma Chablis?" *Evie smiled* *± saw tunic*

"What, am I gonna be, like, your sugar mama now?" Evie opened her macramé bag and ripped open the envelope. There was no check, but rather sixteen one hundred dollar bills. *I saw her -*

"Huh?" Alex asked.

"If you're talking about Arturo," Evie turned to look at him. "He most likely won't even be at the reserve by the time I start up again. He'll be starting UC Davis this spring. But Alex, you have nothing to worry about."

"Hmmm..."

"Alex," Evie looked into his dark eyes. "Nothing."

"Oh, I can't believe I forgot to tell you!" Dee Dee suddenly exclaimed.

"What?" Evie asked.

"Alejandra de Los Santos tried to get into the party!"

"*What?*" Dee Dee was right. Evie could not believe it. "When? Where was I? Did someone get it on camera phone?"

"I don't know where you were," Dee Dee said, "maybe dancing or eating more Huli Huli chicken or something. But she showed up with her three little *a-migas* and, of course, she was denied access. Denied! In front of everyone, and was she so embarrassed!"

"Ha!" Evie laughed. "Okay, okay, birthday or no birthday, now *that's* the best gift ever!"

Dee Dee turned down P. Mosh on her CD player. "I was just thinking. I have no idea what to expect at Isla."

"It's really not as bad as everyone makes it to be," Alex said. "I know this guy through Gorby, and he had actually gone there. He said the staff was really cool and he got a lot of help. A lot."

"Well, that's a relief to hear," Evie said. She looked out the window at all the "Beach Access" signs that lining Pacific Coast Highway.

"Alex," she asked. "Do you think we can go surfing out here sometime? For, like, a change?"

"I dunno, Eves," he looked out toward the ocean. "It gets pretty territorial the farther south you get and--." He stopped himself. "No, you know what? If you wanna try another beach, why not?"

"Exactly," Evie said. "Why not?"

Evie read another sign on the highway. "Oh, hey, this is Leo Carrillo," Evie said as Dee Dee drove by. "Do you know I used to come here as a kid? My family used to go camping here."

"Oh, yeah," Dee Dee chuckled. "I remember that, but didn't you always come home to sleep?"

"Yeah," Evie laughed with her. "Hey, can you slow down just a bit, on the shoulder?"

"Evie, we don't have time for a little memory lane trip."

"Yeah, we're gonna be late," Alex agreed.

"It'll just take a second." Evie assured them.

Dee Dee slowed down, and Evie looked near Leo's main entrance kiosk. There were two wooden posts on the opposite sides of the dirt road. Each post was about four feet high and had a row of circular, yellow reflective lights attached to one side. The bottom two lights on one of the posts were cracked, and the post also had a gash on the side.

The cracked lights and the gash had been courtesy of Sabrina years ago, when she and Evie were still kids. Evie remembered sneaking out with Sabrina when Sabrina was fifteen and Evie was eleven. Sabrina desperately wanted to take their parents' car for a little spin around the campground and had convinced Evie to go with her. ~~(Just like Lindsay had said, Sabrina was a horrible driver, nervous and timid.)~~ They hadn't driven more than a few campsites away from their own before Sabrina hit the post. She was horrified. She had placed her head on the steering wheel and cried. It took Evie's urging to finally get her to wipe her tears, get the car in gear, and get it back to their own campsite before their parents found out. But they did find out. Their father was angry at Sabrina, but then calmed down as she continued to cry. ~~She was embarrassed and~~ ~~ashamed.~~ Evie remembered how her father had put his arm around Sabrina and told her that what she had done, taking his car without permission, was wrong, but that she had to get over the fact that she had made a mistake. It wasn't the end of the world. But Sabrina, ~~being Supreme even back then, liked to do things perfectly. She liked to do things perfect~~ the first time.

"You have to forget about what's in the rearview window and just keep forging ahead," Evie remembered her father saying. "Just focus on what's in front of you, what's ahead."

*remembering her father's words*  
"You know," Evie said. "I think I know what to say to Raquel when I see her."

"You think?" Dee Dee asked.

"Yeah," Evie nodded. "I think so." She looked at the time on her cell. "We're gonna be late getting back to my party, my mom is gonna be totally pissed."

*a little*

"Not even," Dee Dee said. "It'll just give her and Graciela more time to make the bow."

"The bow?" Evie's stomach flipped. "For what?"

"Oh, my God!" Dee Dee covered her mouth.

"Dee Dee," Evie demanded as she grabbed her arm. "Tell me,"

"Dee Dee..." Alex <sup>looked upward.</sup> shook his head.

"Evie, stop it!" Dee Dee pulled her arm from her. "I'm driving." <sup>Evie pulled at her arm</sup>

"Tell me, Dee Dee," Evie was not going to let up.

"I'm sorry, Evie!" Dee Dee said. "It was supposed to be a surprise. Your mother is going to kill me!"

<sup>Kill you about what</sup>  
"Are you serious?" Evie shrieked. "I'm getting my car? I'm getting Cherry Bomb?"

"I'm not saying anything else," Dee Dee ran her thumb and index finger across her closed mouth like she was zipping it closed.

"You don't have to," Evie's stomach continued to tingle with excitement. "If I'm supposed to be surprised, I will be."

She pulled down Jumile's sun visor and looked at herself in the mirror. She raised her eyebrows, widened her eyes and <sup>stretched as wide as it could pass.</sup> opened her mouth into a giant O. The look on her <sup>express</sup> face was a cross between sheer astonishment and sheer terror. She could definitely look <sup>go stretched</sup> surprised. No problemo. <sup>shock she tried again</sup>