

Car Collision (#) in the 80s Between Help + Hot Water

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

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

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

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

"I dunno..." Lindsay ~~continued~~.

"Lindsay," Evie followed her down the two ceramic tiled steps ^{on} into the den. "We live on a ^{cul de sac} dead end. It's not like cars go speeding by all the time. I'll be totally safe." She

titled her head forward and to the side, fashioned after the infamous "I'm ^{purdy please} so gonna get ~~my way~~" tilt learned from her best friend, Dee Dee de LaFuentes. "And the more I

practice, I'll definitely get my license and then I can drive myself anywhere. You won't be having to cart me around anymore. Don't you want a break from being a chauffeur?"

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

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

"I will, promise!" Evie sprinted as fast as her ^{Havaiana} () flojos could take her towards the kitchen. **She** snatched the key ring off the kitchen's metal key holder, grabbed her iTrip, (a boast of over 1100 downloads), her wallet (an even better boast -- a freshly issued drivers permit) and sprinted out of the house.

But once Evie had ^{the} Lindsay's keys, she had no plans of staying within the **oppressive** boundaries of the Gomez' circular driveway, let alone the cul de sac. There was a whole wide world beyond Camino del Rio and she was ready to explore it. What was that old saying? Driving wasn't a right, it was a... right of passage? And her passage this afternoon was one that led to the nearest beach. Maybe not Sea Street, but The Shores would do. Any beach, actually, that had a cruising lane with close proximity to the shore. Evie definitely wanted to cruise, cali beach style, with her seat reclined, her iTrip ^{bumping} blaring and the convertible top all the way down. Actually, nix the last part. Lindsay's ^{sedan} Trans-Am wasn't a convertible and it was far from being a g-ride, when you actually put it in pimp ride terms, but there was no way Evie was gonna roll out her mother's beloved Saab. So really, the only joy in ^{this} Lindsay's ride was that it was available.

this joy ride is that it was a ride

As she **got in the driver's seat**, Evie pulled her cell out from the front pocket of her Senor Lopez pullover and immediately speed dialed **best girl**, tied for first place, Raquel Diaz.

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

"Not you, obviously." Evie switched from *Radio Lazar*, Lindsay's favorite Spanish station to Dios (Malos). Nothing like brown boy emo bumping the speakers to calm one's novice nerves. She **was ready to go**.

"~~Hey,~~" (she announced to Raquel.) "I'm coming to pick you up. Let's cruise The Shores."

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

"You ain't picking me up to go anywhere," Raquel's voice was throaty and harsh.

"I ain't even awake."

"Well, get up." Evie **ordered**. "I got a car."

"What do you mean, you 'got a car?'" Raquel **asked**. "What are you? **A bank robber?**"

"Come on," Evie adjusted the seat closer to the gas pedal (Could it possibly be that Lindsay was actually shorter than she?) and positioned the rearview mirror so she could see all things slow and less important behind her. She turned the key in the ignition. "Let's ~~go rolling~~. The day's almost over."

Actually, the day was far from being over. It was barely one o'clock in the afternoon, but to a **party girl** like Raquel, the day was just starting.

"I got Lindsay's car," Evie explained. "But I need a licensed driver to go anywhere."

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

“Raq, come on,” Evie pleaded. “**My parents** are gone and Lindsay’s far away in novela-vela land. We got a whole hour to have fun.”

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

“Who’s that?” she asked.

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

Ever since Raquel and her boyfriend, Jose, broke up last semester, her **Buddy List of boys** was being utilized **to the max**. Whereas any cool girl at Villanueva (which Raquel claims there are only three – she, Evie and, of course, *la otra*, Dee Dee) would gain cred (say, a **hottie shortboarder** with major label sponsorship or a member of a local neo-nardcore band) to inspire jealousy in an ex, **Raquel was hooking up in the polar region opposite of north**. She was dating down, *way down*. She needed to teach Jose that she could be **just as scandalous, if not more**, with someone other than him and she was **on a mission** to hook up with anyone who was more dangerous (that is, as **deep** danger can get in a suburban setting) than him. Jose no longer went to Villanueva Prep, having got kicked out for his poor grades, but he still ran in a similar **party circuit as Raquel**. Evie had no idea who the owner of the background voice was and she didn’t bother asking. If she knew Raquel, the voice and the male attached to it wouldn’t last more than a couple of weeks.

“Where are you?” Evie asked.

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

As Evie started to back out of the drive way, she looked up towards the Diaz’s house. Between the towering cypress trees that divided the properties, she saw that the window shades to Raquel’s upstairs bedroom were pulled up. Raquel was definitely not in her room. She kept her shades good and drawn until she, and only she, decided it was the right time to finally start her day and make the grand decision get out of bed and open her blinds. Evie wondered where Raquel had gone the night before that led her to still be away from home. Whenever Raquel took off somewhere scandalous for the evening, Evie would get a call to cover for her. However, last night Evie didn’t get ‘the call.’

“O-kay, Raquel.” Evie said. “I’ll let you go do whatever, with whomever. Just call me later.”

“Yeah, yeah. For sure,” Raquel said before hanging up and after playfully slapping “*stop it!*” to the unidentified boy with her.

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

“Hi Evie!” Dee Dee practically chirped on the other end.

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

“Hey, I’ve got Lindsay’s car for a while,” Evie said as she slowly entered Camino del Rio and cautiously looked both ways down the street. “I thought I could come over and pick you up.”

Dee Dee also lived in Rio Estates. She actually used to live next door to Raquel and Evie, but now, after her return of living in Mexico for four years, her father and new stepmother purchased a new home just a few streets away on Camino Cortez.

“Right now?” Dee Dee asked. “I can’t. I have a meeting with Eileen Cervantes.”

“Eileen? Who’s that?”

“She’s connected with Las Patronas,” Dee Dee explained. “And I’m meeting with her at four PM.”

“At four?” Evie re-checked the time on the Trans Am’s dashboard. “Dee Dee, it’s barely one o’clock.”

“I know. I’m totally running late. I’m just so nervous. I’ve already smoked three cigarettes this morning.”

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

“Evie, it’s for *Las Patronas*,” Dee Dee said as if Evie was crazy for even asking. “I have to make the right impression. This is my first meeting the former director and she’s going to give me some hints. I have only one more year before I can be nominated. And I need to make sure all my duckies are in row.”

Duckies?

Ever since Dee Dee was a little girl she always talked about being a La Patrona debutante. Her mother was one, her grandmother was one and, of course, Dee Dee not

only wanted to be one, she *had* to be one. La Patronas was the oldest and most respected debutante society in the county. It was started by the wives of the early Southern Californian landowners, all of them wealthy and many of them Hispanic. Dee Dee's father didn't have such regal **connections** to early **Ventura County**, but Dee Dee's mother, the late Margaret de LaFuenta, family sure did. Her family had owned multiple ranches in the area long ago, when the area was still Mexico. You can't get more regally **connected** than that.

Between Dee Dee's calculating pursuit to obtain the **key to the city**, Raquel **jonesing for** a key to the nearest mini bar, and she, herself, **most desirous of** the keys to any available automobile, Evie wondered how all three ~~bestfriends~~^{girls} could each be so different and remain such ~~best friends~~^{But as}. Her older sister, Sabrina, once had ~~pegged~~^{pontel out} the **irony of their differences**. Long before Raquel and Evie became the flip flop wearing **Flojos** they ~~are~~^{were} now and Dee Dee transformed into the super cosmopolitan chica with the super charged blonded **highlights**, they once had ~~all~~ been the three little girls in tight *trenzas* with *respado* juice dripping down their chins.

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

"If I'm so good," Evie was not buying it. "Then why don't you ever let me drive Jumile?"

"Evie, you know I would if I could, but it's all about my dad. He's so uptight about my insurance and everything. Really."

"Uh huh." Evie said. "I *love* that story."

Similarity
to
their
history.

Jumile was the name of Dee Dee's VW ^{Beetle} Bug. Sailor christened boats, socialites attached pure bred Chihuahuas with pretenious tags, but in South Cali, all the cool kids conjured up cutesy names for their cars. It was ^{free} ~~a must.~~

Jumile is actually the name of a particular beetle found in the hills of Taxco, Mexico. Dee Dee ^{reminisced to} ~~told~~ Evie and Raquel that on the first Monday after *Dia de los Muertos*, it was a tradition to hike into the hills and search for the little green beetles.

^{so} "Then," ~~Dee Dee~~ paused, "the locals roast and grind up the beetles and make salsa out of them/ 'sta loco, no?" ^{Dee had ()}

So when Dee Dee ^{father bought her when she moved to CA,} first got her lime green VW Beetle, she instantly named it Jumile, in honor of time spent with Rocio in the romantic town of Taxco. This Beetle, of course, wouldn't be ground into any sort of burrito bar condiment.

"Evie, it's the truth," Dee Dee ~~insisted to Evie.~~ She didn't want Evie thinking there were other reasons why she couldn't drive Jumile. ^{insisted it was} "Besides, in less than two months you're going to have your own Jumili, right?" ^{merely her father}

"I hope so. And if I get my own car," Evie started. "I'm definitely not gonna name him Jumili, that's for sure." She now headed south, down the ^{was ing} ~~eucalyptus~~ lined street ^{Calle Bonita} of (), towards the main gate of Rio Estates. She was ready to gun the engine and make a run for it.

"Hope? If? I *know* you are gonna get a car," Dee Dee maintained. "There is *no* way your dad isn't going to buy you a Beetle for your birthday, God, Evie, I cannot *wait* for your party. Everyone is already talking about it. It's gonna be the **pachanga** of the year."

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In about ~~two~~ months, Evie was going to not only turn sixteen, but she was going to celebrate her Sixteenera – more Sweet Sixteen, way less *quinceanera* – which only meant one thing in Southern California -- A Mexican style luau. Evie was planning to have her bash thrown at Duke's in Malibu. After she'd seen all the *Seventeen* photos of all her favorite *Laguna Beach* and *O.C.* stars lunching and "canoodling" at Duke's, ~~which~~ *night on the patio ** was a replicated beach house, make that beach mansion, named after the OG Hawaiian surfer himself, **Duke ()**. So, it only made sense that she would celebrate her sixteenera in all of Duke's Polynesian atmospheric glory. Her reputation, as a surfer flojo chick, depended on it.

Evie practically claimed her own table (third from the – over looking the Pacific) whenever she had the opportunity to bail on the 805 and lunch with the ladies (in this case, Dee Dee and Raquel) in the celebrity ridden area code of 310.

"Are you serious?" Evie asked. "Really?" Was her party really the talk of Villanueva Prep? "God, I hope it doesn't turn into some mascara running drama straight outta *My Sweet Sixteen*." *Aux balcony*

"Oooh, I hope so," Dee Dee mused. "Or it wouldn't be good party, otherwise." *Aux balcony*
"No, but listen, your dad just has to come through with your Beetle. We have to have a complete set."

It was Dee Dee's plan that Evie and Raquel get a VW Beetle just like hers. She believed the three girls were a team, a dynamic trio, and not having a similar mode of transportation would be like the **three musketeers not having, well, identical moustaches**. Dee Dee's Jumile was lime green with incense sticks in the **flower holder** and a large oval sticker of her favorite band/soap opera, RBD, on the back window.

Raquel parent's had just bought her a ^{Beetle} ~~bug~~, hers in black and named B.J. as in Beetle Juice, not the *other* thing, a month ago. B.J.'s flower vase contained dead roses (**taken from the**) and an oversized decal of ~~of~~ **"So-Cal" in old English script across the top of the front window's visor.** Evie wanted a red Beetle with a sunroof, Bose speakers, fresh cut hibiscus flowers in the flower holder and with the quintessential decal that identified Evie totally—a white outlined pair of flip flops, smack center of her back window. She had already purchased the decal months ago at the Ventura Surf Shop. All she needed was a brand new car to attach it to. Simple enough, no? And the name for her Beetle? ^{Bugs} Lady, of course.

"So," Dee Dee went back to Evie's dilemma of needing a licensed driver. "Why don't you take Alejandro or Raquel?"

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

"Surfing. Again?"

"Yup," Evie ^{changed the nurse} (~~did something~~). "I'm gonna hook up with him tomorrow. **We might take the boards to Santa Barbara.**"

"Mmm-hmm," Dee Dee's voice suddenly turned **slo mo** leading Evie to believe that she was applying either eyeliner or mascara (Funny how eye make-up automatically relegated one's speech pattern to emulate **Paris Hilton on downers.**) "No offense," Dee Dee continued, "but don't you ever get tired that all you do with Alex is surf?"

"What do you mean?" Evie asked.

"Don't get me wrong," Dee Dee said. "I think it's cool that you two have something major in common. It's just, I mean, in Mexico, boys take girls out, on dates. You get to dress up and have a nice dinner, go dancing."

→ *woman*
 “Dela,” Evie rolled her eyes. “I’m fine with the stuff we do. Alex is my bud.”

to the hills
 Your *bud*?” Evie could sense Dee Dee’s blonde tinted eyebrows (**MK Salon, 60 dollars a pair**) rise in surprise. “Oh, I thought he was your *boyfriend*.”

“He is,” Evie suddenly felt defensive. “But he’s also my buddy, my friend. And that’s very important in a relationship.”

“Claro, of course, it’s important,” Dee Dee agreed. “I was just asking, that’s all. So...” (her voice reverted back to her normal **Dee Dee tone and speed**). “What about Raquel? Did you call her to go driving?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Nothing," Evie tried to **soft pedal backwards**. She knew better than to diss the all mighty D.F. Besides, she was now approaching Calle Aqua Caliente and had to focus. Shifting gears was not her specialty and the transmission of Lindsay's sedan revved hard as she fumbled into second gear, making Evie **sound** like an amateur barista-in-training, grinding espresso beans to a pulp. Evie reached the intersection just as another other car, a gray sports car, pulled up at the same time, but she could not remember who had the right away to go first.

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

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

"Uh," Evie looked over at the ~~sedan~~ ^{sports car}. "She's not moving."

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

"I just did."

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

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

"Oh my God!" Evie screamed as she dropped the phone to her lap. She felt her heart plummet to her mouth. Her chest grew numb. She did *not* just hit a car.

“Wha-? --pened?” Dee Dee’s phone connection cut in and out. “What -ong?”

Evie picked up her phone. ^{hee hee} “Dela!” She yelled into her cell. “I just hit a car! Oh my God, what do I do?”

“What? Are you serious? Oh my God. Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I think so. I...” Evie looked over her shoulder and saw the driver swing open his car door.

“~~What the hell?~~” The driver lifted his arms up in thug-like ‘*what the?*’ confrontation as he sauntered over to the front of his **car to check the damage**. He was short and stocky with a shaved head and wearing a football jersey. Someone you usually didn’t see behind the cloistered gates of Rio Estates. ^{what the hell?} “If you weren’t so busy yakking on that damn cell phone, maybe you’d know how to drive. Pay attention, you pinche *idiot!*”

“Oh. My. God.” Evie sunk into the upholstery of the car seat. She tilted her “damn phone” down, away from the driver’s view. ^{ee hee} “Dela,” Evie’s voice cracked and she thought she might cry. “He’s *totally* raging.”

“*Who?*”

“This guy.” Evie became frightened. *How* could she have hit a car? “The guy whose car I hit!”

“Oh my God,” Dee Dee was horrified. “Are you serious? Where are you?”

^{hee hee} “Dela,” Evie pleaded. “You gotta come. *Now!*”

The guy was now at the driver’s side of Lindsay’s sedan He tapped on the side of the door with the back of his hand **and glared at Evie**. “Hang up the damn phone, then turn off the friggin’ music and get out here and deal. What, you want me to call the cops?

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

ee me
“Dela,” Evie could still feel her stomach in the back of her throat. “I... I have to go.”

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“Wait! Evie, where are--”

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

“I am *so* sorry!” She looked over at the driver’s car. It was an old car, a four door bomber from the ‘40s, **black with glistening chrome and everything perfectly in tact..**

“Did I ding it?”

“Yeah,” he said. “You fucked it up all right.”

The guy walked back to the front of his car and Evie followed him. He crouched down to show her ~~his car’s bumper~~. *the damage she caused*

“Mira,” he said. “Right there.” He pointed to a spot on his bumper. *shiny chrome*

Evie looked. And looked. And looked. *strained* She couldn’t see anything. Then finally, a small dent, the size of a dime. “You mean that?”

“Yeah, I mean that.” The guy looked at her in amazement. “This is a ‘42, my father’s car and my *show* ~~cruising~~ car and now you made it look like shit.”

Evie looked over his car and then at Lindsay’s sedan. With the exception of her Lazar Radio bumpersticker being scuffed, Lindsay’s car appeared flawless.

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

“My license?” Evie’s heart dropped.

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

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

One ring, two ring...

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

Three ring, four ring.

“*Bueno?* Gomez residence.”

Finally.

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

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

“I’m not in front of the house. I’m—”

“*What?*”

“I’m over here,” Evie said. “On the corner of **Calle Agua Caliente and Calle Socorro.**”

“*What?*” Lindsay repeated. “Why are you way over there? I told you —”

“Lindsay, I know, I know. Please, just come now.” She looked back at the driver to make sure he couldn’t hear her. “This guy I hit is gonna kill me! Just come. *Now!*”

Evie hung up and slowly got back out of Lindsay’s car.

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

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

*It should've
take long*

"Yeah, right now." Evie looked down the street. "We live just a few streets down, on Camino del Rio."

Camino del Rio. Why? Why didn't she just stay on her street like she was supposed to? She looked at the guy who was now rummaging through his glove compartment. What if the cops did come? She couldn't be taken away, could she?

She looked at the time on her own cell phone and then back at the driver, whose eyes burned a hole into her and then into his car's bumper.

Oh... Just hurry Lindsay.

Chapter 2

It seemed like forever for Lindsay to finally show up at the scene of Evie's **crime**. When she did, she was out of breath and her dark wispy bangs stuck to her forehead from perspiration.

"Lindsay," Evie started. "Why didn't you just drive my mom's car over?" She didn't know ~~how it could take her so long and~~ why she showed up on foot.

"Because," Lindsay huffed between breaths, "You took my main set of keys." She grabbed the key ring from Evie's grasp. "I *told* you to take the extra set. I didn't have the keys to the Saab!" She looked Evie over. "Are you okay? What happened?"

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

"Her license?" Lindsay looked at Evie.

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

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

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

"My brother-in-law works at **Tony's Auto Repair**," Lindsay informed the guy, as she looked over ^{the} ~~car's~~ bumper ~~and head light~~. "He could fix this in a day. I'll call him tonight. I'd rather keep my insurance out of it."

Of course, that was enough for the guy. Everyone in the whole county knows about **Tony's Auto Repair, in Vineyard Estates**. Tony's motto was '**From Model-As to Orales**' Tony fixed all kinds of cars. *Orale* was Spanish for "Cool! Right on!" but at Tony's, *Orale* meant lowriders, which as Evie noticed, this guy's ~~crusing~~ ^{which} car was a ~~low~~ ~~riders~~. ~~It was~~ like an inch from the street ~~and~~ definitely fell under Tony's *Orale* category.

Finally, after an exchange of **info**, the guy and his '40s cruiser with the dime ^{mini} sized dent was on his way. It couldn't be soon enough for Evie.

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

Lindsay pursed her lips and got into her car. Evie opened the passenger door and got in as well. 19

“Evelina,” Lindsay started the engine. “I told you to stay in the drive way, in the cul de sac and you-”

“I know Lindsay,” Evie felt badly and didn’t want to hear it. She hated letting Lindsay down. She was often her only ally and now Evie had been purposely dishonest with her. “I’m sorry. I am *so* sorry. I was in front of the house, just like where I told you I was gonna stay there and then I got on the ~~phone~~ ^{cell} with Dee Dee and—”

“You were *talking*?” Lindsay tapped the brake pedal and glared at Evie. “On the *phone*? While driving *my* car?”

Was that steam coming out of Lindsay’s nostrils?

“You are lucky you didn’t kill yourself!” Lindsay shook her head while she held the steering wheel with one hand as she made the sign of the cross with the other. “Your parents going to be *very* unhappy about this. **Muy ()**.”

Evie was afraid of that.

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

“How are you going to pay for his car?” Lindsay shook her head in disbelief. “**That dent** isn’t some little pop out and he has a very expensive ~~old~~ ^{a classic} car. It’s gonna be a lot of money, Evelina. Alot.”

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

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

"Well, no," Evie confessed. "Not yet actually. But you know Grandma Pama always sends a check and now that it's gonna be my 16th birthday, I'll probably get more money than usual."

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

"I don't like keeping secrets from your parents," Lindsay said.

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

Lindsay didn't say anything as she drove on Camino Pacifico and turned onto Camino del Rio. It was true that Evie's father, who owned four successful panaderias in the county, had invested a lot of money and time into his fat free sweet bread idea. He

then lost a lot more money when it didn't do so well. The subject of money had been a sensitive **topic** in the Gomez household.

Evie looked out the window. She was already on thin ice for breaking her curfew (*again*) with Raquel (*again*) and all she needed was a third strike that could land her in interment (*again*). In California, 'the three strikes and you're out' law could throw one in prison, but Vicki Gomez could be just as severe. Would she cancel Evie's party? Not let her drive? *once she got her licence* Or worse, would Evie's little fender bender keep her from getting Lady Bug? With the sun roof, the Bose speakers, and don't forget the single white outlined decal of flip flops!

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

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

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

When they finally pulled up to the house they were surprised to find Evie's father's black Escalade parked in the driveway. Actually, Lindsay was probably surprised. Evie was speechless. She was hoping for more time to massage Lindsay. *soft side* What would she tell her parents exactly?

"Linds..." Evie clenched her shoulder safety belt as she grappled for one last plea of mercy

"Yes?" Lindsay parked alongside the Escalade and turned off her car's engine.

"Nothing," Evie sighed. She knew it was no use.

As soon as they went into the house, Lindsay stepped down into the den where the closing credits of *La Suela* ^{Evie} were rolling down the TV screen. She clicked her tongue as well as the television off, in annoyance. Obviously, in her haste, she had forgotten to TiVo her absolute ^{just} favorite show.

~~After~~ ^{just} coming in from the afternoon sun, Evie had to adjust her eyes as she went into the kitchen to **determine that** the silhouettes in the kitchen were actually her parents. **MORE**

"We were wondering where you two were," Evie's father looked up. He was going over the ~~afternoon~~ ^{morning} mail at the kitchen counter. "The front door was wide open and the TV was left on."

"Where did you go?" Evie's mother was sorting through a mountain of place mats, all them in different shades of green. Forest green.

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

"Molesto got out," Lindsay quickly interrupted as she also entered the kitchen.

"And we were driving up and down the street, looking for him. Ay," she clicked her tongue again. ^{& ran her hand across her hair} "That dog."

Evie looked over at her, in surprise. ~~Yes way for the Lind-say.~~

"Oh, no," Evie's mother feigned concern. "Did you find him?"

Vicki Gomez actually despised Molesto, the black Labrador that had once been Sabrina's. It would be her ultimate dream come true to have him to run away and never return to the Gomez residence. Last summer Sabrina had been working for **El Centro**

Misio'n for the Blind and Molesto (then properly named Ernesto) was training to become a seeing-eye guide. Molesto flunked not just a few, but all of his obedience classes, and Sabrina, feeling empathy and concern what would happen to dear old Ernesto, begged her parents to let her take him in. Of course, they conceded and at the time he was cute as a blind school flunkie pup, But now Sabrina was back at Stanford and Molesto was displaying the true colors of his Spanish nickname— he *was* quite *bothersome*.

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

~~Nice~~ save. Evie looked up at Lindsay and smiled. *Thank you.*

Lindsay ^{then} **gathered old newspapers off the counter and took them to the recycling container outside.** She was smart to make an early exit before Vicki Gomez got too inquisitive.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It all seemed ^{very} odd to Evie. What was the urgency to have Sabrina home so soon? Was the whole drama of having her car driven down ^{by some one else} really needed? Stanford University was only five hours north of Rio Estates and her sister, as well as the whole family, relished the long scenic drive along the California coast. Why wouldn't her sister just drive home, like she usually does? ^{good}

"I could drive her car down," Evie volunteered. Sabrina had a brand new Mini Cooper, red with a white stripe down the hood. It was polished, petite and always filled with a tank of gas. Evie ^{middle of} ~~has always wanted to~~ ^{dreamed} get her hands behind the wheel of that little foreign number. ^{about getting}

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

^{serious}o. "What's going on here?"

^{grabbed more nuts +} "What?" Evie looked over towards the paperwork he was reading.

"Your quality check," he said.

2 weeks - This way he 1st check to show her initial major of ten new semester

Shit. How could she be so **tonta**? QCs came out every ~~0~~. If only she had checked the mail instead of being in such a rush to take Lindsay's **stupid** ~~tank~~ out for a spin she could have retrieved the incriminating evidence addressed to "The parents or guardian of Evelina ~~G~~ Gomez".

Maria

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

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

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

"And you're already a sophomore," her mother added. "These grades count. You have to maintain a high GPA if you want to get into a good college. How do you think Sabrina got into Stanford?"

at Duke's

"And you know our agreement," her father said. "No birthday party if you can't keep your GPA up. We discussed this already (You need to keep your average at a good solid B if you want to have your big party at Duke's.)"

"And," her mother reminded her. "If you average gets below a B, you can't drive, license or no license."

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

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

"Oh, we won't worry," her father tossed the paperwork on the ~~granite~~ ^{kitchen} counter. "It's *you* who should be concerned."

"And we need to know that you are improving, *in advance* of your party," her mother said. "We still need to send out the evites."

"What do you mean by 'in advance'?" Evie asked. She put the remaining nuts back in the bowl. She suddenly was no longer hungry.

"Evie, don't do that," Her mother said. "Either eat them or throw them away. Don't ~~pick~~." She went on, "What I mean is, you aren't going to get your party with hopes that your GPA will be raised by the time your report card comes out. We have to see how your next quality check is."

"*What?*" Evie balked.

your next check is 3 weeks - by
that time - mid Feb.
we'll know to have the party
on the 29th

“You need to show us that you are serious about improving,” her father said.

“Like your mother said, in advance.”

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

“But ~~I’m in the middle of the semester,~~” Evie protested. “How am I going to tell you *beforehand* what my final grades will be?”

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

“No,” Evie grumbled as she sulked in her seat.

Her father rolled the paper work and tapped her under her chin with it. He softened his voice. “Don’t worry, mi’jita. You can do it. I know you can.”

“Of course you can,” her mother agreed as she reached for some nuts and then stopped herself. **Nuts** were the forbidden **fruit** on her new So SoCal diet. “I remember one time when Sabrina got her quality check and was so upset that that a B+ brought her whole average down. Remember that, Ruben?”

Again, with La Sabrina.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Evie's mother retrieved the saliva saturated Bluetooth delicately with two fingers and went to get a paper towel to wipe off the slobber. She shook her head at Molesto. "God, he is *such* a dumb dog!"

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

* * *

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

Dee Dee texted back right away:

Blue blood
Blue tooth
Blue
mood
shocking
Blue

Cn u cme here?

As did Raquel:

Same plce?

Raquel's quick response surprised Evie. Fun time with the **boy** in the background must have ended.

The ER/RE! ASAP! distress signal meant that one of the three bestfriends had to discuss something of dire importance and that they *had* to get together, immediately. Even as kids, long before the technology revolution of cellphones, texting and IMs, Evie, Dee Dee and Raquel would meet up by secluded **area** at the far end of the Rio Estates golf course. It was private and safe, that is, unless a **runaway** golf ball came whizzing by at 90 miles per hour, which, considering the advanced age of the majority players of the club, sometimes happened.

Because Dee Dee was still fussing over her precious **Patronas** meeting, the girls didn't meet at the "same plce" but rather at Dee Dee's house. Raquel and Evie drove over to her house for the ER/RE! ASAP! ^{meet up} ~~For some extreme troubleshooting~~. As soon as they were loaded up with the regulatory Snapple and pita **chips**, courtesy of the de LaFuente's housekeeper, Marcela, they settled in Dee Dee's upstairs bedroom, where the intro to Evie's rant commenced.

"So, this is the situation," she paced on **the wide loop shag of Dee Dee's bedroom carpet**. "My parents are totally freaking out. They told me that I couldn't have my party unless I bring my average up by the time I get my next quality check. That's in

3 weeks. There is *no* way I could bring my average up in time (We are in the middle of a friggin' semester.)

"How bad was your quality check?" Dee Dee asked as she held two different blouses over her in front of her vanity mirror. **That was the problem when the girls didn't meet on the golf course. There was a lack of focus which led to multi-tasking and a seemingly casual concern for a major problem.**

"It was okay," Evie took a sip of Kiwi Strawberry and suddenly felt ~~a little~~ embarrassed. Dee Dee was the brain between the three friends ~~and~~ without even trying. It sometimes made Evie feel inferior. "I mean, I got two Cs. One in English and other in Civics."

"How could you get a C in English?" Raquel flipped through Dee Dee's *Elle Girl*. Not quite Raquel's **style**, but she wasn't about to deal **with any of the "moda estylo" 'zines that Dee Dee subscribed to from Mexico**. "Harrison is total kick back. Even I did good in her class."

Great. Raquel "even" did better. Could **Evie feel mas inferior?**

"Well, I didn't do so hot," Evie said. "I hate English. All Harrison does is make us write. 'Write your feelings,' 'write your thoughts,' 'write to make the pain go away.' Ugh. I *hate* writing."

"I don't. I love writing," Dee Dee said. She hung up one of the blouses after choosing a **femmy pink one with a conservative neckline**. "Especially in Spanish. That was the best thing about living in D.F." She got dreamy eyed. "I got to write and read in Spanish, all the romantic poems and essays by **Neruda and nun** and of course, love letters from Rocio."

Raquel threw Evie an exasperated 'here we go again' look. She, and to be honest Evie, had had enough of hearing about Rocio, Dee Dee's long lost love who still lived back in Mexico's Condesa District. He was all Dee Dee had talked about "**venti-cuarto/siete**" since her return to California. If she wasn't texting him *larga distancia*, she was gabbing with him in that show offy big city *espanol* of hers.

Dee Dee noticed the look that Raquel shot at Evie. "What?" she asked.

"Nuttin' honey," Raquel answered in an exaggerated child-like voice. She turned her attention back to Evie. "Why don't you just do some community service crap or something for extra credit in Civics? Vasquez loves that kind of shit."

"Yeah?" Evie asked.

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

Evie laughed. "Seriously?"

"Seriously," Raquel ~~rolled her eyes~~ *smirked w/ pleasure*. "What a loser."

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

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

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

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

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

"I can write the paper for you," Dee Dee offered ~~()~~. "You can just basically tell me what to say and I'll write it up, real good. A+ quality."

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

"I could do it in **Francais** if you want." Dee Dee wasn't gonna let them get the best of her. "You know I'm already at level III and at the top of my class. **Come tall** **vue?**"

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

"And we don't want that," Raquel said ~~()~~ ^{added}. "It's been a friggin' dry spell around here."

"You're telling me," Dee Dee agreed. "Totally ~~()~~ ^{seen}"

~~"And~~ what language is that?"

"**Chilango.**" Dee Dee said with a smug.

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

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

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

NW Swell @ ^{2CST}Rincon. Cnt make 2morw. Srry!

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

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

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

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

But Evie didn't laugh. She was about to text Alex back but decided she should talk to him in person, or at least over the phone. She was overwhelmed with what she had gone through in one day – the car accident, a tongue lashing from a total stranger, her miserable quality check, the possibility that she may not have her birthday party -- should she go on? And Alex, her *boyfriend*, wasn't even around to comfort her during any of the

drama. He had been *too* busy surfing at Sea Street and now, their Sunday plans were cancelled because he suddenly wanted to go surfing. Did she mention *again*? And to make matters worse, he didn't even invite her to go along! Sup with that?

Evie re-read his text message again and felt angry, and to be honest, a little sad.

She and Alex had only been going out a little over **two months**. Was he already losing interest in her? She fondled the abalone necklace her had given her just last ^{November} semester. She wore it everyday, sometimes even in her sleep. It was a sign of his affection towards her.

But now, it seemed her cell phone symbolized how he really felt.

his text messages

420 in the 80s

Chapter 3

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

"I'm totally sorry about yesterday," he said again. "I promise, we'll go to Santa Barbara. Soon."

"Don't make promises you can't keep," Evie knew she was being a baby about him canceling the day before, but to be honest, she was getting a little tired of Alex's flakiness. This wasn't the first time. There was the time they had plans to go to the new skatepark over on Rose Avenue and he flaked because Mondo's Maurader was down and

he needed a ride to Oakview. Then there was the other time when they were supposed to go to her father's Christmas party for all the employees at his bakery and, **at the last minute, Alex wanted to drive to Santa Barbara for a last minute board sale at Remmies. Maybe Raquel was right. Can a girlfriend compete with an intern search for stoke that so many surfers were born with?**

"I am so sorry," Alex said again

One million and one.

Alex gently rubbed the () of her back as she opened her locker. "Don't worry about this grade thing," he told her. "I'll totally do whatever I can to help you. I don't like seeing you so bummed out." He leaned in to wrap her arms around her.

"Hey!" Dee Dee came up behind them. "*Que pasa*, lovebirds?" She was with Raquel.

"Nothing, *now*," Alex smirked as he pulled away from Evie.

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

"Raq," Evie motioned to her ears. "Pull the plugs!"

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

"What an (-Slob)," Alex smirked.

"Hey," Raquel **voice was back at easy listening volume**. "Let's leave campus for lunch. I'm jonesing for an O-hi Frostie."

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

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

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

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

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

"See!" Evie huffed. "I knew this was gonna happen. (I told my parents that there was no way I could get my average up before the evites need to be sent out. That's in ~~it~~ *a month* weeks.) If I don't get rid of those two Cs, my mom is totally gonna cancel the party."

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

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

Dee
"An avocado?" The lines on Dee Dee's forehead furrowed. "But they're so fattening."

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

"Oh," Dee Dee nodded. "Right." As if avocados from a ranch in Somis made such a drastic difference in caloric count.

Alex read off listings from the volunteer board. "Here's help needed, 'Working with the elderly.'"

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

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

"Yeah," Evie laughed, "You're at risk every time you paddle out on that **twelve hundred dollar** ^{Stewart} board of yours."

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

Evie felt a little uncomfortable hearing about Raquel's latest transaction with Mondo. He was school's only pot dealer and Raquel had upgraded from last semester's dime bags to this semester's ^{when} **0**. It was just last semester that Mondo, as well as Raquel's ex, Jose, used to hang out with Evie, Raquel, and Alex. But that cutesy quintet who all wore flojos soon lost flavor once Raquel found out that Jose was cheating on her and she immediately dumped him. It's not that anyone took side, but ^{still} -

To be honest, Evie sometimes missed the days of Flojo past, **the carefree afternoons of pot and plasmas** -- before Jose became a two timing jerk, before Raquel started drinking so much and Mondo cared more about his business than friendship.

^{partying} before

Before ~~she~~ found herself in the stressful situation of raising her friggin' GPA up so she could have her friggin' party. Ah, the () other upclass and ().

But then again, those were pre- Dee Dee and Alex days and Evie really loved, as she had learned, having the double D and Alex, as a boyfriend, in her life.

~~Evie, herself, was still friendly with him, but more in a hallway hospitality kind of way.~~

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

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

"You know the rules," Miss Peterson pointed to the doorway. "Take it outside."

Raquel rolled her eyes and then looked at Evie as if for permission to be excused.

"I'm just gonna find out what's up with Mondo. I'll be right back to help you."

"Yeah, yeah," Evie knew better than to really count on Raquel. Once party ~~supplies~~ *fixies* entered the picture she was suddenly unavailable. "Just go."

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

As soon as Raquel was out of earshot Dee Dee leaned closer to Alex and Evie.

"So what's up with Raquel?"

"What do you mean?" Evie asked.

"She's been going a little off the deep end," Dee Dee eyes glanced over to where Raquel was in the hallway. "Do you know who she has been going out with? Did she tell you?"

"Nuh, uh," Evie answered. She didn't like to admit she didn't know something so personal about Raquel. For the four years that Dee Dee was away in Mexico City, she and Raquel had become very tight. And now, here was Dee Dee knowing something about Raquel that Evie didn't? It didn't seem right.

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

"Davey Mitchell?" Evie repeated the name. "Whose that?"

"Ronnie Mitchell's older brother, that's who," Dee Dee answered.

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

"He's practically ²²twenty years old," Dee Dee said of Davey. "And he did time at the CYA."

"Really?" Evie couldn't believe it.

"Yes," Dee Dee knowingly raised her eyebrows. "Raquel told me. She was actually bragging about it. She's become such a 0."

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

"We're not gossiping," Dee Dee said. "Raquel *is* our friend and we are just concerned. You should talk to her, Evie. She'll listen to you."

“Listen to me, ⁷ say what?” Evie asked. There was no way anyone could dim Raquel ~~shine~~ ^{down} when it was set on high.

“Anything,” Dee Dee insisted. “Just say something.”

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

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

“I sure hope so.” Evie took a deep breath.

He drove around town in a super amped white by with the quintessential So-Cal decal in Old English text. That didn’t worry Evie. To the left of his back tinted window was more old English – In Loving Memory. Below was three names listed. Three friends of Davey’s who had died in some () related deaths. Evie couldn’t image dating anyone who had the INM on ther truck or tattooed on their bodies. She didn’t want her name, or God forbid Raquel’s name added to the list by way of being at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Just then, the door to one of the counselor’s office opened. None of them could help but hear the voice, that thick Spanish **accented** voice of Alejandra de los Santos that monopolized the whole ~~of~~ ^{over}. She was just concluding her session with her counselor, A-H. ^{her}

Alejandra was one of the Sangros, the fresitas ricas from Mexico City. Evie and Dee Dee had actually sorta been friends with her last semester, when they didn’t know better. It was discovered that it was she who was seeing Jose, *Raquel’s* Jose, behind

everyone's back. Not only was Alejandra a *puta*, but she wore the scarlet letter P on her chest proudly.

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

“Alejandra,” A-H sounded appropriately exhausted with her arrogance. “I hope you think more of your internship as just putting in hours. Thousands of other high school juniors across the country would die for the opportunity to intern at Yale. I hope you don’t take it so lightly.”

“I know,” Alejandra said quickly, as if she didn’t want some lowly high school counselor **telling her how to think.**

As she left his office, Alejandra couldn’t help but come face to face with Evie, Dee Dee and Alex in the narrow hallway. How could she be so lucky, Evie thought, that Raquel had just left? Ever since Raquel found out that Alejandra had been seeing Jose behind her back, Raquel ~~has~~ had her claws sharpened and extended *ready to rip*. There have been ‘accidental’ shoulder slams in the hall, an intentional keying of Alejandra’s ~~of~~ Audi and anonymous derogatory scribble on Alejandra’s locker door. Evie and Dee Dee didn’t condone such behavior, but never did anything to stop Raquel. **They definitely sided with her.**

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

Dee Dee, however, answered in English. Slowly and calmly. “Oh, my father loves his new position,” she said. “And I *really* don’t think *your* father got him his job, Ally. I mean, my father has his own credentials. But it was very nice of your father to mention the position to him, but I think that’s all he did.”

Evie couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Was Alejandra insinuating that her father got Dee Dee’s father his new position as ~~Ch~~ Chancellor at Cal State Channel Islands? She couldn’t believe that Alejandra would be so bold especially when it was just she against the three of them. Her sidekick Sangros, the *Ah*-migas – Natalia, Xiomara and Fabiola – were no where to be seen.

“So,” Alex asked Alejandra, “You’re gonna do an internship at Yale?”

Evie pressed her foot into the side of his. *Alex, who freaking cares?*

“*Claro,*” Alejandra smiled deep into Alex’s eyes. “This summer. But I still don’t know,” She sighed heavily as she stroked her blonde highlighted hair in a bored fashion. “I might just go back to Mexico and intern at UNAM. I really miss the sophistication of city life.” She glanced at the volunteer list in front of them. “Are you doing an internship too?” She asked Alex. “Maybe we could both do one at UNAM. That would be fun.” She looked over at Evie.

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

Evie’s face burned. Why are boys *so* ()? *clueless?*

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

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

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

"I wasn't talking about volunteer work," Alejandra smiled slowly. "I'm talking about 'your party.'"^{(She used her fingers to mimic quotes when she referenced 'party.'}
~~Tell me~~, what made you decide to have it at Dukes?"

"What wrong with Duke's?" Evie regretted asking as soon as the words came out of her mouth.

"Well," Alejandra took a breath as though she had an extensive list to read off. But then **her eyes suddenly gazed over Evie's shoulder and** ^{su} suddenly announced her departure.

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

"Okay, it's *on!*" Raquel held up her hand to high five Alex. She was oblivious that her nemesis had just been so close by. Couldn't she smell the residue of slutty Sangro snobbery still wafting in the air?

"I got the goods from Mondo," Raquel patted the zippered pocket of her backpack. "You wanna go out to The Tree?" She asked Alex.

Alex looked at Evie. "Uh..."

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

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

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

"Evie," Raquel said. "Don't be all uptight. Besides, how many pairs of eyes do you actually need? Dee Dee can get you started and we'll be back before you know it. I got 0 after lunch and there is no way I can deal with him without being lit."

Wuu "Just go," Evie waved them both aside. She was now officially annoyed.

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

"No...just go already."

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

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

"Yeah," Evie looked after Alex and Raquel as they headed towards Juniper's Tree, the big oak tree at the end of the quad. "I need something, or someone, **really good for me.**"

Chapter 4

And

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

Mr. A-H was also Evie’s counselor and after she and Dee Dee had picked what seemed the ideal volunteer position for her – caring for rescued horses at the Southern California Horse Reserve -- Evie tapped on his door, still open from his session with Alejandra de los Santos, ^{she} and asked if he had time to answer a quick question. **(She needed him sign off on her () and she had only six more minutes before she had to get to her next class to find out.)** But she soon found out that quick questions can lead to excruciating long winded interrogation. Mr. A-H wanted to know exactly why she wanted to work at the SCHR.

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

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

“Your community?” Mr. A-H looked over her file. “I thought you lived in Rio Estates,”

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

“Do you mean equine?” Mr. A- H looked up from her file and smiled.

“Yes, absolutely.” Evie answered. Isn’t that what she just said? “I was reading that they need care, for horses that have been abused or injured. I can do that.”

3 weeks into
“Well, you do know that it’s already ~~in the middle~~ of the semester and they may not have availability.” He adjusted his wire frame glasses and looked at the calendar that hung to the left of him. It was a Villanova school calendar, the one that all the seniors so enthusiastically sold every year to raise money for their prom, as if any student who attended the ~~thirty-six~~ ²⁰¹⁰ G a year Villy really needed more money to **show case pretension**. “They may not have room for you.”

“But they have a listing on the volunteer board,” Evie told him.

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

Evie suddenly wondered if she could get a position as **an** office intern.

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

“I thought you wanted to work with rescued horses?” Mr. A-H asked. He pulled a cloth lens cleaner from the drawer. “At the reserve.”

~~Bust-ed~~

“Oh, I do.” Evie answered. “I was just asking. I mean, if Villanova needs help, I ^{Vern} totally wanna help.”

Nice save.

“It’s refreshing to hear such school spirit,” Mr. A-H took off his glasses and started to clean them. It was obvious that he was on to her. “Well, if we can’t get you at the reserve this semester, there is always their summer program.”

“Summer program?” Evie was **horrified**. “No, I have, I mean, I’d *like* to work this semester.”

“And the urgency is because of your love of horses?” he asked. “And nothing to do with the two Cs on your last quality check?”

Well,” Evie felt her neck flush. “Maybe,” she answered sheepishly. “Just a little.”

“Don’t worry, Evie,” Counselor ^{we} A-H smiled, a somewhat nice calm reassuring smile. He put his glasses back on. “I’ll see what I can do. I’ll give the reserve a call and see if they have anymore openings. I think I can pull some strings. By the way, how is your party coming along?”

“My party?”

“Yes, I hear from many of the instructors that it’s been quite the distraction in the classroom. All the students are talking about it.”

“Oh,” Evie cringed. “I’m sorry.” Should she offer him an invite?

“No worries,” Mr. A-H ^{said} “But just focus on matters on hand, Evie. Your grades need improving. You know, I was your sister’s counselor when she was a student here. How is she doing at Stanford?”

“Great,” Evie answered. When is she not doing great?

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

“Uh, huh,” was all Evie could say.

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

But Evie's **moment of serenity** was short lived. She still had to get final approval from both Vasquez and Harrison and that took a little maneuvering.

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

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

“Give me the mood,” Mrs. Harrison weaved her hands in the air, expressing a dramatic flair she hoped Evie would capture on paper. “I want to hear the complexity of what a charro life really is.”

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

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

and my next quality check could reflect that?

Wow,” Evie wasn’t expecting a full letter B. She was anticipating perhaps a light

level. “I’m really going to do a good job,” she assured Mrs. Harrison.

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

“Thank you,” was all Evie could really say.

Vasquez was a bit harder to convince that Evie was an oppressed upper middle class teen struggling for the Malibu birthday party of her dreams.

open the has started.

“I normally don’t allow this type of extra credit this late in the semester,” he stated dryly as he erased the chalkboard, his back kept towards her the whole time. “It’s standard procedure to request volunteer work at the commencement of a new semester.”

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

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

“Oh, I totally agree,” Evie nodded her head in agreement. *Please, just sign the* paper. “I mean, all my friends were telling me I should work at a hospice, or with Heal the Bay, but I felt I could be more useful volunteering at an animal reserve. It’s pretty

tragic how horses are so neglected in this country. I mean, they were once the ~~0~~ symbol of our frontier, right? Now, not enough citizens bother to care.”

Citizens. Country. Frontier. Words that are music, patriotic music, to a **Civics** instructor’s ears.

Mr. Vasquez turned around to face Evie. The bottom of his nose had been accidentally dusted with white chalk. *Party hearty Mr. V!* He squint his eyes and slowly nodded his head with approval. “Good for you, Evie. It’s good to see you thinking for yourself. I remember last semester, when you dyed your hair blonde and started hanging out with a different crowd, Alejandra de los Santos and all her friends, I got a little concerned about you. You’re a bright girl and now here you are, wanting to do your own thing. Good for you.”

Yes!

Good for me, Evie **thought** as Vazquez signed her sheet. **She was on her way to having the sixteennera of her dreams and becoming the most popular sophomore at Villy.** *+ maybe even outdoing Ja Sabrin*

Chapter

To be honest, Evie didn’t know much about horses. Most of what she related to Vasquez she paraphrased from the SCHR’s flyer. She did, however, love when Dee Dee’s mom, Margaret, used to take her, Dee Dee and Raquel, horseback riding in **Oakview**. And she did fancy herself a lover of animals. Really, wasn’t she the only one who made sure Meho’s litter box remained semi clump-less and wasn’t *she* the only one

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Chapter

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So after all the paperwork had been approved, signed and turned in, Evie was scheduled for her first day of volunteer work at the Southern California Horse Reserve that following **Wednesday** ^g after school. Alex ^{offered} ~~had agreed~~ to drop her off at the reserve before heading out to Sea Street. As Eve walked out to the student parking lot to meet ^{It was set} ~~Alex~~ ^{mini}, she heard someone call out her name.

"Hey, Evie."

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

"Oh, hey," Evie said back.

She didn't ^{couldnt remember the} know names of these two particular boys, and she was surprised they ^{by name.} even knew her. She did, however, recognize them from their photos in the school paper's sport's page. Normally Evie wouldn't think much of jocks, in their numbered jerseys and lifted trucks, *hello*, where on the *water polo* team and while she never bothered to read the accompanying text to ever learn their names, Raquel had pointed out

the differences between team members which now helped Evie differentiate the two boys who were now walking next to her.

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

“Yeah,” Big Bulge Speedo came up to her right. “You gonna supply customized party hats?” *for yr. guests?*

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

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

Evie hadn’t thought of giving out *recuerdos*, mementos, for her party. They were usually reserved for little kid’s birthdays or tacky over produced weddings. But here were two of Villy’s finest water boys suggesting it.

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

“Coo’.” Tight Across the Ass approved. “You gonna have a band or a DJ?”

“I think just a DJ,” Evie didn’t know why she said she ‘thought’ of having a D.J. Her father had booked DJ Chancla *Q*, *another* nonrefundable deposit, months ago.

“Is it coo’ if I bring my cos from SB?” Big Bulge asked. “He **said it’s all over myspace.**”

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

“Yeah,” Tight Across the Ass said. “Your party’s gonna knock 805 on it’s ass!”

“Marco...”

Tight Across the Ass, & Evie

Evie turned around ~~and saw~~ ^{was w/} that Alejandra de los Santos ~~and~~ her ah-miga, Fabiola were walking by, across them.

"Uh, hey," Tight Across the Ass looked over at Alejandra.

"We're gonna go (),," Fabiola said. "You wanna come with?" She looked over at Evie. It was clear that the invitation was not extended to her. ^{Quieres + li con nosotros?} ^{didn't}

"Uh, not right now," Tight Across the Ass ~~went back to Evie~~. "I'm talking party talk with Eves, here."

^{familiar}
Eves? Was he getting cutesy with her?

Evie suddenly felt (). How cool was her life? This semester?

Alejandra looked at Evie. "Okay, see you later..."

When Evie and the two Speedos reached Alex's truck, he had just taken his long board out of Mondo's Marauder and was putting it in the back of his truck.

"Hey, Marky," Alex lifted his chin to Tight Across the Ass Speedo.

"Hey," Tight Across the Ass Speedo said back.

"You gonna rip at Sea Street?" ^{he} Big Bulge Speedo looked over Alex's longboard.

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

"You're going to Rincon?" Evie balked as she opened the ^{truck's} passenger door and tossed her backpack behind the seat. "You didn't tell me that." She suddenly felt left out.

As long as she's been dating Alex and surfing, ^{as long as she's been} which was basically the same amount of time, she had never been to Rincon, which was only five more miles north of Sea Street.

The waves at Rincon were supposedly as fierce as it's local territorialism. Alex pretty much kept her away.

"You didn't ask," Alex teased. "sides, you gotta get from guppie stage before you can swim with the sharks."

Evie felt a twinge of embarrassment. How could he say such a thing in front of Tight Across the Ass and Big Bulge? Two of the top swimmers on the water polo team?

"You can't swim, Evie?" Tight Across the Ass asked.

"Of course, I can swim," Evie wrinkled her face and shook her head. "He's just being stupid."

"Cause I was gonna say, if you need help," Tight Across the Ass started. "I could totally help you."

"You?" Big Bulge smirked. "You can't even (). Look, Evie. If you ever wanna (), just let me know."

Evie could not believe what she was hearing. Where these two guys, *water polo boys* ~~team members~~, seniors, fighting over who would get to be with her? Had she died and gone to ~~heaven~~? She couldn't help but glance over at Alex, who appeared not be paying attention as he (). *Made sure his board was shopped in.*

"Wow, that's so totally nice of you," was all Evie could say. "I guess I gotta admit, I still get a little tense when I gotta do a turtle turn, under the waves."

"Oh, you don't wanna be tense when you should be having fun. I can totally help you with that," Tight Across the Ass said. "Just let me know."

Marky told
"So, we gotta get going, ~~Patey~~," Alex ~~said to~~ Tight Across The Ass (as came to the back of the truck) "Evie's got an internship over at the SCHR."

"Oh, Yeah?" Tight Across the Ass said. "Cool. Well, see you guys later."

“Yeah, Evie, see later,” Big Bulge added.

“What was that all about?” Alex asked as he pulled out of his parking space.

“What was what?” Evie asked, but she had a ~~sinking~~ inclination that she knew what he meant.

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

“I wasn’t flirting,” Evie tried to deny it. Was it that obvious?

“Of course you were,” Alex said as he made his voice high and girly. ““Oh, I get so scared when I go under the waves! Help me, help me!””

“I did *not* say that,” Evie insisted.

“In so many words you did.”

“Alex,” Evie pinched him on the side. “Please... ^{aw} ~~ah~~ are you jealous?”

^{Alex denied it} “Not even. I just know that you wouldn’t like that if I did that in front of you.”

“You’re right,” Evie admitted. “But God, it’s not like Tight Across, I mean, Marky ^{Evie} talks to me everyday. He’s like Mr. Big Man in the Pool.”

“You are so impressionable,” Alex said. “He’s not that great.”

~~“You’re right. He’s not.”~~ Evie ~~looked out the window.~~ ^{laughed cold heart nothing} And you’re so not jealous? Yeah, right. “So,” she started. “He said that my party was all over myspace,”

“Yeah,” Alex said as he waited his turn in the student parking lot to make a left on ^{Ventura} Highway 33. There was no stop light and a line of ^{the} late model rides was practically ten deep. “I meant to tell you that.”

“What?” Evie asked. “Are you serious? How do you know?”

"I've gotten two bulletins for it." Alex ^{tapped} beeped his horn at the **black SUV that completely dwarfed his ~~medium sized~~ truck**. "Go already!" he muttered under his breath.

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

Alex smiled. "And what did you say?"

"I told him I would."

"You do know that party hats are ^{rubbers} ~~condoms~~, right?"

"Are you serious?" Evie held her hand over her mouth and laughed. "Oh my God, I am such a **dork!**"

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

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

"Not even for your birthday. I mean, you are going to be sixteen."

Evie ~~felt uncomfortable and~~ smiled out of embarrassment, "Alex, you're gonna crash the truck if you get talking like that."

"Talking like what?" he asked innocently.

Evie threw him a sideways glance.

"Okay, okay..." Alex ()

Evie looked out the window at the **towering** eucalyptus and oak trees that lined Highway 33. This wasn't the first time that Alex joked about them sharing more than spit. Indulging in some extended play? She didn't know if she was quite ready for all that, *now* with him.

She remembered the first time he had actually made his first move on her and just alone ^{that} was overwhelming.

It happened at Sea Street, of course, right after a twilight surf session. Alex had come up behind her and without her even expecting anything, she expected that he was going to help her unzip her wetsuit. But suddenly he kissed the back of her neck, a short, quick and gentle kiss. Evie **nearly died. He then placed his hands on her shoulders and even with her wetsuit on she could swear that ~~she could feel~~ his fingers trembled.** ^{Evie} She turned around to face him, but suddenly his lips were on her mouth and Evie's head seemed ~~to explode~~ with excitement. ~~How could she possibly say it?~~ The sensation to have Alex's lips on hers was a million more times more thrilling than the first time she tried Veuve Cliquot at the party. **TWO More.**

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

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

It was then that Evie fell into sweet, blissful Alex-stasy. ~~And so far,~~ a place she ^{so far} has been comfortable with.

^{this time} "Damn!" Alex held his hand on his horn. "What's this dude's problem?"

Friggin' **student driver!**"

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

"I'm sure you don't suck this ^{hard} bad. He's had three chances to go. ~~No balls!~~"

"Hey, Alex..." Evie ^{she} started. Her mind was still in Alex-stasy.

"Uh huh," he answered half heartedly. ^{interested}

when

"Do you think we can go to Santa Barbara?" she asked. "Like maybe this Sunday?"

"Uh, yeah. Why not?" Alex revved his engine and finally **ripped** a left turn onto ~~Vta Ave~~ Highway 33. "Hey, you know Bien Ben?" he asked. "That guy who transferred from ~~0~~?" ~~Brener~~

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

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

"Yeah, totally," Evie agreed. Baja was just across the Mexican border. A lot of kids went there for simple day trips or for the weekend to surf. It really wasn't a big deal, but the thought of going to another country with Alex, albeit just a few miles south of San Diego, excited her. (Wow, she suddenly got an idea. What if she and Alex hooked up in Mexico? Muy cosmo, no?)

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

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

"Bien Ben," Alex said.

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

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

"Hence, his tag, Bien," Evie smirked. "but yeah, I don't mind." She regretted asking if she could have Sunday alone with Alex. Was she becoming the obnoxious

so obnoxious

possessive girlfriend that she had read about in the articles of Dee Dee's Mexican magazines? Posesiva o' No, to decide?

Alex slowed down on ^{at} the highway and looked the addresses on the mailboxes.
"Hey, where is this place again?" ^{Ventura} he asked.

"It's actually just coming up," Evie looked at her paper with the address. "The lady on the phone said it was a little past ^{Kane St the entrance} ()." Evie saw it and pointed. "There, it is."

Alex pulled over and Evie noticed on the dashboard clock that she was somehow ~~a few minutes~~ late. Damn, she so wanted to make the good first impression.

"Well, here it goes." Evie glumly ~~said as she~~ unfastened her safety belt ~~quickly~~ and grabbed her backpack from behind her seat.

~~She was suddenly not looking forward to working an afternoon in the Ojai heat when she knew she could be out in sea breeze with Alex.~~

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

"Oh, like you know ^{so much} about work, other than paddling out."

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

^{okay} "You're right," Evie agreed.

"You need a ride home?" ^{Alex asked.}

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

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

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

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

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

As she followed the **handwritten** signs that directed her to **the reserve**, Evie's ^{of a kind} flojos kicked up dust. No smoking or cell phones were allowed, but she only had to worry about the latter. She ~~dug her~~ ^{over} hand into her backpack and ~~turned phone off~~ ^{or}. She already ^{hacked} felt like she was turning a new leaf. To turn ~~off of~~ ^{off} her phone and donate a whole afternoon without ringtones or text messages? Unthinkable for Evie Gomez.

Gradually the aroma of hay and manure hit her and ^{rain} ~~Evie~~ ^{Evie she guessed was} ~~Evie~~ knew she must be getting close to the reserve. Sure enough, a tall blonde woman in a denim sun hat standing ^{a chain link gate} near the ~~main~~ entrance greeted her.

"Hey, there," the woman called to Evie. She was deeply tanned and ~~had far of~~ ^{w/} crow's feet extending from the outer corners of her dark eyes. She held a clipboard to her chest. "Are you here for the orientation?"

"Uh, yeah," Evie said. "Yes."

"What's your name?" the woman ^{asked} smiled.

"Evelina," she answered. Ever since Dee Dee's step mom, Graciela, seemed to questions Evie's name **when she** had first introduced herself as "Just Evie", she felt

always
insecure about how to properly introduce herself to adults. She now offered her formal name.

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

“Oh, yeah,” Evie answered.

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

“Yeah,” Evie laughed lightly. She learned, from spending time at her father’s bakery (~~and more recently with her counselor~~) that you sometimes had to **grant** sympathy chuckles to ~~adults~~ ^{people}, especially to those in charge.

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

“Sure,” Evie smiled back as she made her way over to “join the others”. Her position at the reserve was now clear and her stomach slowly started to turn with first day jitters. She was at the reserve to work. She would be following orders from people she didn’t know and would have to do tasks that she didn’t want to do. At fifteen and a half, Evie never really had a job, job. Sure as a kid, she, Dee Dee and Raquel ran **the** **perquisite** lemonade stand that all kids always had in the summer and she often helped her father out at one of his *panaderias*, but both “jobs” were just for fun. She didn’t need major experience to sling lemonade or **arrange sweetbread on the shelves**. She just had to be the cute kid with an interest in the adult workforce, happy to receive token payments in the form of shiny fifty cent pieces or ‘you go girl’ smiles. But now cuteness would not cut it. She was at the reserve to work .

and while there was no monetary paycheck, there was an even greater payoff – her grand sixteenner at Duke's.

As soon as Evie reached the ^{group} she discovered how ^{dead}horribly wrong she was with what she had told Alex. The majority of volunteers were not high school students like her. ^{salt}They weren't even sophomores, but rather seniors. Not *high school* seniors, but seniors, as in senior citizens, *old people*. There was about eight of them, small, ^{or}fragile looking in jeans and windbreakers. A few of the men wore ^{plastic}visors.

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

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

Lynn, the ~~woman~~ ⁹Evie had met earlier, walked over and stood in front of the group. Evie shaded her eyes from the late afternoon sun as she listened to ^{her}the woman introduce herself as the owner of the Reserve and talk a little bit about the reserve's history. **MORE**

"I'm not here that often," Lynn admitted. "So, you will be trained by Arturo. He has been with the reserve for ^{over a year}almost two years and I really trust him. He's my right hand man. And with that," she looked over at a guy sitting in the front row wearing a cowboy ~~hat~~ who Evie hadn't noticed before. "I'll now let Arturo take over."

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

Emily Strange Girl, surprisingly, **muttered** under her breath, "Nice."

Evie looked Arturo over. Yeah, he was nice looking. If you like that rural kind of look, which she didn't. He was tall, like Alex, but not has wiry. He had a broader chest. He also had **brown** hair like Alex's, but really light eyes, like almost green. He was very tan, which Evie did like, but wore that cowboy ^{boots} hat, which Evie definitely didn't like.

"My name's Arturo," he introduced himself again. "You can call me Art if you like, but just don't call me, last minute, to cancel your hours."

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

Evie looked over the group. *Please*, that remark was *so* not LOL worthy.

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

We don't need him over a year
He
Arturo went on to explain that had been working at the reserve for two years, part time and that he was a senior at Thatcher High School and also an officer with the FFA, the Future Farmers of America.

"A lot of people think that the FFA is just a bunch of kids who are into raising livestock, but it's much more than that," He ^{went} goes on to explain. "We learn leadership skills. I'm ^{the} actually county director for the county. We have state directors, national directors." *a lin actually running in state director?*

Evie looked around at the group again. Was this ^{Kiss and} guy for real? The Emily Strange Girl was ~~now~~ working on a blemish under her chin, but everyone else, especially Lynn, ^{seemed} ~~was~~ so taken by the wonderful magical **words** of Arturo and **his** ~~passion for all things~~ **humane**. ^{taking charge.}

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

Of course, all the old people chuckled even more and raised their hands in **anticipation**.

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

"Have fun and be sure to listen to Arturo," she said before getting into her pick up. ^{"I'll be back before you leave."}

As everyone followed Arturo, Evie fell into step with the Emily Strange Girl, who glanced over at Evie. "I like your necklace," she said.

"Oh," Evie touched the abalone shells that dangled from the cord. "Thanks. My boyfriend made it for me."

"Oh," Emily made a face like she **just witnessed two kittens cuddling**. "That is **too sweet**."

Okay, the girl may look like Emily Strange, but the similarities stopped there. This girl obviously had a **tender** side.

"What school do you go to?" she asked. ^{Evie}

“Villanueva,” Evie answered.

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

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

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

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

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

New Path was a C-school, at the north end of the county. Unlike Villy in all it’s majestic Spanish architectural splendor, New Path was just a bunch of quantum huts and non-descript bungalows at the Camarillo airport. Evie didn’t know anyone, except for Jose, Raquel’s ex boyfriend, who went to New Path. **Last semester he got kicked out of Villanueva for his bad grades and he had been pretty much out of sight, out of mind. At least** within her sight, anyway. ^{Sounded}

“Do you know a guy named Jose?” Evie asked. She couldn’t help but feel a bit evil (Maybe ^{she had a} little Emily Strange in her?) hoping, that Jose was doing badly. But, he ^{le} was quite the dick to her, and of course, to Raquel, last semester.

“Jose...” Emily Strange Girl squint ^{ed} her eyes in thought. “Is he a Mexican guy with wild hair, like a ‘fro?’”

“Yeah,” Evie said.

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

"I'm sure they do," Evie smirked. "He used to go to my school and —"

"Excuse me, are we interrupting you?"

Evie looked up and realized that Arturo was directing his question right to her.

Suddenly all eyes were on Evie.

"Uh, no." Evie's face got hot. "I'm sorry. What did you say?"

"Please," Arturo looked upward in annoyance. "I really don't want to go over this again.

"I know," Evie, for some reason, **stood up straighter**. "I'm paying attention."

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

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

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

"You wear flip flops *and* shorts to school?" Arturo directed his question less to Evie and more to his newly **acquired prisoners**, *and duh. The young like prisoners* **at the mercy of his leadership and** *lame observations* **lame observations**. "And do you wear a bathing suit to church?"

More tittering from the geriatric gallery.

"What is your name?" he asked. *looked at his chart*

"Evie, Evie Gomez."

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

"Uh, yeah," Evie felt put on the spot. *what did he mean by that?*

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

MR.
Jeez, ~~this Arturo~~ “friend of the animals” was really laying it on thick.

I know,” Evie said.

“So, anyway,” Arturo tried to continue, but you could tell he was annoyed. “Back to the real reason why we are all here, the care and rehabilitation of these challenged *pon* animals.” *harris* .”

Arturo then led everyone to each stable and introduced each horse by name. Evie noticed that just about everyone took notes and that many of them went so far as to draw out a diagram of the reserve and label each stable with the individual horse’s name. She glanced over and saw that even the Emily Strange Girl was writing something in her notebook. Evie *med.* suddenly felt inadequate and didn’t know what to do with her empty hands. Wasn’t the whole point of doing volunteer work was to gain insight and experiences you *couldn't* learn in the classroom? Why then, would anyone follow the strict requisite, such as note taking, that *just* reeked of academia?

“Now, let’s go give old Chamuco a visit,” Arturo announced after the group had been introduced to the last of at least twenty horses. “Chamuco,” Arturo explained. “is one of our oldest residents. He was seized from a ranch in Santa Ynez and when he first came here he was starving and dehydrated, but he has come a long way.”

est
The whole group followed Arturo to the a stable farther away from the other horses. A humongous light brown **Shoshone** came over to the group and was lazily

chewing on strands of hay. He had big dark eyes and the longest lashes. A collective "~~Aw~~" was expressed from the whole group.

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

Evie glanced over at one of the volunteers, a woman who stood about four feet tall and had dirty grey hair tucked under a headscarf. She was fiercely scribbling on her note pad: 'Chamuco/devil, has come along way, pick up Poly-grip on the way home.'

"Who'd like to meet Chamuco?" Arturo asked the volunteers. Evie couldn't help but notice that Arturo's asked as challenge, as if he already knew no one would dare enter the ^{stall}pen with him.

Suddenly the **shared** eagerness of the group **dimmed**. None of the volunteers volunteered to get in the pen with Chamuco/devil.

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

"Me?" Evie pointed to herself on her chest.

"Sure" Arturo motioned her to step the inside the ^{stall}pen. "Come on in.

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

away

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

Everyone laughed, that is, except Evie. She couldn't help but feel a bit nervous around Chamuco/devil. She remembered that one time Dee Dee's mother had taken her horseback riding and Raquel was the victim of horrendous back kick, courtesy of one of the "more gentler" horses. Chamuco was twice as big as that so called gentle horse. His torso as wide as two line backers and his ass and "ahem" were, how do you say it? Muy, muy grande? Not that she was looking, mind you.

Evie cautiously crept around Chamuco allowing him adequate space so he could possibly not feel threatened, but just as she was making her way to the front of him, her ringtone went off, in a full bar kind of way -- a long continuous of () blared from the back pocket of her board shorts. It startled Evie, but not as nearly as much as it did Chamuco.

Suddenly, his gigantic black body jerked back and his neck pulled back like a two ton cobra ready to strike. (Chamuco barred two rows of () yellow teeth and lead a () whine.)

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Arturo grabbed Chamuco's neck and took a hold of his bit. "Easy does it, boy."

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

^{stable}
"Get out of the pen!" Arturo yelled at Evie as Chamuco ^{bickled up a nervous} paced around the stable,
his ears ^{were} pulled back and ^{ed full} teeth baring in fright. He started to knock his body against the ^{wooden} fence.)

The volunteers watched in **suspense** as Arturo tried to calm Chamuco. After what ^{time} seemed a good long while, Chamuco's ears finally pulled forward, his body ^{finally} came to a ^{pacing} ~~slow~~ ^{stayed} halt and his ~~tail~~ ^{d mane} Arturo continued to stroke his ~~tail~~ and pulled another carrot from his back pocket. Chamuco, it seemed, was ~~official~~ **relaxed**. Arturo, on the other hand, was wound. Tight.

"You ~~cannot~~ ^{on} have your cell phone ~~here~~!" Arturo spat at Evie from the pen.
"Didn't you see the signs before you came in?"

"Yeah," Evie tried her best to defend herself. "I mean, yes, I did." She felt horrible that she was to blame for what just happened. The last thing anyone wants to do is traumatize a poor **defenseless animal** that has already been abused. "I thought I turned it off."

"Why would you even *need* your phone while you're working here?" Arturo snapped. He then addressed the whole group. "Do *not* bring your cell near the stables. At all. Keep them in your car." ^{if}

"But I ~~didn't~~ drive," Evie said.

"Then keep them in your little purse and keep that in the supply shed."

Little purse?

One elderly man with pure white hair and wearing a light blue nylon baseball cap raised his hand. "Uh, I have a question," he looked around at the rest of the group.

"What is it?" Arturo ^{wrong} tilted his head to its side in frustration.

“Uh, none of us have mobile phones, the man spoke “Is that going to be a problem?” ^{ii elders}

“No.” Arturo answered, exasperated. “Don’t worry about it,”

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

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

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

“Ugh.” All Evie could do was groan. She went to the fridge and poured herself some **Kern’s horchata**. Will there ever be a time when Lindsay will find the time and do the ~~good Mexican thing~~ ^{night time} and make the ~~drink~~ ^{horchata} from scratch, like Dee Dee’s housekeeper?

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

“We can’t use our phones at the reserve,” Evie said. “It spooks out the horses.” She decided to omit ~~relaying~~ her own little incident that erupted between her and Chamuco/devil. She still couldn’t shake off the look ~~frightened~~ ^{of pure} look in his eyes. The look she caused.

“You have to tell us all about it.” Her mother was now scraping the worn sides of

the avocado hull for any possible remaining flesh. "You're father's gonna be home soon. You want something to eat until then?"

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

"Don't use the new towels," her mother called out. "I just bought them for Sabrina. I want them for her when she comes back."

Evie wanted to ask why her mother would buy brand new guest towels for a mere family member, but she was just too plain tired to muster up a question that she really didn't care about its answer. She slowly made her way to the bathroom of her parent's master bedroom and turned the jacuzzi dial of their oversized tub to high. After she lit two vanilla scented candles and mixed in her favorite lavender oil into the whirling jet streams, she stripped off her stinky clothes and slid into the hot water. She called Alex from her cell phone.

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

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

"What an asshole," Alex said.

"Totally," Evie agreed.

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

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

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I have to clean up after all the horses." *Eric said*

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

"Too many, thank God I just have to go a few times after school."

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

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

"Surf porn," Alex said. "You know, typical ~~()~~ shots with the ~~heavy noise~~ *big waves, big music* soundtrack. Bien's over." *throbbing*

"Oh, really?" Evie asked.

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

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

"Yeah, Bien and I were talking about going down to Baja sometime."

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

"Who?"

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

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

*you gotta ck
her out
Evie*

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

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

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

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

Evie clicked over to Dee Dee.

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

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

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

"I hope so," Evie wasn't feeling as confident as she was a few days earlier. She ran the pumice stone under the bottom of her other foot.

"Well," Dee Dee started. "I haven't told you the most exciting news,"

"What?" Evie asked.

"I talked to Rocio today..." Dee Dee paused in hopes to create an air of anticipation.

“And?” Evie asked. No such air was created. Dee Dee talked to Rocio everyday.
It was far from being “the most exciting news.”

“And guess what?” Dee Dee asked.

“What already?!” Evie said.

“He’s thinking of going to college out here!” Dee Dee announced.

“Really?” Evie asked. “Here in the U.S. or in Cali?”

“Here,” Dee Dee said. “In California, ^{Que} Muy chido, no?”

“Uh, no,” Evie answered. “I mean, right. It is 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 ‘Yes, I agree to your ^e no?’

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

“Claro, of course,” Dee Dee said. “He hasn’t 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 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 bit longer and make it to your **Sixteenera**.”

“Really” Evie asked. “He’s coming that soon?”

“Yeah,” Dee Dee said. “And 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 whom she never even met, from Rocio to all her Myspace friends (up to 220 friends!) knew "All about Evie". At least her party, anyway.

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

"Really?" ~~Evie felt like a ()~~. "What?"

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

"*Them?* So it's a plural present?" This would be the first birthday, after four years, that Evie would get to share with Dee Dee. As a kid, Dee Dee, or at least her mother, were known for doing it up with **over the top lavish gifts**. Not that is what all the birthday celebrations were all about ^{presents} (), but *still*.

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

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

~~"I'll talk to you later."~~ Dee Dee said. *And all mes*

"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 can have her Sixteener. She *had* to. She set the cycle to *High* ~~whirl~~ **and** the jets blasted hot water and soon soothed her muscles. She ~~still~~ stunk like a horse saddle, her arms ~~still~~ ached and she had yet to practice her driving with her father later that evening. She still had to check in with Raquel, but ~~she was just so tired~~. *And* But when she got out of her bath she was so tired that she fell asleep shortly before dinner time and didn't wake up until early the very next morning.

The House that Pan Dulce Bought

It was that Evie was ashamed of having money. Or as she told Emily Strange Girl, her father had money and that was because he worked a lot. But was hard to “be down” when your down payment was usually “paid in full”.

Explanation of his Estate

Chapter

The rest of the week at the SCHR continued to be ridiculously laborious for Evie. Wednesday through Friday she'd leave directly from school with Alex so he could drop her off at the main entrance of the reserve to work a four hour shift, which was followed by an evening of homework, a few phone calls, ~~some~~ approval of new myspace friend requests, IMs, and a few episodes of *Laguna Beach* before finally, finally, the ~~finally~~ *finally* night, good night texting with Alex before going to bed.

Alex: Nite QT.

Evie: ☺ *Nite*

Evie would quickly stash cell phone (turned off – double checked) in her backpack. Change from flojos to last semester's distressed Keds before entering the reserve. No one, she observed, except for Arturo, actually wore cowboy boots and

that hat and Evie was *sure* that it was all for show – She had never even seen him ride any of the hors

Because the older volunteers worked the week day morning shift, Evie and Emily Strange Girl (who was actually named **Sidney**) were the only volunteers who had a whole shift to themselves. They worked *under supervision* alongside Arturo and soon the both of them fell into a rhythm. They worked as a team, basically doing what the morning shift did -- feed, walk and brush down the horses, but because their shift was at the end of the day, they were on dump duty, which meant they had to transfer all the horse droppings that were collected earlier from the day into a dilapidated wheel barrow and then roll the wheelbarrow to the far south side of the reserve. It was there they had to unload it in a compost ~~manure~~ *horse dropping* patch

“This is bull,” **Ana** complained as she loaded up the wheelbarrow with (). “You know, the morning shift could do some of this, they could split this part of the chores. I thought old people were supposed to be all helpful and reliable.”

“If I was you and I went to New Path,” Evie ran her shovel against the ground, scrapping up as much *Q* as she could. “I’d just come in the morning and get this all over with.” *me manure*

“Come in the morning?” Ana looked at Evie as if she was crazy. “That means I’d have to wake up even earlier.”

“What time do you get up now?” Evie asked. She knew students at New Path were allowed to made up there own schedule, but she wasn’t sure how flexible they were allowed to be.

I get up around 10,” Ana said. “Smoke a bowl, do some homework, check in at school, smoke some more, and then come here.”

“You smoke pot before school, work?” Evie asked. *Is she related to Raquel?*

“Of course, that’s the only way I could deal with this shit.” She held a shovel full of **it in** front of Evie and laughed. “Literally and figuratively.” Ana continued. “And my parents are already at work by the time I get up, so I’m pretty much on my own, until they get come home after work, around six.

“That is so cool,” Evie said enviously. “My mother is *always* around, breathing down my neck the minute I come through the door.”

“Was that your mother who picked you up the other day?

“No,” Evie said. “It was our housekeeper, Lindsay.”

“Lindsay?” Ana crinkled her face. “What kind of name is that?”

“What do you mean?

“I dunno,” Ana said. “I’ve just never known any maids called Lindsay.”

“She’s not a maid,” Evie asserted. “But what do you think *is* a good name for a maid?

Ana looked at Evie with a smirk and enunciated each syllable. “*E-vie.*”

Yup, Evie thought, Ana *must* be related to Raquel.

When Ana finally shoveled one last heap of smelly horse dung into the wheelbarrow, she patted it down with the back of her shovel. “Okay, this is full,” she told Evie. “You wanna take it to the **patch?**”

“Nuh, uh. No way. ” Evie shook her head. “I took the last bunch.”

"Okay," Ana wiped her forehead with the bottom of her palm. "Then you can give Chamuco his **medicine** and I'll go dump it."

Ever since that first day of orientation Evie was still very much intimidated by big ol' Chamuco: Devil, Dangerous, with nostrils a flaring and teeth a baring.. *NOKE*

"Nuh, uh." Evie shook her head again. "You go give him his ^() and I'll go dump this load." *name*

"Did you hear that Ar-turdo said there might be two more volunteers joining up,?" Ana asked.

Arturdo?" Evie laughed. "That is a perfect name for him!"

Yeah," she seemed proud of herself. "So, as soon as that happens, we can give them the shit work to them and we can be on carrot duty."

"Definitely," Evie said as she grabbed the worn wooden handles of the barrow. The palms of her hands were getting callused and actually hurt, just a bit. She rolled the barrow towards the supply shed to get a pair of work gloves but when she entered the structure, the scent of peppermint (or was it spearmint? It's was hard to ^{sense} anything is *overpowered* *There was a girl* *over* *pretty much* *overpowered by the usual* smell of manure and grain) hit her. She found ~~someone~~ in the shed, a girl. She was reclining quite casually on the very top of three stacked plastic bins. She was about Evie's height with short, ^{brown} dark, almost black hair and was overdressed for a day of work at the reserve. She wore high waist beige riding pants and a black satin looking corset top tapered that exposed the sides of her naked hips. Seemingly hundreds of thin **gold** chains hung around her long brown neck and she wore black leather knee high riding boots that looked like they had just came right out of the box. Many visitors and volunteers of the reserve often escaped the sharp rays of the *7*

“Josephina,” 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 arms 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 with high ^{*an*}toned inflection as if every ^{*one of them*}sentence was question. This was typical San Fernando Valley speak, that somehow made it down the Conejo Grade and into Ventura Country. This girl, the girl named Josephina, had obviously got 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 to know. His embrace around Josephina relaxed **as she took back her cigarette from him.**

“Just some gloves,” Evie held them up to prove she wasn’t just 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 embrace. “Arturo, stop it. You’re gonna wrinkle my **vest**?”

Arturo pulled back and then the girl looked blankly at Evie, which prompted him to introduce her to Evie.

“This is Evie,” he told the girl. “She’s one of the volunteers, from Villanueva.”

“Villanueva?” Josephina asked.

“Yeah,” Evie said. (She was used to getting that type of **quizzical** response. **Not many flojo surfer looking chicks went to high-end preppy Villy.**)

The girl **studied Evie**. “I just met a girl, she goes to Villanueva?”

“Oh, really?” Evie asked. “Who?” Villanueva had about ³⁰⁰ students and everyone seemed to know everyone else. Or at least, **were victims of their second hand drama.** *which meant just about*

“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.

“Yeah, 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, who she now deemed snooty and spoke in question marks, that Dee Dee was, indeed, a very, very dear friend to her. Her *best* friend.

“I just met Dela,” she said as she held out her hand. “I’m Josephina? From Las Patronas Senior Committee?”

Dee Dee had mentioned the Las Patronas **Senior** committee, who were made up of the past year’s recipients. Senior Patronas had say of who was selected ^{as} to be new Patronas for the incoming year *small to be*

“Oh, right,” Evie nodded and shook Josephina’s hand. She had forgotten to remove the oversized work glove and felt like a clumsy bear ^{man} ~~man~~, handling a delicate fawn. She wasn’t used to an introduction followed with a handshake, unless it was with adults. “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 didn’t know how to back pedal. ^{felt stupid} ~~back pedal~~ **Was a pet poop comment just as bad as telling a parent that their child was ugly?**

Just then, Ana poked her head in the supply shed.

“*Evie*,” she sighed 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 towards the wheelbarrow.

“Ana,” 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,” Ana protested.

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

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

Evie and Ana headed towards the gulley.

“Who *was* that?” Ana asked.

"I guess Arturo's girlfriend.

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

"Nah, none of my friends look, act, or dress like that." Evie **said**.

"**She looks like she was about to go hunting with the hounds...but forgot to change out of her Victoria Secret ^{nightie} panties.**" Ana laughed. "What's her name?"

Josephina," Evie said. "Josephin-a." She emphasized the 'a'

Did all things seemingly Sangro **End in A**

Chapter 7

Despite an evening fundraiser later that evening, Saturday was finally (finally!) *for the SCHZ*

Evie's first free day from the reserve in **over two weeks**. She had worked a total of

40 ~~twenty~~ hours at the reserve and, of course, the inner flojo in her just wanted an afternoon devoted to complete chill. It was **nearly noon** and she lay in her bed blissfully devoid of duties or obligation. Nothing would get her out of bed. Nothing, unless 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 **awhile** since she had Alex had went surfing at Sea Street and there was no way she was going to miss out on some ^{*choice*} waves this ^{*Sat*} time. Who knows? For all

she knew, maybe he would surprise her and they would go up to Rincon. She got out of bed, slipped on her ^{sank} flojos and looked for her **bathing suit**. No doubt ^{she'd} have to wear her full length winter suit in the ocean, but once she was out of the water, she liked to peel ~~the suit~~ down to her waist so she could tan her shoulders and belly.

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

-I can't hear you when you yell"
"No, Evie," Lindsay **answered back from the hallway**. "Are you going for a swim?"

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

called from the kitchen
"You can't go to the beach," Lindsay came to her door. "Sabrina is coming."

"I know," Evie gave up on her hamper and looked around her bathroom floor. Where there used to be bathing suits and towels **sprinkled** 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 stick around, she said. Just in case."

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

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

"Are you serious?" Evie **asked**. "What? She wants me to stay home all day?"

"I think so, but you should really ask her."

Which is, of course, what Evie immediately did. She marched down stairs and found her mother out on the deck with her father.

“Evie,” Her father looked over at her. “You are not going anywhere today and you shouldn’t be making plans without asking me or your mother. You need to consult us if you plan a whole day at the beach.”

Consult? When did he start talking like that? ^{He} ~~He~~ has obviously been spending way too much time with her mother.

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

Evie’s mother threw her a deep **hard** look that hinted to an answer Evie didn’t want to hear.

“Well,” Evie grumbled as **she pulled out her cell phone**. “I *guess* I better text him. Hopefully he hasn’t left yet.”

“I have a better idea,” her mother **said**. “Why don’t you call him? Have you ever tried *that*?”

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

Alex: Bmr. Ttyl.

. In spite of some hesitation of having to share the landline and the remote of the den’s Plasma TV, Evie was looking forward to seeing her sister. She hadn’t seen Sabrina since Thanksgiving and that had been a good two months ago. She didn’t even get to see her at Christmas for Sabrina had decided to skip coming home for the holiday and rented a cabin with her sorority sisters at Mammoth.

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

"Yes," her mother said **as she ()**. "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 till didn't see the necessity to stay home all day. "So, I'm gonna leave with Alex right now and I'll be **back by four.**" *2 pm*

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

Evie looked at the clock on the stove, which was a refurbished vintage O'Keefe and Merritt. There was still question whether the time on it's clock was trustworthy. Evie discovered it was eighteen minutes behind, but unfortunately, her parents didn't use the stove to gage her curfew deadline.

"Yeah, but that's not until later," she pointed out. "What do you need me around for?" ~~Can't Lindsay just help you with whatever you need?~~ She looked at her cell phone. **T minus 10 minutes** until Alex arrived.

"Evie, stop it," her mother said sternly. "You're ~~reacting like a~~ spoiled brat. Sabrina isn't feeling good 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 two weeks and **gave to go to a work thing night**. This is my only one day off and I haven't gone to the beach in, like, forever."

Evie stomped up to her room, tossed her cell phone on a pile of dirty clothes and fell onto her bed. Grrr! Sabrina was a family member, not some VIP that deserved an **opened armed** welcoming committee. ^{Die} She sat up, grabbed her stereo remote on the bed stand and pointed it to the stereo. She cranked up Los Abandoned 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."

"Huh?"

"It's what we are reading in (). Title of Book, where two different people hire each other to kill someone off."

"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 all day just to wait for Sabrina. I totally wanted to go surfing with Alex."

"Maybe you should have gotten up earlier," Raquel said. "If you so badly wanted to go surfing."

"Oh, you are *so* not advising me. You of all people." ^{click to a new song} Evie did something. "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." Evie sighed, referring to her Civics teacher. "He wants me to put in at least () hours....a week. He says that the monthly amount of volunteerism in the U.S.

15-20

4x5

^{two}
is usually ~~four~~ days a month and that the average American usually volunteer only half a day, which is four hours and that I should at least do the minimum of that, considering the time frame I am working with."

"What?" Raquel laughed. "You ~~gotta~~ ^{skt} be kidding. What an a-hole."

"Totally," Evie agreed. "I don't know why everyone is making it so hard for me to do better. And speaking of a-holes, that guy, Arturdo, the one I was telling you about? He's still treating me like such a peon 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, ^{skt} The thought of Arturdo in any form of intimacy is repulsive." Evie clicked off Los Abandoned with her remote. She was not in the mood for ^{realized she} **any music**. "So you do wanna stop by and say hi to Sabrina 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** is playing at the street fair."

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

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

"No, he didn't tell me." Evie **instantly felt left out**. "Not yet." 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, practically *their* place?

"Well, when was he gonna tell you?" Raquel asked. "It starts **at three**. In fact, I better get going. Davey's gonna be here any minute and I've still gotta shower, shampoo

and shave.” She yawned. “Oh, man, we totally got lit last night. You know, I think I’m getting my tolerance up. I was able to 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 the ‘brina 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. “She can totally buy us drinks at Duke’s.”

Oh “God, Raquel, you have such a one track mind lately,” Evie **said**. “My party is *over a month* still ~~six weeks~~ away and she’s not still gonna be here. Besides, Sabrina’s nineteen, not twenty one and she’s really not the party type. You know that.”

“Are you kidding me?” Raquel **guffawed**. “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 Northridge 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.”

“Evelina!”

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 ~~Inglewood~~. *LA*.

“No,” Lindsay said. “She’s picking her up at Santa Barbara airport.”

“Santa Barbara?” Evie asked. It was unusual that Sabrina would fly into Santa Barbara, which was a small commuter airport, **patronized by** jet setting UCSB students, Silicon Valley businessmen, *and* maybe Oprah, who evidently lived in Montecito. “Why is she picking her up there?” *had a house*

“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 to 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 in Sabrina’s room.

“So, how long is Sabrina gonna visit?” she asked as she walked *in* to find Lindsay *was* airing out the cream colored comforter over Sabrina’s queen sized bed.

“I don’t know how long Sabrina is going to stay,” Lindsay said. “You should probably ask your parents.”

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

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

"Are you serious?" Evie asked. She had just opened Sabrina's ~~pink~~ vinyl CD carrier case, a relic before iPod nation took over, and winced at her taste in music. From *classical piano* **Dave Matthews to World Music**, how could they possibly be related?

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

"I think she'd be way more upset that we are moving things around in her room." Evie closed the CD case. "She doesn't like her things messed with. As nor do I, Lindsay," Evie exaggerated in proper English enunciation to prove her point.

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

Lindsay put her hands on her hips and looked over Sabrina's room one more time. The carpet was vacuumed, the **stuffed panda bears were propped against the overstuffed** pillow shams and the TV remote, as well as Sabrina's silk eye mask, were

^{cos}politely positioned on the night table -- ^{for}cositas all ready to get ~~cuddly~~ with 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 Lindsay to outside to the deck where her father should have been in the midst of barbecuing tri-tip on his new Viking Grange grill.

Just last night, he and Evie’s mother had gotten into a disagreement surrounding the introduction of the new grill.

“Ruben, *no*,” Evie’s mother said when she had learned he had invited a few family friends over from the country club to welcome Sabrina home.

“But everyone wants to see her and I only asked Frank and Charlie and some of the guys I golf with. Besides, I want to show off the Ultra Premium.”

“Ruben,” Evie’s mother said firmly. “Sabrina’s coming home to rest. Not for a party or be the centerpiece of yours.”

And so it was decided. No welcome party, no mini reunion. Sabrina’s homecoming was going to be nothing like the pachanga that Kitty Diaz had thrown for Dee Dee’s family when they returned from Mexico.

But when she and Lindsay got to the outside deck, Evie’s father had yet to even fire up his new Ultra-Premium. He did, however, quite look the part of **back yard grill master**. He donned a crisp white chef’s hat that was practically two feet ^{high} in height and a red and white apron striped aprom which stated “~~Kiss the Chef~~ **Hell’s Kitchen**”

El Jefe
from
D. F.

“You are so not wearing that,” Evie looked at her father, disapprovingly as Molesto came trotting up to her.

“Why not?” her father **frowned**.

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

“Because,” Evie leaned over to scratch under Molesto’s collar and grumbled, “it looks lame.”

“Lame?” Her father asked.

“Silly.”

“I think he knows Sabrina is coming back today,” her father looked at Molesto “He’s had this weird energy of excitement all morning.”

At least someone was excited about Sabrina’s return.

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

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

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

“I can go get some propane, Senor Ruben,” Lindsay offered.

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

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

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

Easily,” Evie joked. Leo Carillo was a state beach between Malibu and Rio Estates, right off of Pacific Coast Highway. The 101 freeway divided the ^{well hiking} chaparral of the ^{trails} canyon and the rocky coastline of the beach. Leo Carillo was truly the best of both worlds, depending on what side of the freeway you were on. ^{It had been ages since she thought of it.}

“Those were some good times,” her father continued. “Remember your mother ^{hard to} used to make that potato salad with all the eggs and black olives? Before she was worried about her weight and everything? And you and Sabrina ^{hard to} would take the boogie boards out and would be out in the ocean all day. We couldn’t get you out of the water for nothing. You girls were so water logged that you’d look like raisins when you finally came out.”

“Dad, we didn’t even camp,” Evie said. “We slept in the Vacationer **and** half the time mom would get so annoyed with all the other 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 rug of **negativity**. “We’d spend the whole day at the beach together. It was so fun.”

Sister inseparable

Evie looked over at her father as he struggled ~~with preparing the Weber~~. “Do you even know what you are doing?”

“*Ee-vie*” Lindsay shot her a look as she arranged the utensils on the patio table

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

“*Yes*, Evie” her father didn’t mind her sass. “I do know what I am doing. It’s pretty simple. I just have to get the coals going, which... is...” He looked over the pit. “Taking a little bit longer than I thought.”

“So, how long is Sabrina gonna stay?” Evie asked her father. Molesto had now rolled over ~~and made it clear~~ that he wanted his belly rubbed.

“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 I thought. I hope Sabrina isn’t too hungry when she gets here.” He looked over at Lindsay. “Hey, Linds, did you make your salsa? The verde picante? It’ll go great with the tri-tip.”

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

“You didn’t use any of my mom’s ~~Palemia~~ *Rancho Palmito* avocados, did you?” Evie asked as she scratched Molesto’s belly.

“Of course not,” Lindsay said. “I couldn’t if I wanted to. She has those under lock and key, **with all her winning Bunko money**.”

Before they knew it, Molesto's ears, **as if on cue**, pricked up ~~and was~~ followed by the sound of Vicki Gomez's Saab pulling into the drive-way. Molesto rolled over to his feet and took off for the front yard.

"They're ^{back} here early," Lindsay looked at her watch.

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

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

Evie came around the house just as her sister was getting out of her mother's Saab, but as soon as she saw her sister, she was taken aback. Sabrina, how could you say it nicely? ^e looked bad. For one thing, Sabrina who relished sunshine and **poo pooed** any suntan oil that contained the socially deadly SPF, was pale, ~~almost~~ ^{sickly} pasty white, pale. And she was very thin. (Evie wondered if the shapeless and wrinkled work out suit she wore was to blame for making Sabrina look so gaunt. Sabrina was actually all about form fitting girly gear that accented her digits and never wore work-out clothes unless she was, of course, working out. (The sister Evie knew would never leave the house, let alone take a trip, looking the way she did. ^B Her dark roots were an inch deep, exposing laziness and ().

^{Sabrina} She was one of those girly girls who actually dressed up for travel. Her accessories practically *had* to match the interior of the airlines, which is why she rarely flew Southwest. She looked **horrible in () and ()**.