

Evie Gomez woke up on Saturday morning with two things on her mind. The first was that her best friend, Raquel Diaz, was definitely no longer just that, a best friend. Raquel had proven herself to be, as of 10:32 a.m. that late September morning, a 100 percent *pinche beyachee*. And why? Because after half a month of no phone, no friends, basically no life, Evie wasn't under her mother's house arrest anymore for coming home a pithy ass twenty (okay, maybe it *was* forty) minutes past her curfew. Her ankle bracelet had been officially clipped off, but did her girl Raquel even bother to call so they could celebrate Evie's first night of freedom? *No*. Raquel hadn't even had the decency to return any of Evie's phone calls, text messages, or the desperate IMs Evie had sent to SexyMexy08. Raquel was no Sexy Mexy, Evie confirmed, but she was *definitely* a bitch.

The second thing Evie realized was how light her head felt. She ran her hand from the back of her neck and, yup, her long, dark brown hair was gone. All of it. She pushed up from her pillows and got a look at herself in her closet mirrors -- her hair was now short, chopped in a haphazard fashion with streaks of uneven blue. Cancún Blue No. 32 to be exact. that had come out the color of granny grey blue, the tint you see, well, on grannies, **coming out of**

What had she done? She yanked down at the sides but they barely covered the tops of her ears. Who the hell cuts their own hair? Is this what happened to prisoners in solitary confinement? After being isolated from their peers for too long, did they eventually go mad and commit self-inflicted acts with Ginghar craft scissors, too? Evie looked hideous and she had no one to blame but . . . yes, Raquel. It was her fault that Evie was even grounded in the first place. Raquel had insisted they go to Tracy Tankerson's party two weeks ago. It was the first party on the first Friday of the new

school year and Raquel promised she'd have Evie home by her curfew. But, as Evie should have known, by the time Evie knew it was time to leave, Raquel was just getting her drink on. There was no way she was gonna get Evie's home by her curfew and she didn't.

Evie glowered at the sight of her reflection. Why, why hadn't Raquel just called her back last night? She *owed* it to her. By the time it was **nearly 9 pm**, it was obvious that Evie was going to spend another long night at home alone. And after clicking from one reality makeover show to the next, she realized it was she, not another midwestern housewife, who needed a change. She wanted something that demanded attention, respect. She wanted ... hair the color of the Cancun ocean! And that's how *the reinvention of Evie Gomez, Mex-treme Makeover, Friday Night Home Edition* came to be.

But now it was Saturday morning and it was sadly evident that she had truly lost her senses the night before. Her rookie dye job screamed beauty school flunkie. The bleach she used to strip her brown wasn't dispersed as evenly as it should have been and now her head was like a patchwork **collage** of biege, white and blue; the national colors of ... whatever county's flag was biege, white and blue. She looked like crap.

"What do you think, P.?" she toed her male Tabby, nestled at the foot of her bed. "Punk rock or goth metal dork?" But P. Kitty could care less about her state of blue disrepair as he promptly lifted up his hind leg and started to lick behind it.

"Cla-see," Evie smirked as she gave him a slight tap with the rest of her foot.

She then heard Lindsay, the Gomez's housekeeper, turn up the volume of *El Mercadito* on the kitchen radio downstairs. Other than that, the house was quiet. She was

cable with Raquel over the summer, she had become a mad active surfer, on the internet, anyway. Raquel wasn't so hot on independent study after seeing the film, so it was Evie, alone, who became interested in all things surf. As a fourth generation Cali girl she at

least looked the part, from her 60 dollar Hollister Ts to her hibiscus print board shorts.

AS Evie had even went as far to buy a surf board, a nine foot, five fin white custom long board, especially shaped for her by Max. But truth was, Evie had yet to even get the thing wet and, to be **dreadfully direct**, she could even barely manage a boogie board in waist high white water. Que scandalous, no?

describe

RioChica: What do you think of the color blue?

ShaggyMA: One of my **shorties** is blue.

RioChica: Cool enough.

ShaggyMA: Hey, gotta go.

RioChica: Sure, Lates.

How bout, later?

Sigh. Evie was alone, and bored, again.

Suddenly (need song name) blared from her cell phone. Evie got up from her desk and grabbed the phone off her nightstand. She saw Raquel's face on the screen. She reluctantly flipped it open.

Defech those say?
"Personal Jesus"
Willie wonka say?

"Hello?"

"Heeey," drawled Raquel's gravelly voice. Apparently Raquel had gone out the night before. Without Evie. What the fuh?

? WTF?

"Oh, hey." Evie said trying to sound just as casual.

"So . . ." Raquel started. Evie could sense Raquel starting to smile on the other end. "You got your phone back."

"Uh, yeah," Evie said. "I actually got it back yesterday, as of five p.m."

"Oh, yeah." Raquel paused. "That's right."

"So what happened?" Evie asked. "You said we were gonna do something, go out. I left you like a gazillion messages."

"Yeah." Raquel let out a moose-sized yawn. "Sorry about that. I completely spaced. My parents went out and then Jose came over with a six-pack. We ended up kicking it, watching Fuel all night. *Boring.*" The moose yawned again. → ?

"Oh." Evie tried to sound calm, but she was burning up inside. "That's cool. Did Alex or Mondo go out?"

"Nah," Raquel said. "Nobody did nothing."

Evie relaxed. At least she hadn't missed anything, but that really didn't surprise her. The five Flojos— herself, Alex, Mondo, Raquel and her boy Jose — shared one thing in common and that one thing was the absolute, self gratifying pursuit to . . . do nothing. → EVIE'S WHAT? GRR.

Was it the cliché teenage rebellion of their workaholic fathers? Too many spins (and lyric interpretation) of Sublime on Mondo's Technics turntable? Whatever the reason, be it poolside or oceanside, or what ever you called it, trifling or chilling, the Flojos all *didn't* do it together. And they didn't do it, thank you, in their sprawling suburban comfort zone of Rio Estates, -- twenty minutes north of Malibu, twenty minutes south of Santa Barbara. Never mind Generation Y, the Flojos were in a generation of their own -- Generation Why Brother.

→

“So.” Evie continued with Raquel. She took a deep breath. “I chopped off my hair.”

“What?” Raquel said.

“My hair,” Evie repeated. “It’s gone.”

“What do you mean?”

“I hacked it off. All of it and . . .” Evie paused for dramatic flair. “I dyed it blue, sorta.” Evie felt proud and a bit smug. She liked the idea that she did something so radical, on her own and without consulting Raquel. It was so unlike her.

“Yeah.” Raquel yawned. “I dyed my hair blue one time.”

“Really?” Evie wasn’t sure she believed this—it was *so Raquel* of Raquel to try and outdo Evie. “When?”

“One time when I was up in the Bay Area, like two summers ago. It totally clashed with my complexion. Brownies can’t be sporting blue. I changed it back the next day.”

“You never told me that,” Evie said, still suspicious.

“Cause it was really no big deal.”

Evie felt herself getting annoyed. “So,” she said, changing the subject. “What’s the plan for tonight?”

“Um.” Raquel yawned again. “Jose heard about some party out near Bard. You in?”

“Definitely,” Evie said. Actually, she was hoping they would drive down to L.A., do something covert, crazy. Rio Estates was just sixty miles north of Los, but it was still

suburbia and, of course, painfully uneventful. Even though she was a Flojo, Evie always felt the slight tug of wanting something more, to *do* outside of the 805.

But Raquel did say that the night's party was "out near Bard " so that could mean anything.

"As long as I'm home by twelve thirty." Evie reminded Raquel. "I mean, not even twelve thirty-two in the driveway. My mom will freak if I'm late again."

"Yeah, and we don't wanna freak out ol' Vicki," Raquel said in a tone that conveyed she was so *over* mothers and curfews. "She must have crapped bricks when she saw your hair, huh?"

"Not really," Evie lied. "Like you said, it's really no big deal."

But Evie started to worry. What would her mother say about her hair? Vicki Gomez was known for possessing the legendary Gomez fury, unleashed when something didn't go her way.

Just then someone knocked on Evie's bedroom door. She sank into her bed and quickly pulled the sheet over her head. She would soon find out just how her mother felt about having a Smurf for a daughter.

"Evelina?"

Whew. It was only Lindsay, their housekeeper. "Are you awake?" Lindsay asked from the hallway.

"Sì, sì, Lindsay," Evie called out, making sure to keep her head still covered.

"Come in." She told Raquel she had to hang up.

"Yeah. Oh, hey . . ." Raquel started. "One last thing."

"Yeah?" Evie asked.

"Did you dye your pubes too? 'Cause if you'd done your shrub, now, that woulda been *real* crazy ass."

"*Goodbye*, Raquel." Evie rolled her eyes and flipped her cell phone shut before tossing it onto the floor. Yup. No doubt about it. Raquel was definitely a bitch.

"Oh," Lindsay said as she came into Evie's room and saw Evie in bed. "You're still sleeping."

"No, I'm awake," Evie answered, peeking out from under the covers. "I'm just laying here."

Lindsay looked around Evie's room and sighed. "*Ay*, Evelina. This is not good. Let me clean in here today. It would make your mother so happy."

"Lindsay, I really don't *care* what makes my mother happy." That was Lindsay's job, she figured, to make her parents pleased, not hers. Since Evie was a little girl, Lindsay has always wanted to do a good job for the household. "So," Evie started. "Did you buy anything off of *El Mercadito*?"

"Ay, no," Lindsay took a seat at the edge of Evie's bed. "There was a foot, *como se llame*?" Her wrinkled hands made a rubbing motion across her **Soft Soles slip ons**. "A massager? But the lady wanted too much for it. No way." She turned around and looked above Evie's bed. "Why is all that scribble around that girl?"

Lindsay was referring to Sanoe Lake. Evie had Sharpied elaborate red hearts around Sanoe's image, making her the center of attention in her *Blue Crush* poster. Yeah,

Why that
scribble?
It's for
me!
38

Michelle Rodriguez had a z in her name, but Sanoe was the only true surfer in the movie and Evie felt you just had to give props for that.

“Oh, that’s—” Evie started to explain as she turned to look up at the poster. But when she did, the sheet slipped down, exposing her head.

“Ay!” Lindsay stood up, her fingertips covering her open mouth. “Evelina, what did you do? Your hair!”

“Oh, I cut it.” Evie nervously pulled at the sides, but it was no use. The sides remained short and scrappy.

“Yes, I see that.” Lindsay’s face remained shocked. “But the colors. It’s . . . does your mother know?”

“Well.” Evie tousled her hair nervously. “She’s always going on about money. So she should be happy that I saved her a hundred bucks to do my own hair.”

Lindsay’s eyes widened. “You pay a *hundred dollars* to have your hair done?”

Evie immediately felt embarrassed and tried to explain. “It’s not just for a cut. I mean, I get it washed, and they give it a blow-dry and style. Plus I sometimes get a one-on-one consultation, a lot of times with Viggo—he’s the salon owner.” But the more she said, the more Evie knew how shamelessly VH1 diva it all sounded.

“Ay, Dios.” Lindsay shook her head. “I just can’t imagine what your mother will think.”

“Think about what?” Vicki Gomez asked as she entered Evie’s bedroom. Even just out of the pool, Evie’s mother looked effortlessly stylish in her magenta one-piece and a plush beige towel wrapped around her wet hair. There was no time to duck and cover.

"You mean *tonight*?" Evie was horrified.

"Yes, *tonight*." Evie's mother knelt down and rubbed the stained carpet with her fingers.

"But Dad usually stays late on Saturdays and I told you I was going out with—"

"You'll just have to wait." Vicki Gomez stood back up and gave Lindsay the pillow. After telling her in Spanish to work on it immediately, she stalked out of Evie's room. Lindsay followed silently.

No. There was no way that Evie was going to endure another night in the Gomez Penitentiary. She leaned over her bed, grabbed her cell, and speed dialed her father.

He'll listen, she thought. Her father was a reasonable man, definitely much more reasonable than her mother. Evie knew she wouldn't survive another night of lockdown. *I'll go crazy, and who knows what I'll do?* she thought. *Maybe I really will dye my pubes blue.*

2

In seconds, Evie was on the phone with her father. She pointed out that there were house rules and regulations for her recreational interests—how much time she could spend at Sea Street, absolutely no drinking, the number of hours viewing MTV2—but no mention of cutting her hair and dyeing it blue. No rule, no violation, so no punishment, right? Surprisingly, her father agreed.

"Ay, Vicki." Evie handed her mother back the phone, but she could hear her father talking to her mother through the receiver. "The color's not permanent and the hair

good to
have Volpi
Dependable

will grow back. What teenager doesn't experiment with change? Remember when we were dating and you wanted to look like Teena Marie?"

And so Evie was sprung. She actually wanted to click her heels (if she only knew how) with joy as she waited in the front driveway for Mondo. She finally out of Warden Vicki's tight-fisted control and soon to be far, far away from the suffocating security gates of Rio Estates.

But eight turned to eight thirty, and eight thirty turned into 9 p.m. Evie grew impatient and then angry as she paced back and forth across the circular driveway. Where the hell was that Mondo? Finally, by nine thirty, his black Mercury Marauder slowly eased up the Gomez's' driveway. Evie was ready to pop a fuse.

"What's the deal?" she snapped as she walked toward his car. "I've got a curfew, remember?"

"Oh, you know Mondo," Jose started to explain as he got out of the front seat and took over the back with Raquel and Alex. "He ain't called Fed Mex for nothing."

"That's right." Mondo smiled unapologetically into the rearview mirror. "When you absolutely, positively gotta be there on time, don't be calling me. Besides, beggars can't be—" He noticed Evie's hair as she got into the front seat. "Whoa, what did you do to your hair?"

Jose actually snorted. "Hey, yeah. Blues Clues!"

"More like Blues Clueless." Mondo laughed. "What's with the spotty job? And why'd you mangle your mane? It looked good before."

"You guys, shut up already," Raquel said from the backseat. She looked shocked at the first sight of Evie's hair but tried to offer encouragement, the best way, well,

Raquel could. "You can't help it you fucked up your hair," She stroked Evie's bangs.

"Don't listen to them. We'll take it to Viggo and he'll fix it up."

Evie fastened her seat belt and crossed her arms. These were the so-called friends she was just dying to be with? She looked back at Alex and glared. "Don't even say anything," she warned him.

"Evie." Alex sighed. "I really don't care *what* you do with your hair."

* * *

When they pulled up to Bard Road, Mondo killed his Marauder's ignition and announced, "Okay, just 'cause I drove does *not* make me the designated driver. Fulby should already be here and you guys can get a lift back from him if you need to."

"Dude, we can't all go with Fulby," Alex complained from the backseat. "He's got a truck."

"Yeah, a truck with a nice wide, flat bed." Mondo reached under his feet and lifted the floor mat to retrieve a rolled-up baggie.

The party was at Pacifica Abalone Farm, out at Bard Beach, one of the local beaches just west of Rio Estates. Bard was a part of town known for hard living, where dime bags and Hawaiian Tropic suntan oil was a way of life. This was perfect for Evie. She felt quite the *scandalosa* spending her first night out at Bard.

"Okay, okay, already." Evie was getting more impatient. "I'll take the friggin' bus back home if I have to." She pulled her corduroy jacket from under her. "Let's just go!"

"Whoa, slow down, Blues Clues," Mondo said. "There's no rush. We got our own party supplies here." He dangled the baggie in front of her. "And lemme tell you, this mota is *mean*."

"Yeah, just kick back, Evie." Raquel leaned into Jose and draped her arm over his shoulders. "We got all night to party."

"No." Evie opened the car door. "I *don't* have all night, and you know I don't smoke that shit. Just forget it. I'll just meet up with you guys later."

would she
hesitantly say
that to
him?

"You're gonna go by yourself?" Raquel's question sounded more like a challenge, than a concern.

"Yeah," Evie said. "What's the problem?"

The problem was that the last thing Evie wanted to do was enter some Bard Beach party by herself, scrappy blue hair and all. But of course she wasn't going to admit it.

"No," Alex said reluctantly from the backseat. "You can't be walking around alone, especially out here. You've got Rio Estates written all over you. I'll go with you."

I don't like
this. I like
does it
true.

"I don't look all R.E." Evie snapped defensively. She resented that Alex, who was also from Rio Estates, would say such a thing. What, was he so "down?"

Do you
have
a way
have for
it?

"You know what?" Raquel suddenly announced. "I'll go too. I gotta take a piss."

"*What?*" Jose asked. "But *you* were the one nagging for the new green."

"Well," Raquel said matter-of-factly. "When you gotta go, you gotta go."

Evie followed Raquel and Alex headed down the sandy path toward the party. It was a typical fall evening in Southern California. The Santa Ana winds were already

and lunch??
kicking in, but the residue of summer was still in the air. Evie suddenly felt less irritated and more excited. Yes, she thought. *Tonight, the switch is ON!*

"I think everyone's at the other end of the farm, past these tanks," Alex guessed.
"I can hear the band."

Evie stooped over one of the low concrete tanks. "What's in these things?" In the moonlight, she could barely make out what seemed to be thousands of brown, rough-looking, quarter-sized organisms clinging to the tank's walls.

"Abalone spawn!" Alex deepened his voice. "Very dangerous stuff."

Raquel put her hand into the tank. "Man, this water's cold—oh my God!" Suddenly her whole arm was pulled into the bubbling seawater. Her expression changed from curiosity to sheer terror. "Oh my God! My hand!"

"Raquel!" Evie shrieked. "Alex! Oh my God! Help her!" She went up behind Raquel to pull her arm out.

But Raquel just started laughing and then calmly pulled her hand out. Both she and Alex busted up.

"Man, you're such a sucker!" Raquel laughed harder and slapped her wet fingers on Evie's shoulder. "That was a good one!"

"You guys are such jerks." Evie tried to wipe her shoulder.

"It's just baby abalone," Alex said. "Look." He stooped over and picked something off the sand. It was a shell, small, but iridescent and perfectly intact. "Cool, right?"

Evie took the shell in her hand and nodded. "Yeah."

"Let me polish it up for you," Alex offered. "It'll look nice on a cord or something."

File "You don't have to do that," Evie said.

File "No problemo. Think of it as a peace offering, plus it would look good on you."

He took the shell back from Evie

"Yeah," Alex went on. "These tanks are just like a little nursery for the abalone. Check it out—it takes like five years just to get one abalone full size."

"Five years?" Raquel said, looking over the tanks. "Damn, they must crank some bank here! If we got Mondo to cultivate this instead, we'd all be kickin' it, pimp style."

Coming, but it works.

* * *

Alex was overreacting about Evie and Raquel needing an escort to the party, but that was Alex, always the overprotective gentleman. He wasn't as fine or tall as Jose, and he wasn't as funny as Mondo, but between all the Flojos, Evie guessed she needed someone like Alex around.

The crowd was sketchy but far from threatening. The Bard Boys and their crew were more AA than A-list, really just a bunch of tanned homeboys who liked to party. All had done their prerequisite time in either County, rehab, or endless days hustling on the beach. People might picture a California beach party as a bunch of fit, golden-tanned teenagers gathered around a bonfire, but no such postcard exists from Bard.

The three of them filled up at the nearest keg and Evie quickly took a gulp from her plastic cup. She didn't really like beer, and keg kind was the worst. Still, she felt she had some catching up to do.

"Hey Evie."

She looked up "Mikey?" At first Evie didn't recognize Mikey Regalado. Evie hadn't seen him since they were both in grade school.

"Yeah, Mike," He pumped the keg and directed the spout into a waiting cup.

"How are you doing?" He looked Evie over. "Check out your crazy ass hair and shit."

"Oh, yeah." She felt slightly embarrassed. "I sorta messed it up."

Mikey's own head was now shaved. Was he part of the Bard Crew? Evie wondered.

"Nah, it's looks good," he told Evie. "You've always been so crazy."

"Really?" She was sorta surprised by his comment. She didn't exactly feel exciting enough to ever be considered "crazy."

"Well, look at *your* hair!" She laughed. "Or should I say, lack of. Hey, remember

"E-vie," Raquel interrupted. "I still gotta pee." She grabbed her arm. "Come on, let's go find the little girls' room."

"Well, looks like I gotta go." Evie shifted her eyes toward Raquel to show Mikey her annoyance. "See you later, right?"

"Why not?" Mikey lifted his chin up towards her as he continued to pump the keg.

As Evie and Raquel left to look for an outhouse, Alex went to watch the band. Just moments later, Raquel finally found the Porta Potti. She rattled the white plastic door. "Dude!" she called out. "Come on, already! You got a line out here!"

tank top that she didn't quite fill out, Evie suddenly felt, como se dice? Sencilla? Mierda?

bland.

"What are *you* doing here?" Raquel was already up in her face, but Evie knew she was just as surprised as she. "Shouldn't you be home watching *Sabado Gigante* or something?"

"What am *I* doing here?" Alejandra carefully stepped down from the outhouse. "Raquel, my second cousin Gabriel owns this farm. He is Pacifica Abalone. Shouldn't you be reading *Let's Go Mexico* and actually go?" She took her last high heel step onto the sand. "Raquel, I've been coming to his parties for years" She ran her white-tipped nails through her blonde striped hair. "I've never seen *you* here before."

Suddenly Evie felt nervous. Truth was, none of the Flojos were officially invited to the Bard party. Jose had snagged the info from a friend which, like so many *evites* he's lifted for *pachangas*, led the Flojos to Bard Beach.

"Well. I gotta take a shit," Raquel gave Evie her beer to hold and pushed by Alejandra. "*Excuse* me."

She stepped up to the outhouse and shut the door behind her. Evie was now stuck alone with Alejandra. This was a first. Usually it was Raquel sister-necking a Sangro while Evie stood sidekick.

"What did you do to your hair?" Alejandra asked. Her almond shaped eyes, topped with a glittery eyeshadow looked straight into Evie's eyes.

"Nothing really." **Evie smoothed down the front of bangs.** "It's no big deal."

"I guess not." Alejandra snapped her gum before spitting it into a piece of paper she got out from her pocket. "So, how's the doughnut shop?"

been Evie and Raquel's best friend when they were little girls growing up in Rio Estates. Raquel was Evie's official best friend now, but Dee Dee was actually the closest friend Evie ever had. Evie had practically lived at the de LaFuentes'. Evie hated to admit it, but Dee Dee's mother was the mother Evie'd wished she had. Margaret de LaFuente didn't put on airs like Evie's mom, and Margaret was always home, always around to talk instead of chasing department store sales. But when Dee Dee was twelve, Margaret got sick, like, really sick, and suddenly died. Then Dee Dee and her father moved out of California and Evie hadn't heard from her in the last four years. Dee Dee never answered Evie's e-mails or returned her calls. To this day, Evie still didn't understand exactly what happened. Just hearing Dee Dee's name gave Evie a sunken feeling.

Suddenly the Porta Potti door opened and Raquel stepped out, zipping up her jeans.

"What," she said to Alejandra. "You still here?"

"You know what?" Alejandra bent her elbow to her side and held her cigarette out. "I think Gabriel would just *love* to meet some gate-crashers. Why don't you and your little **blueberry** stay put, here by the toilets and I'll go get him?" She pushed by both of them.

As soon Alejandra took off, Evie snapped at Raquel, "Why did you do that? You're gonna get us kicked out!"

"Nah." Raquel drank her beer calmly. "If it's the Gabriel I'm thinking of, which I'm sure it is, he won't kick us out. I've partied before with some older dude named Gabriel who said he had a fish farm out this way—it must be the same guy. Besides, a first-rate dope buddy is definitely more important than some second-rate second cousin."

"Did you hear what Alejandra said?" Evie asked as they walked away from the Porta Potti. "About Dee Dee's dad, like, being at Channel Islands?"

"Yeah, I heard," Raquel said. "How come you didn't know?"

Evie shrugged. She felt foolish. "Doesn't your dad keep in touch with Dee Dee's?"

"We get Christmas cards," Raquel admitted. "Some family photo with a pre-printed signature that you just know was sent by some assistant."

Evie's heart sank. Her family had received the same type of card for the past few years. She always looked for a handwritten note from Dee Dee but never found one. She brought her cup to her mouth and tapped the last trail of foam into her mouth. This was not the kind of evening she had expected.

"Yeah, and I thought you were, like, best friends," Raquel continued.

"We were," Evie said. "I mean, all three of us were."

"No." Raquel shook her head. "You and Dee were always tighter. I would've thought she'd call you right away."

"Yeah, I guess."

"So . . ." Raquel drank more beer. "You wanna go check out the band?"

Evie threw her cup on the ground. "Nah, not really." She crossed her arms. She suddenly felt cold. "You wanna go get more beer?"

Raquel made a face. "Nah, not feeling it."

Evie looked around. She didn't know what to do. She didn't want to leave the party, but she sure as hell didn't want to stand around talking with Raquel. She was making her feel worse. Evie looked at her watch: 11 p.m. She still had an hour and a half.

She heard
while in the
Porta-Potti?

I thought
didn't like
beer?
Is this
Evie, or
Raquel?

Really, an hour when you counted how long it would take to gather everyone up and make the drive back to Rio Estates.

“You know what?” Evie said. “Let’s go back to Mondo’s car.”

“Mondo’s *car*?” Raquel raised one eyebrow. “*You* wanna go back with Mondo and Jose? You know, they aren’t just ‘hanging out.’”

“Of course I know that,” Evie snapped. “I’m not an idiot, Raquel.”

“I’m not saying you are. It’s just—”

“You know what?” Evie interrupted. “This night wouldn’t be such a big deal if I hadn’t just been grounded for two weeks and that was your fault. If I hadn’t listened to you at Tracy Tankerson’s party, I would’ve been home on time. And *then* you didn’t even have the decency to call the first night I get to go out. Why is it such a problem that I want to have a really good time tonight?” Evie couldn’t believe how emotional she was getting in front of Raquel.

Now both of Raquel’s eyebrows were raised. “There’s no problem,” she answered coolly. “I just didn’t realize you were having such a lousy time, that’s all.”

“Well, I am. It’s my first night out in weeks and I was all looking forward to being out with my friends and then I gotta find out all this about Dee Dee from Alejandra—” Evie stopped herself. She felt on the verge of tears. “Let’s just go back to the damn car.”

> Why B Evie
all eno hard
over 13?
Too melodramatic

“I ain’t stopping you.” Raquel inhaled uncomfortably.

“Okay,” Evie said. “So, let’s just go already.”

And for once, it was Evie who grabbed Raquel by the arm and took the lead.

The next morning Evie awoke to her mother bursting into her bedroom.

"E-vie!" she said. "Get up. It's late." She opened Evie's white wooden shutters, flinching when her fingers came up covered in dark grime. "Ewww! Evie, this is disgusting."

"Mom." Evie rolled over on her side and covered her eyes with her sheet. Her head was throbbing, and her mother's loud voice was making it worse. "Why do you have to break out the negativity so early?"

"Early?" Evie's mother crossed the now sun drenched room. She a plastic gloves on and was carrying some kind of carpet cleaner. "It's already past eleven, and I've got to get in here to clean."

"Mom, *no*," Evie whined. "I don't want you rummaging through all my stuff. I can clean my own room."

"No, you can't." Evie's mother walked into Evie's bathroom and pulled a bottle of bleach from under the sink. "You know that Lindsay's off today and somebody's gotta work on these carpet stains." She came out of the bathroom and then spied something on the carpet, crouched down, and pulled up a ball of surf wax embedded in the carpet. The wax had collected Molesto's thick long black hairs and God knew what else. "Evie, what is this?"

"Sex wax," Evie rubbed her eyes.

"Sex *what*?" her mother immediately dropped it.

"No," Evie couldn't help but laugh. "Mr. Zogs. It's wax for my surfboard."

Don't
they have
Lindsay
he said
oh.
But would
he want
still clean

"Oh." Her mother didn't bother to pick it up again. "The board your father paid almost paid a thousand for and you have yet to use it?" She wiped her fingers on her pants.

Fortunately for Evie, the ringtone of "SONG" started up from her cell phone.

"Evie," her mother began as Evie leaned over to get her phone from the pile of last night's clothes. "I told you I don't want your friends calling your cell when you're home. When you start paying—"

"Mom." Evie found her phone and saw Raquel was calling. "I have free weekend minutes and—" She flipped open the phone. "Hello?"

"Hey, it's me."

"Evie," her mother said one last time as she dropped the ball of wax into the bamboo covered trash basket and finally headed out of the room. "Get up so I can get in here and clean."

"So I asked my dad about Dee Dee this morning," Raquel told Evie.

It took Evie a split second to remember what Raquel was talking about. "You did?"

"Uh-huh," she said. "And he confirmed it."

"Confirmed what, exactly?" Evie asked.

"That the de LaFuentes are definitely moving back to Rio Estates."

"And he knew?" Evie asked. "Why didn't he say anything? Why didn't he tell you?" Evie had cotton mouth and her head was pounding like a mofo.

Plan
wood
New be
wax.
"Personal
Joan"

Post
xene?

RioChica: Little party tonight. Should be fun.

ShaggyMA: Have a beer for me!

RioChica: What kind?

ShaggyMA: Anything but Coors.

The following Saturday evening, when Evie arrived with her parents at the Diaz's home, it was clear that the "little something" Kitty Diaz had scheduled was going to be a full-blown soiree. Evie saw two valet parking attendants setting up a station near the Diazes' mailbox, and several caterers in crisp white guayaberas were lugging an oversized cast iron *comal*.

"Oh, look, Vic." Ruben Gomez nudged his wife. "They're gonna have *tortillas de maiz*. Handmade."

"Kitty's going all out." Evie's mother rolled her eyes. "Again."

Oh "Yeah," Evie's father suddenly frowned. "I wonder why she didn't order any of my *pan*."

As he rang the front doorbell, Evie's mother looked Evie over. "Oh, Evie," she said. "I wish you would take care of that hair. This is bad."

"Bad for who?" Evie asked. And actually, she had taken care of it, thank you. As Raquel had promised, she took Evie to see Viggo who stripped the ~~entire~~ brown out and dyed her whole head a nice shade of vivid blue. When Raquel suggested he also fix her cut, maybe add some extensions to fill in the thinned out parts, Evie tallied the total bill in her head and declined. But Raquel pushed for the correction. "I can't have my best friend going around looking like a mauling victim," Raquel joked as she graciously paid the extra price with her credit card. "I have a rep, you know."

SPENT
COOL
PRY W/
BLUE
HAIR?

Evie's mother went on. "You could at least have put on some dress shoes."

"Dress shoes?" Evie asked. Did anyone even use that term anymore? "When have I ever worn *dress* shoes?"

"Well, you could have least *dressed* appropriately."

Evie felt she was definitely dressed appropriately. Tonight she wore flojos, her fancy Crystal Havaianas, and a secondhand blouse that she had found at a *segunda* downtown, cream colored and lacy. It looked perfect with her vintage straight legs, and she had even put on the pearl stud earrings that her *tía* Isabel gave her for her eighth-grade graduation. She knew Dee Dee would approve, especially of the blouse. As kids, they often went with Lindsay to the thrift stores downtown and loved trying on all the used bridal veils and *quinceañera* gloves.

"Vicki." Evie's father came to her rescue just as Kitty Diaz opened the front door. "Evie looks fine. Just drop it."

Vicki Gomez started to scowl, but rearranged her face to a pleasant smile as soon as Kitty opened the door.

"Ruben, Vicki!" Kitty welcomed Evie's parents into her house. "How are you? Thank you so much for coming early."

"Sure, Kitty," Evie's father said. "We are at your disposal."

"Hello, Evie." Mrs. Diaz smiled at Evie. "Oh, look at you. Raquel mentioned you colored your hair. You're a bluenette! *Very creative.*"

"Thanks." Evie looked up at her mother and gave her a smug little smile.

Kitty Diaz resembled Evie's mother in appearance and style. Both wore minimal makeup and had no-nonsense hair cuts intended to convey a career woman image, but the

Dee.

♡ m. 10/10

similarities ended there. Kitty Diaz was chapter president of Madrinas, the National Latina Leadership Network and she had also co-founded Hi Tech Aztec, the software company, with her husband. Evie's mother, on the other hand, rarely lifted a finger except to point to which Isabella Fiore bag or Via Spigas she wanted the salesclerk to ring up.

As soon as Evie and her parents entered the Diazes' foyer, Raquel called from upstairs, "Hey, Evie! Come on up. We can hang out before the serious alkie arrives."

"Raquel!" Mrs. Diaz looked up and threw her a stern look. "Act right! Remember, this isn't just some party for you and your friends."

"I know, I know," Raquel said. "I was just messin'."

Mrs. Diaz led the Gomezs into the kitchen. "You are *not* going to believe how much this caterer is charging me for the last-minute job," she said. "The cake-cutting fee *alone* . . ."

Evie started up the stairs to Raquel's room. "My mom said your mom might need help. Maybe I should offer to cut the cake? At a discount?"

"What you could offer is to give her an elephant tranquilizer and . . ." Raquel spoke from the side of her mouth. "I'm sure she has one somewhere in that panic drawer of hers." Raquel let out an exaggerated sigh. "I don't know why my mother always insists on throwing these parties. () They always make her so stressed out and bitchy." She looked Evie over. "By the way, 'scuse me, Miss Teen Vogue."

"What?" Evie asked.

"Nothing." Raquel brushed it off. "You actually look nice."

"*Actually?* What is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing."

But Evie wasn't convinced.

"Evie, I'm serious. You look cute. Dang, you're so *sentiva*."

When they got to her room, Raquel shut the door and held up a bottle of champagne. "Check it out. Veuve *Cliquot*. Kitty Diaz is sparing no expense on *La familia de LaFuente*." Raquel started to uncork the bottle. "Oh, when I was sneaking it out, I forgot to get glasses. Looks like we'll have to take swigs. Not very sophisticated, huh?"

Evie sat on Raquel's vanity stool and took the first swig of champagne.

"Whoa, slow down," Rachel said. "There's plenty more where this came from."

Evie took a smaller sip before giving Raquel back the bottle. "I just wanna loosen up," She got up and flopped on stomach on Raquel's canopied bed. She flipped through the *Kerrang!* magazine that was laying on it. "It's so *wrong* that Dee Dee's, like, back in Rio Estates and still hasn't called."

"Have you called her?" Raquel asked.

"No. Have you?" Evie suddenly felt awkward and found a loose cuticle that needed attention.

"I don't have her number," Raquel answered.

"Well, she has mine," Evie said. "I mean, at least my parents'. They haven't changed their number in years. She has, like, no excuse for not calling."

"Ahhh." Raquel took a swig of champagne and looked dreamily upward. "And so the novella between the wayward friend and the forgotten woman left behind continues.

Dos mujeres, dos caminos . . ."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing, really," Raquel said. "I just think you're obsessing too much about Dee Dee."

"*Obsessing?*"

"Well, maybe not obsessing." Raquel took another swig from the bottle and passed it back to Evie. "But I mean, come on. What's the big deal about Dee Dee? Even when we were little kids, you always had to be around Dee Dee. You were like Mary Kate to her fucking Ashley."

"That's not true," Evie pretended to be into ()

"Don't take this wrong, Evie," Raquel suddenly sounded authoritative. "But maybe you just need a man." She pulled a bunch of her hair forward and carelessly checked for split ends. "I was talking to Jose and—"

"You were talking about *me* to Jose?" Evie looked up at Raquel. "I can't believe you discussed my love life with him!"

"Oh, I didn't realize you *had* a love life." Raquel teased. "When did that start?"

Evie took a larger swig from the bottle. "Raquel, do not talk about me to Jose. I know he's, like, the 'love of your life' and everything, but there's gotta be some boundaries."

"He *is* the love of my life." Raquel frowned.

"Well, you'd never know it," Evie said. "The way you two fight all the time."

"We don't fight," Raquel snapped. "Sometimes we disagree on things, sometimes our disagreements get heated, but we aren't fighting. That's what you call passion, Evie. Besides, you sure aren't one to judge a relationship. You've never even had one."

Bunny

DA I THOUGHT
SHE DON'T
LIVE BECAUSE

The room grew quiet, and Evie felt uncomfortable. The last thing she wanted was to fight with Raquel, but it was always like this with her. It was always Raquel's way or the *calle*. She was never open for discussion, debate or compromise. Even when they were little kids. Yes, they were old friends, but Evie hated it when Raquel acted like such a know-it-all. But they've been friends long before the Grand Papa Clause, meaning Raquel plain got away with certain behavior just due to their history together. And you just can't mess with history.

Raquel stepped into her bathroom to switch on her flattening iron.

"So . . ." Evie continue to flip through *Kerrang!* and tried to change the subject. That seemed the only way she knew who to keep peace. "I wonder what Dee Dee looks like now."

"Yeah, I wonder," Raquel answered halfheartedly.

"Um," Evie scanned Raquel's room hoping to find something, anything for inspiration. She saw one of Raquel's fancy glass **sand bottles**. It was in the shape of a genie's lamp.

"Remember when her mother had that Aladdin birthday party and insisted we all dress up?" Evie asked.

"Oh, yeah."

"Yeah," Evie continued. "She had just seen *Aladdin on Ice* or something like that, right?"

"Something like that." Raquel came back into the bedroom. "That party was the worst."

"I thought it was fun," Evie said. "You had on that really cute outfit, the harem pants and that halter."

"Hmm..." Raquel started warming up. "I guess at the time it was okay."

"Dee Dee's mom was so cool," Evie said. "She always threw the best parties."

"My mom throws good parties." Raquel frowned.

"Hey, Raq!" Jose was tapping on Raquel's bedroom door.

"Come in," Raquel called. "It's open."

Jose strutted into the room with an exaggerated pimp limp. Alex was close behind. Both of them had on stiff baggy cords, but only Alex wore a button up. Jose was in his usual Trunk Ltd vintage T. He also, as Evie detected when he hugged her hello, wore cologne. *Cute.*

"Hey, hey, hey," Jose said. "So this is where the pre-party action is, huh?" He looked and when he saw the Veuve Clicquot he instantly balked. "What, no Cristal? Girl, you going *bourgie* on me?"

"Messi-can, *puh*-lease." Raquel gloated as she went over to lock her bedroom door. "This is just the beginning. Once everyone gets bombed, we'll have the run of the place. Where's Mondo?"

"Mondo," Jose said slyly, "had a *very* important drop off in the valley. He might be by later."

"Oh, he'll definitely be by later." Alex said. "He never turns down a party."

Jose looked Raquel up and down. "Damn, Rocky." He whistled slow, eyeing Raquel's low-cut black *canisole*. "You sure know how to rock a fella!"

highs.
clever.

"You likes?" She twirled around, the sheerness of her tied ~~ed~~ cami exposing maybe more than she wanted.

"What do you think?" Jose gestured below his **belt**. "Check out the Miracle-Gro!"

"Jose!" Raquel snapped. "Why do you always have to ruin it?" She went to the bathroom and got her flattening iron. "I swear!"

"What?" Jose looked at her, then at Alex and Evie, perplexed. "That's a compliment. You want me to say you look ugly?"

"Just act right," Raquel reprimanded. She leaned against the bathroom doorway while she straightened her long, wavy hair.

Jose cowered a bit before taking over the window seat in Raquel's room. He looked out across the Diazes' backyard and whistled again. "Check out the fancy spread downtown."

"Didn't my mother just go crazy?" Raquel asked.

"Yeah." Alex sat on the edge of the bed, near Evie. "We saw some dude laying out flowers and some of those floating candles in the pool."

"Ooh." Evie went over to the window. "Lemme see."

Jose was right. The Diazes' backyard was pure swank. Their pool was glowing in candlelight, and multicolored *papeles pica-dos* hung across the yard from the Diazes' fancy wrought iron and brick wall to their jacaranda trees.

"Are the cutouts custom?" Evie asked.

"Oh, yeah," Raquel said. "Each *papel* has like a little scene from when the de La Fuentes lived here. There's some of their first house here in Rio Estates, some from the

Just
papel
picadory
no?

Didn't they
plan this
as a last
minute
party?
When did they
have time to
do this?

summers we all stayed in Cabo, and oh, that one of the Christmas we spent at Lake Tahoe. 'Member?"

"Hey, can I smoke out a little?" Jose interrupted, obviously bored.

"Jose." Raquel pursed her lips and gave him a look. "Quit acting stupid."

"What?" He pulled out some rolling papers from his back pocket. "I'm stupid just 'cause I asked a question? Remember what Mr. Mercer said? There is no such thing as a stupid question, only stupid—"

"Boyfriends?" Raquel finished his sentence. "And don't even get me busted by lighting up. If you wanna be high all night, you can just go home now. This is an important night—we don't want any drama. Right, Evie?"

"Right," Evie confirmed with an exaggerated single firm nod. She got back on Raquel's bed. She lay on her side and propped her head up with her hand.

"Well." Jose opened the window and looked out again. "Maybe I'll get one of the bartenders to give me a lift home. Say, like maybe that sweet redhead setting up the bar?"

"What redhead?" Alex walked to the window and looked out.

"Ugh!" Raquel put her flattening iron on the bathroom counter and went over to Jose. She dropped her body onto his lap. "Over my dead body."

Jose wrapped his arms around her waist. "Hey, I got nothing against necrophilia if you don't."

"My," Raquel dug her face into his neck. "Such a big word for a little boy."

"Budes, get a room already." Alex rolled his eyes. "Oh, wait, we *are* in a room already."

Evie handed Alex the Veuve and he held it up to eye level. "This is dwindling," he said. "We're gonna have to get more." He took a short swig and handed the bottle to Evie. "But don't drink too much. **Don't forget we're on DP tomorrow.**" → ?

To Evie, getting up at dawn on a non-school day was entirely out of the question. But Evie learned that DP, Dawn Patrol, was the time of day any serious surfer got to the beach. Alex was the only Flojo who surfed and he not only helped Evie pick out her long board but he had promised to take her on DP, in this case, Sea Street.

You staked out your territory long before the line up got flooded with aggro locals (which they, living in Rio Estates, were definitely not—locals that is) and you nabbed hours of free parking, way before the meters inflated weekend rates.

Besides, as she served out her mother's sentence, she and her new Hanson longboard had been landlocked two weeks too long. Evie had actually begun to look forward to D.P.. > But she never used that board w/?

"Oh, no worries." Evie insisted. "I'm down for dawn."

"Yeah, that's what you *always* say." Alex said as he handed Evie the bottle. "But you have yet to go."

"Alex, I've been grounded."

"Yeah, yeah," Alex. "So how long did Dee Dee live in Mexico?"

"Almost four years." Evie took one last sip from the bottle. She was already feeling buzzed, and the memory of last weekend's hangover reminded her of a place she didn't want to visit again. "Dee Dee moved there when we were all twelve." I know DAE DIDN'T move there. DAE DIDN'T move there.

"Man, I'd love to live in Mexico," Alex softened his eyes and suddenly looked dreamy. "Like down south, Puerto Escondido way."

"Well, Dee Dee didn't live in southern Mexico," Evie said. "She lived in, like, the Polanco District, right in Mexico City."

"Yeah, and you know she had to hate it," Raquel looked up from Jose's neck.

"Dee Dee's a total country mouse."

Would she really say that

"Raquel!" It was her mother in the hallway. She jiggled the locked doorknob and spoke sternly. "Come out and join the rest of the party. We have guests. You are a hostess, and you are being rude."

"Oh, *shit*." Raquel bolted up from Jose's lap and fanned the telltale smoke through the open window. "I better get out there." She called to her mother, "Sorry, Mom! Evie's just helping me pin my bra straps down. I'll be right out." Then she told Jose and Alex, "You guys wait awhile and then come out and meet us. And remember, be as tolerant of Dee Dee as possible. She can be freaky shy. And you"—she looked at Jose—"stay away from that redhead."

* * *

Evie recognized many of party guests from the SCC, the Saticoy Country Club. Others were colleagues of the Diaz's, fellow Hi Tech Aztecs, who'd also made their money through computers or some kind of software technology. A lot of men, robust in stature and liberal with the cologne, had families and homes in Rio Estates but held positions and, as Raquel claimed, *sanchas* up north, in their luxury Silicon Valley condos. Did a new hefty rock on Mrs. Coulhan-Reyes's finger, Evie wondered, derive from new heftier guilt felt by Mr. Reyes's conscious?

After they made the obligatory rounds of the party, the Flojos pretty much stayed to themselves. Evie anxiously watched the front door, Alex worked on sneaking more booze, and Jose tapped about every platter that came his way.

"What's with your mom serving all this Mexican food?" Jose asked Raquel as he took a quesadilla triangle off a passing tray.

"What do you mean?" Raquel asked. "What should she be serving?"

"I dunno, but didn't the de LaFuentes just come in from Mexico? Don't you think they've had their fill?"

"You are so *not* bagging on my mom," Raquel insisted.

"No, I'm bagging on her choice of food." Jose took a bite and immediately made a face. "Ugh. What is this?"

"Jose, don't be a jerk. It's a goat cheese quesadilla. Obviously too refined for your Taco Bell palate."

"Hey," he warned. "Don't *you* bag on the Bell."

Evie couldn't stop glancing at Alex's Nixon. It was already seven forty. The de LaFuentes were over half an hour late. Didn't anyone notice? Evie saw mother with Mrs. Estes, admiring Kitty's new original Arturo, a sculpted metal art piece over the doorway. Hmmm, Evie thought, maybe she was the only one tripping over the de LaFuentes' rudeness?

By eight o'clock, the appetizers of mini chalupas and the aforementioned quesadillas were almost gone and everyone was toasty from an hour's worth of free booze. Charlie Diaz made an announcement to the crowd. "Okay, everybody, I just got a

call from Frank.” He was pink faced from the heat and excitement. “They’re on their way. They just turned on Camino Coral. They’ll be here any second.”

“What, did Frank forgot how to get around his old neighborhood?” someone called out, and everyone laughed as if it was the funniest joke in the world.

A few minutes later to cheers and shouts, the de LaFuentes’ car finally pulled into the Diazes’ circular driveway followed by a series of car honks to announce their arrival.

“Ah, man,” Evie overhead Jose tell Raquel. “That’s *so* barrio.”

Evie immediately felt more nervous. She quickly went to the bathroom to do a final check on her appearance and discovered that her anxiety was visible—there was two small sweat rings under each of her arms. *Crap*. That was the problem with vintage pieces—they were always made from some polyester blend that generated sweat and, worse, a mad stink. Evie grabbed one of the monogrammed guest towels hanging from the chrome towel bar and reached under her blouse, patting each armpit dry. She looked for deodorant in the Diazes’ bath cabinet and discovered that Kitty, just like Evie’s mother, bought the Trader Joe’s natural stuff, which, naturally, doesn’t do jack. Evie heard more shouts and greetings. She quickly rubbed on the deodorant anyway and raced back to join the party.

Does it?
Begin on
The Joe's

When Evie returned, Frank de LaFuente, Dee Dee’s father, was already standing in the Diazes’ foyer. Next to him was a short, smartly dressed woman. Evie’s and Raquel’s parents were cooing over both of them. Frank de LaFuente looked a lot like Evie remembered: the same broad smile and thick, bushy eyebrows that were now a bit grayer. He still wore a three-piece suit and silk tie, his standard classic uniform.

“*Bienvenidos!* Welcome!” Evie’s father exclaimed. “Frank, it’s been too long!”

"Yes, yes!" Frank de LaFuente agreed excitedly. "It's so wonderful to be back! To be home."

"Look." Evie's father pushed her forward as if she was a prop or something. "Here's Evie!"

"Oh, Evie!" Frank de LaFuente took her hands in his, stood back, and beamed. "Mi'ja, let me look at you! Such a beautiful young lady you've become! Look at this hair. It's like the ocean!" He looked over at Raquel, who was standing next to her. "And Raquel, *tú también! Qué bonita! Mira*, I want you both to meet my wife, Graciela."

Graciela was a stout, fair-skinned woman with dark eyes and dark hair cut in a short bob. Two large, ornate earrings swayed like ship lanterns from her ears.

Love the description

What Dee Dee's father offered in warmth, Graciela definitely cooled down with her own ice. Her brrr factor was cranked to high as she offered a lukewarm hello, surveyed the Diazes' home, and asked Kitty Diaz, "Is our Lexus going to be safe with those men outside?"

huh?
"Oh, yes, of course." Kitty put her arm around Graciela's shoulders. "We've used this company for years."

"*Buenas noches*, Graciela," Evie said with her best Spanish accent. "Soy Evie. Dee Dee and I have been best friends since we were little kids."

"Yeah," Raquel added. "We've all been friends since we were, like, seven years old."

"Really?" Graciela looked them over. Evie suddenly felt like a piece of silver plated jewelry Graciela wouldn't even bother to try on. "What did you say your names were again?"

last time and the caterers were gathering up the dessert dishes and what was left over from the *tres leches* cake. Evie was feeling as uptight as her mother looked.

"This is very rude of Dee Dee," she overheard her mother say to Evie's father. Her arms were crossed and her cheeks and neck were flushed pink. "Very inconsiderate."

Evie was surprised to find herself in full agreement with her mother. She couldn't believe that Dee Dee was being so thoughtless on the night of all nights. Evie felt Dee Dee wasn't just blowing off the party, she was blowing off *her*. Evie's eyes started to burn with anger.

She walked around the party again and was relieved to finally spot Jose and Alex in the ~~Diazes~~ ^{great} room. They'd get her mind off Dee Dee's absence and she immediately went over to join them. They were chatting it up with some older female guest and a server. Both the women were laughing and speaking Spanish.

As the server left to gather more plates from other guests, the ~~guest~~ switched to Spanglish. "But *ay*, no," she insisted to Alex. "Aren't you ever afraid? What about sharks? And those waves are so big. *Tan grande!*"

~~Her~~ bangs were blown up high and her neckline was low. She had on a black ~~that~~ Lycra? minidress and, in bold contrast, wore light blue, almost white, contacts.

"Well, I wouldn't say I'm a ~~big~~ wave surfer," Alex said, not noticing Evie had just joined them. "I mean, I'm no ~~Laird~~ Hamilton, but—"


"*Quién?*" the woman asked.

"Oh." Alex waved a hand dismissively. "He's just some surfer."

Some surfer? What was Alex saying? Laird Hamilton was, like, Alex's idol.

"Yeah." Jose smiled. "We should take you out with us sometime."

"We?" Alex ribbed Jose. "Dude, you can't even float." He turned his attention back to the woman. "I'll take you out and you'll be totally safe. I work at the pool. At the country club."

Yeah, Evie thought, *leading water aerobics* 

"But I don't even know how to swim." The woman gave a helpless giggle and tugged on her tight mini, which was riding up her thighs.

"Oh, I can help you." Alex shook the ice around in his glass. "I'll have you doing a few basics strokes in no time."

"Yeah." Jose grinned. "I'm *sure* he will."

"You"—the woman playfully slapped Jose on his chest—"are gonna give me problems. I can see that already."

Evie was being blatantly ignored and her patience was wearing thin. She finally offered her hand to the woman. "Hello, I'm Evie."

"Evie?" The woman's piercing white eyes penetrated hers. "Evie Gomez?"

"Uh, yeah . . ."

"Ay! Evie!" The woman set her dessert plate on a chair and wrapped her arms around Evie. She was suffocated by flesh, hair and perfume. A lot of perfume. "Evie!" the woman exclaimed. "I've been asking everyone where you've been!"

"Excuse me." Evie felt lost. "But have we met?"

"Evie! It's me! Dela!"

"Dela?"

"Oh." The woman threw an embarrassed sideways glance over at Jose and Alex.

"Okay... Dee Dee?"

"Dee Dee?" Evie couldn't believe what she was seeing. This . . . this was Dee Dee?

"Oh my God, Evie," the woman went on. "Look at you! Oh my God. Your hair! You are so crazy with your *pelo azul*!"

She put her arm around Evie and turned to Jose and Alex. "This little girl is the friend I was telling you about. Right here, little Evie Gomez. *Ay*, Evie, you are *so* cute. You never got any taller, did you?" She actually patted Evie on the head.

"Um." Evie voice came out like a squeak. "Dee Dee, uh . . ."

"Oh, *mi'ja*," she said. "I'm so sorry I'm late. Don't be mad. I just could *not* get off the phone with *mi novio* back in D.F. He hates that I am here and he gets so possessive. *Ay*, I mean, *posesivo*. I hope American boys aren't that way." She gave Jose and Alex a coy smile.

"Nah." Alex smirked. "We let our women go as far as our leash lets them."

"*Ay!*" Dee Dee gave him a sideways glance. "Now you too?"

"Um, Dee Dee . . ." Evie tried again.

"No, no." She put one finger over Evie's mouth. "*No one* calls me Dee Dee. *Por favor*." She frowned knowingly at Jose and Alex.

"So Della." Alex was still all smiles. "I bet you've got some funny stories from when you and Evie were kids."

"Oh, yes, I—" Della snapped her fingers to get a server's attention. "Over here," she called, holding up her glass. "I'm done here." She turned her attention back to Alex. "Let me tell you, she was my best, best friend. We did everything together and—oh, wait,

WHAT?
SHE DIDN'T
(LOVE)
RECOGNIZE
HER?
I DON'T BY
THE WAY

1 → ?

1 → ?

I want you to meet Graciela, my stepmother. 'Ama!' she called. "'Ama, here's the friend I was telling you about. This is Evie."

"Oh, yes." Graciela looked Evie over again. "I met her earlier this evening. Very nice." She turned to Dee Dee. "Listen, *mi'ja*. Your father and I are getting tired. We are going to head home."

"Already, 'Ama?"

"Yes, yes. I'm still not used to the time change and the food." She put a palm over her abdomen. "It's not sitting too well with my stomach."

"Ah." Jose smiled. "The goat cheese quesadilla? Am I right?"

"*Mande?*" Graciela looked at him, confused.

"Oh, 'Ama," Dee Dee said. "These are my two new friends. This is . . ." She looked at Alex. "I'm sorry, what is your name again?"

"Uh, Alex," he said, looking embarrassed.

"Alejandro?" Graciela asked.

"No. Just Alex."

"You mean Alexander?" Graciela asked again.

"No, Alex." He repeated, uncomfortably. "~~Just Alex.~~"

"Okay, 'Ama," Dee Dee interrupted as she gave her stepmother quick peck on the cheek. "I'll see you later tonight."

As Graciela de LaFuente started to leave, Evie saw Raquel slowly swagger up to them. *Oh*, man, where had she been this last hour or so? Somewhere, obviously, that granted her an all-access pass to a steady flow of liquor. She looked thrashed.

"Uh, Raquel," Evie started to warn her.

"Raquel?" Dee Dee smiled widely. "Ay, *Pansita!* Look at you!"

"*Pansita?*" Jose laughed. "Oh, my God. You used to be called *Pansita?*" He looked Raquel over. "Yeah, I can see that."

Raquel looked at Jose, then hard at Dee Dee. "Who the *hell* are you?"

"It's Dee," Evie tried to inform her. "I mean Dela. Dee Dee."

"Yes, it's me, Dela!" Dee Dee held her arms up and wiggled her body.

Raquel squinted. "Whoa, what the fuck happened to your eyes?"

"What?" Dee Dee asked. The wiggling stopped.

"Your eyes," Raquel said again. "Oh, shee-yat!" She covered her mouth and looked at Jose. "I feel like I'm talking to a wolf! No, no, one of those huskies. A Siberian husky!"

"Excuse me?" Dee Dee fumed.

"Oh God." Raquel suddenly put her hand on her forehead. "I feel sick. Whoa, whoa . . . I feel really sick."

"Raquel," Evie said. "Why don't you come with me to the bathroom?"

"It's okay." Jose put his arm around Raquel. "I'll take her."

"But I don't wanna go . . . we gotta wait for Dee Dee," Raquel whined. "Evie's dear little Dee Dee. Right, Evie? Your best friend?"

"Oh, shit." Alex looked away. "Here it comes."

"*Que es su problema?*" Dee Dee demanded.

"Nothing," Jose said. "She's just had too much to drink. Sorry 'bout this..."

"*Sorry?*" Raquel pulled away from Jose. "Why you telling *her* sorry?"

“Well,” Dee Dee started. “We *were* having a nice conversation before you -”

“Oh,” Raquel said slowly. “Did *I* interrupt you? You macking on *my* boy? You were always this way, Dee Dee. Even back in Mr. Harrison’s class when you knew I liked...” Raquel covered her mouth and groaned again. “Ooh, I’m really gonna be sick. Oh, Jose, don’t let me get sick.”

“Well, baby, you’re gonna have to be sick before you can get better.” Jose led her toward the downstairs bathroom.

“What, so she’s like an alcoholic now?” Dee Dee asked.

“No, it’s just been a long night,” Alex said.

“Yeah.” Evie came to Raquel’s defense. “It’s been a long night and we’ve been waiting . . . all night.”

“Oh, so it’s my fault she’s all *boracha*?” Dee Dee asked.

“No, I’m just saying that we’ve all been excited to see you, and it’s been years, and we hadn’t even heard from you and now—”

“Wait, don’t put it all on me that your friend has a drinking problem.”

“*My friend*?” Evie raised her voice. “Dee Dee, I thought Raquel was *our* friend.”

“You know, Evie,” Dee Dee said angrily. “It’s obvious you’re having a bad night, and I’m not gonna let you ruin my party.”

“Ruin it?” Evie snapped. “Dee... Dela, this party’s been over for hours.”

Dee Dee looked over at Alex. “Alejandro, can you take me home?”

Evie also looked at Alex. *No, no, no.*

“Uh, yeah,” Alex said hesitantly. “But I thought you drove here.”

"I did," Dee Dee said firmly. "But I just don't feel like driving right now. Isn't there somewhere we can go? Like for a drink or something?"

"Well, it's not like Mexico," Alex said slowly. "You gotta be twenty-one to drink here."

"So, let's just go somewhere. Take me to that beach you were talking about."

"Sea Street?" Alex asked.

"Yes, Sea Street." Dee Dee pulled out a silver compact from her purse. Evie noticed the initials D.D. on it. *Oh brother.*

She flipped the compact open and checked herself in the mirror, patting the corners of her eyes with light beige powder. "I'm going to say goodbye to my father, and then I'll be waiting . . . outside." Dee Dee snapped her compact shut and turned to leave. She made sure her eyes didn't meet Evie's.

"Well," Alex said uncomfortably. "I guess I better take her, huh?"

"What?" Evie balked. "Are you out of your mind? You are *not* taking her to Sea Street."

"Well, where should I take her?"

Where should he take her? Evie thought. *God, Alex, are you totally tonto?*

"I mean," Alex said awkwardly. "I feel like it's sorta my obligation. She is a guest."

"So then just go, *Alejandro*." Evie dismissed Alex with a wave of her hand. "I didn't *realize* you were the Goodwill Ambassador for Mexico."

Shouldn't
Dee Dee
know
that?

day when Evie woke up to her glass top nightstand rattling, she started to panic, only to discover it was her cell phone. She had left it on vibrate.

PHONE
WHAT
HIS
TALK
OPINION?

When Evie reached over and saw Alex's face on the screen, she was surprised. This was big of him, she smirked, to actually call after being such the a-hole the night before.

She also saw on her cell that it was already 11:03 am. The operative word here was *already*. When he'd left the party with Dee Dee, Evie knew that Dawn Patrol was definitely off. Besides, she looked at her vibrating cell, dawn had cracked almost five hours ago. So why was he even calling? But as soon as the vibrating stopped, Evie couldn't help but feel a pang of regret. Maybe she should've answered it. Maybe Alex wanted to apologize, beg for her forgiveness and admit he was a lousy friend at the party last night. Maybe – but then Evie stopped herself - who was she kidding? It was *already* three minutes after 11 am. If he had been so sorry, he would have called earlier.

She tossed her phone on the covers and curled to her side.

She looked at her Max surfboard in the corner of her room. How could Alex have taken Dee Dee to Sea Street? What even happened to Dee Dee anyway? The whole build up of excitement of seeing her after so many years crumbled into one tremendous Malibu landslide. For one thing, Dee Dee didn't look even remotely like the best friend Evie remembered. No more long brown hair, freckles or the skinny chicken legs that had gotten her the nickname, **Popotitos**. But suddenly Sangro look or not, Dee Dee was back in Rio Estates and, most likely, would be going to Villanueva. How was Evie going to deal with this, this... Dee-lemma? She looked at her cell. It was much too early to call Raquel, who would undoubtedly be snoring a hang over.

Alex To

Just then Evie heard the linen closet doors in the hallway swing open, followed by the familiar heavy sigh she knew so well. She got up and went over to the bedroom doorway.

"Hey, Linds," Evie said. "What are *you* doing here?" She peered out from behind her door, feeling oddly modest in her cotton cami and cheeky hipsters. Lindsay had seen her in various states of undress hundreds of times. Maybe because it was a Sunday, her day off?

"Oh," Lindsay turned away from the closet. "*Good morning*, Lindsay. How are *you* this morning, *Lindsay*."

Evie **upped** her **playful challenge** and said, as quickly and confidently as she could, "*Buenas dias*, Lindsay. *Como estas? Porque estas aqui?*"

Lindsay smiled, but turned back to the closet. "Your mother called me early this morning and asked me to come in, for the brunch"

"The brunch?" Evie wiped the sleep from her eyes. "What brunch?"

"The one for the de LaFuentes." She looked at her **(O)** watch, the **(O)** that Evie's mother had bought for her. "In about an hour."

"*What?*" Evie felt creases form across her forehead. For all the times her face had went into shock over the last 48 hours, she figured she'd need some major botox by her

18th birthday "The de LaFuentes are coming *here?*"

"Uh huh," Lindsay answered. "You should go ask and see if you mother needs anything. She still has a lot to do."

"Is Dee Dee coming too?"

"I don't know, Evie." Lindsay answered half-heartedly, as if it was another chore for her to think of the correct answer. Her only concern at the moment was choosing the right color of soap for the guest bathroom.

Evie slipped on some sweat shorts, her favorite pair of flojos, and headed down stairs. She had no choice but to ask her mother herself about the brunch. Wasn't the welcome back party for the de LaFuentes last night enough? As a kid, Evie witnessed her mother trying to keep up with, well not the Joneses, but the Diazes and the de LaFuentes. Sure Vicki Gomez's husband owned a few bakeries, but she could host a get together just as good as the wife of a scholar (e.g. Frank de La Fuente) or the CEO/owner of a software company (e.g. Charlie Diaz) and she always felt like she needed to prove it. Was her mother back to her old habit of competing with Raquel's mother over who displayed more sophisticated social skills?

When Evie entered the dining room, she had her answer. For one thing, the dining table was free from clutter. Vicki Gomez always demanded that their Californian mission style table remained bare, all the better to showcase its classic style. But truth be told, it was always littered with bills and paperwork; (Spa Ojai) bills, Santa Clara Church donation requests, catalogues from PawPrints, the *only* guide for high-end pet accessories. But this morning, everything had been cleared away, and positioned dead center was an oversized clay vase filled with Eucalyptus leaves and Birds of Paradise. A definite sign of impending company, or as Evie feared, an oncoming collision. What would she say to Dee Dee when she showed up?

Evie went into the kitchen and found her mother slicing and juicing oranges. Her short hair was wound in small hot rollers and a strip of Jolene cream was applied above her top lip. Just how intimate was this brunch gonna be?

“What’s going on?” Evie picked up P. Kitty, who was purring at her shins.

Her mother looked up. “Maybe I should be asking you that.”

“What do you mean?” Evie immediately felt on guard.

“I mean, what went on last night? With Raquel?”

“What do mean, Raquel?” Evie scratched her cat behind his ears.

“Evie, *quit* answering my question with a question.” Her mother brushed her forehead to wipe away non-existent perspiration.

Oh, please, Evie rolled her eyes, the AC was more like FF – friggin’ freezing-- and how hard is it to place half an orange on a juicer?

“Raquel was throwing up all night,” her mother continued. “Kitty was worried sick she had alcohol poisoning and —

“Alcohol poisoning? Mom, come on...”

“Do *not* interrupt me, Evie. How did Raquel even get the liquor? I better not find out that you were drinking.”

“Me? No. And who even says it was alcohol?” She struggled to protect Raquel, as well as **herself**. “Maybe the milk in the Tres Leches was bad and-”

“Evie! Stop it. When your father gets back I’m going to have him talk to you.” She went back to juicing, shaking her head. “I don’t know, Evie,” her tone softened. “Your best friend is back and I would think you would have wanted to make a better impression. Granted she was rude, late to her own party, but we could be the more

Kitty...
P. Kitty
too similar
No?

gracious ones. Dee Dee has gone through a lot, Evie. Losing her mother, moving to another country and that Graciela's no consolation."

Evie took over one of the red painted stools at the kitchen counter. She knew her mother was partially right, but she wasn't about to admit it. Yeah, she and Dee Dee, as well as Raquel, had once been the golden trio of Camino del Rio. The proximity of their three homes, side by side at the end of the cul de sac, made for obvious reasoning that the three girls would not only be neighbors, but friends. But once Dee Dee moved away, only Raquel and Evie remained close. After last night, Dee Dee's had made it so obvious that she had changed for the worse. She had become the type of girl Raquel and Evie despised -- the helpless giggling blonde, the too tight "hot" clothing. And those colored contact lenses! Was last night's reunion a retro '80s party and no one told Evie?

Lindsay came in from the backyard through the French doors, carrying a plastic bowl filled with more oranges. "Okay, ^{Ta} Senora," she told Evie's mother. "I got the last of them. I even checked around the trees, on the ground."

"Oh, thank you, Lindsay. I think this'll be enough," Evie's mother took the bowl and placed it in the sink. "Kitty doesn't really drink Mimosas anyway."

As soon as Evie heard Raquel's mother's name mentioned, she stiffened.

"The Diaz's are coming too?" she asked. "You said just the De LaFuentes."

"I didn't say that," her mother said calmly. "Everyone is coming... maybe not Raquel. We all didn't get much time at the party last night and I just thought a more intimate brunch would be nice. I didn't think of it until this morning but fortunately, everyone can make it."

"Except," Evie tilted her head and mimicked her mother "...maybe not Raquel,"

But before her mother could say anything, the front door opened and Evie's father came in from the front room. Molesto was clumsily trotting behind him. *Great*. Now, here comes the lecture: The Virtues of Teen Sobriety 101.

But Evie's father had other things on his mind.

"I got 'em!" he announced excitedly as he threw his car keys on the kitchen counter and placed the large flat box on the dining table. "I was beginning to worry this whole morning was gonna be a bust."

The box was from one of the Gomez's *panaderias*. Evie grew up with the white bakery boxes, each one stamped with the small shell on top. Evie went over to the table and lifted the box's lid. She inhaled the aroma of fresh bread, but to her the *pan* looked no different from the sweet bread her father brought home practically every night.

"You got what?" she asked. "More *pan*?"

"No lard." Her father corrected.

"Huh?"

He took a crispy *oreja* from the box and broke a piece off. "None of these have *manteca*. Taste it."

Evie took a bite. The *pan* was still warm, but tasted bland, like the Jenny Craig dietary loaves the whole family had to tolerate when her mother's "no-carb" phase was yes-again.

"What do you think?" her father asked eagerly.

"I think it's good... for someone who needs to lose weight."

"What's that suppose to mean?" He frowned.

"I dunno," Evie confessed. "It tastes weird,"

"Ah, you *don't* know," Her father waved her aside. "Lindsay will tell me. She'll be honest."

Yeah, as honest as her bonus depends on it.

"Come here, Linds," he called over to Lindsay. "Try this."

Lindsay stopped slicing oranges and took a bite into the same flat, flaky *oreja*. She immediately smiled. "Ay, ~~Senor~~ Gomez," she gushed. "This is good. Really. I can't even tell the difference."

And of course, Ruben Gomez just beamed, which made Evie wonder. When was the last time *she* did or said something that made her father proud? It was always someone else who made her father glow. There was Sabrina, with all her achievements at Stanford, Molesto, chewing up all the Gomez's unwanted junk mail, P. Kitty who purred on command, and now Lindsay, with her little *cumplimiento insincero*. Blah, Evie rumped her lips. Parental pride, it's so overrated anyway, right?

"Hey, Vicki, "Evie's father carried the box over to the counter. "Do we have a nice plate or something to put these on?"

"I am already one step ahead of you," Evie's mother pulled down a wicker basket from the top cabinet.

"Oh, that's nice. Real traditional. Hey, Linds," Evie's father started, "You need some coffee with your *pan*? Sit down. I'll get it for you."

"Oh, thank you," Lindsay, pulled up the left side of her skirt and checkered apron. She took a seat at the kitchen counter and looked over at Evie and smiled.

"Can I do anything?" Evie found herself asking meekly.

Good idea. Be the good, helpful daughter.

“Actually yes,” Her mother said. “Go out and look over the lawn. Make sure Molesto didn’t leave anything behind.”

“Wouldn’t Arnie have done that yesterday?” Evie asked, referring to the Gomez’s gardener. He was meticulous about maintaining their Marathon sod lawn and the last thing she wanted was to go outside and scoop Molesto’s torpedo sized turds.

“Evie,” Her mother raised an eyebrow and motioned Evie to the backyard. “Just do it.”

“Come on, Evie,” her father chimed. “Just do the doo!”

“Yeah,” her mother added. “It’s the call of doodie!”

And of course they both laughed. As they did *every* time they repeated their corny catch phrases at the cost of Molesto’s overly productive intestinal tract. It was times like this Evie wished they had gotten that aquarium like her mother had wanted

So while the comedic duo collaborated over how to showcase an array of sweet bread while a happy housekeeper got a mandatory impromptu coffee break on her day off, Evie, pulled the pooper scooper out from the kitchen utility closet and headed for the backyard. Little did any of them know that no matter how much she cleaned up after Molesto, it wouldn’t matter. Now with the Diazes coming, a real shit storm was on its way.

→ Cool B

* * *

By noon, the Gomez's foyer was taken over by Spanish, Spanglish and what Evie calls Ay Que - that's when adult Mexicans elongate the **exclamation** of "*Que*" in regard to a simple observation.

"Ay, *quuuue* guapo!" Evie's mother exclaimed when she saw Frank de Lafuente in a stylish white Cuenca Panama hat. Seconds later Kitty Diaz followed with a reprimand to her own husband. "Ay, *quuuue* malo!" she playfully slapped his back when he said that the only reason Frank de Lafuente wore such a hat was to cover his bald spot.

A slightly jaundiced looking Raquel was with her parents, but Dee Dee was not. This was a relief to Evie, but made her a little concerned, just how pissed off could Dee Dee be? As kids they had their share of arguments -- from who got to be cashier first whenever they played "Tienda" to whose rightful turn it was to use **the boogie board at the beach** -- but their fights never lasted long. Would this fight be any different? Last night was pretty harsh, but enough to officially sever all ties? And why did Evie even care so much? If anything, it was Dee Dee who owed her an apology, or at the very least, an explanation. It was Dee Dee who hadn't kept in touch while she lived in Mexico. It was Dee Dee who hadn't even bothered to call when she arrived to Rio Estates and it was Dee Dee, *again*, who took her sweet ass time arriving to her own party and when she finally showed up, took the seemingly evil pleasure of humiliating both Evie and Raquel. Yeah, it was Dee Dee who owed an explanation to both Raquel and Evie. Definitely.

As Evie's mother led the adults outside to the Gomez's deck, Evie pulled Raquel aside. "So, did you know about this?" she asked.

"Nuh-uh," Raquel said. "My mom just yanked me out of bed and insisted that I come. Like I had to make up for my so-called inappropriate behavior from last night."

She rubbed her temples in annoyance. "I am so *not* in the mood for idle chit chat and **over spiced food.**"

"We're actually having eggs benedict," Evie told her.

"Did your mom or Linday make them?" Raquel asked.

"My mom."

Like I said," Raquel half smiled. "**Over spiced.**"

In that **relaxed** post **party kind of way**, the parents sipped ~~mimosas~~ on the Gomezes back deck while playfully arguing over who could offer the de LaFuentes better floor seats to the Lakers. Evie hung back in the kitchen while Raquel tried to recuperate. If she knew her mother, there'd be at least half an hour before Lindsay served brunch.

Evie filled one of her mother's **red and white** kitchen towels with ice cubes and poured a can of warm ginger ale into a glass. She placed both of them on the counter, in front of Raquel.

"You need aspirin?" Evie asked.

"Nah," Raquel took the towel and held it to her forehead. "I'll see how I feel in the next hour. I don't like overdoing it."

"Yeah," Evie pulled up a stool to sit next to Raquel at the counter. "You proved that last night."

The morning marine layer that often plagued coastal towns like Rio Estates had burned off making the afternoon, and kitchen, sunny, warm and, to Raquel's **annoyance**, bright.

I LIKE IT

“Ugh...” Raquel groaned as she pulled her Aviators over her eyes and placed her head over her arms on the kitchen counter as the sun rays bounced off the counter’s white tile. “What’s with your mother’s opposition to some simple kitchen blinds?”

“It’s more like an opposition to, like, discretion or something,” Evie said referring to the large ornate bay-like windows that overlooked the Gomez’s lush lawn, bountiful citrus trees, and () swimming pool. “My mother likes to see what she’s thought up and put together.”

Raquel looked out onto the deck. “Look at them. Just like back in da day, minus the OG Sangro,” she said, referring to Graciela.

“Speaking of Sangros, “ Evie lowered her voice. She had been dying to bring it up just as soon as the parents were out of ear shot. “What did you make of Dee Dee?”

“What do I make of her?” Raquel face puckered. “She’s such a friggin’ FOTB Sangro, that’s what I make of her.”

Evie knew very well, of course, that the de LaFuentes, fresh or not, hadn’t taken a boat to travel back to California. Did Raquel really think Dee Dee was a Sangro? Well, as much as Evie didn’t want to admit it, if giggles like a Sangro, squeals like a Sangro, **wraps tight lycra ‘cross the ass like a Sangro...** it was, definitely, a Sangro.

“Do you know that Alex took her to Sea Street?” Evie asked.

“Sea Street?” Raquel looked up. “When?”

“Last night. After the party. She practically ordered him.”

“Stupid Alex,” Raquel shook her head in disgust. “That dude be dense. It’s a good thing she didn’t tell Jose to do anything. I’d have beat her ass.” Raquel put her head back

?
Fresh off
the boat
oh.
2

on her folded arms. "We gotta steer clear of her. I mean it, Evie. She's not the same friend we thought we knew."

"It seems that way," Evie reluctantly agreed.

"Seems?"^A Raquel lifted her head up again. "As if there was any suspicion she was? Evie, you have to realize that she *was* a friend, *used* to be a friend, but times, obviously, have changed. **MENTION HOW DEE DEE WAS ON THE PARTY.** We gotta have each other's backs."

"I *know*, Raquel."

Fortunately, just then, Evie's mother announced that brunch was ready. Evie welcomed the interruption and got up to go outside with Raquel.

Evie and Raquel took seats at the smaller patio table that was pushed up against the end of the main table, where all the parents sat and Evie noticed that Lindsay had set an additional place setting for Dee Dee.

Evie started to put some melon salsa on her plate.

"What do you even need ol' Dee Dee for?" Raquel continued as she poured some orange juice for herself. "Hey,"^(A) She flashed a goony larger than life smile. "You got me." Evie knew, in Raquel's condition, it must have just killed her head. "Look," Raquel went on. "I'll even remove all this little nasty avo for you.." She started to pick out the cubes of avocado from Evie's plate.

"Hey," Evie playfully pushed her fingers away. "Get your grubby paws outta my food!"

As soon as Lindsay placed individual eggs benedict in front of everyone the brunch officially started. Evie's father welcomed the de LaFuentes back to Rio Estates for the **umpteenth** time and then Evie's mother got on her own pedestal.

"I'll have you know," Her mother proudly pointed out with a champagne glass in her hand, "That just about everything on the table came from our own backyard –the tomatoes, the *augacate*, and oh, even the orange juice. We squeezed it this morning."

"Ay!" Charlie Diaz feigned pain and pretended to spit an orange seed into a napkin. "And these *semillas*, *tambien*? I think I broke a crown!"

Everyone laughed, **except for Graciela, who just smiled.**

"So," Frank de LaFuente asked as he passed the carafe of orange juice. "How's Sabrina? How is she doing at Stanford?"

"Oh, just great," Evie's father said, cutting into his eggs. "She made the dean's list and was just elected president of her sorority."

"See," Frank de LaFuente knowingly addressed both tables, using his fork to make his point. "That girl was always a go getter. She did things right, stayed on a path. There are Mexi-can'ts and Mexi-cans. And she's definitely a Mexi-can."

The adults laughed, except Graciela who looked confused.

"What," Charlie Diaz asked Frank de Lafuente. "You writing for George Lopez now?"

Raquel nudged Evie and rolled her eyes. "***This*** Mexi-can *can't* take this corn ball crap so early in the afternoon."

While everyone was impressed with Sabrina's accomplishments, it was the debut of Ruben Gomez's pan dulce that garnered the most attention.

"Ay, no," Graciela de LaFuente winced after her first bite into a fluffy *buniterilla*.

"With all respect, Senor Gomez --"

"Grace, please," Evie's father interrupted. "We're like family. Call me Ruben."

"Oh, well..." Graciela looked at her husband uncomfortably. "My family calls me Graciela. Anyhow, as I was trying to say, I understand your intent, but ... I don't know how to say this, but no lo *mete*."

"*Mande?*" Evie's father looked genuinely confused.

"Let me say it this way," Graciela continued. "The heart, *la corazon* of pan dulce is the *manteca*. It's what holds the pan together, literally and figuratively. In Mexico, a *panadero* would never dream of playing with tradition."

"Can you believe she's calling your dad out in his own house?" Raquel whispered over to Evie. "*Nerve*."

Evie sat up in her patio chair. Raquel was right. Her father would *definitely* have something to say about this.

But before Ruben Gomez could defend his beloved bread, a voice called out from the Gomez's kitchen.

"Dad? Graciela?"

Raquel sat up in her chair. Not nervously, but aggressively. Ready for combat.

"Ay, *mi'ja!*" Frank de LaFuente directed his attention, and thankfully everyone else's, away from the pan dulce to Dee Dee who was coming out from the kitchen.

"*Aqui!*" He called out. "We're out here!"

Dee Dee, in huge green tinted sunglasses and her blouse tied high, exposing navel, came out onto the Gomez's deck. Her blonde hair was pulled into a pony tail and she carried a large paper bag.

"Oh, Vicki," She went over to Evie's mother and gave her a hug. "I am *so* sorry I'm late. I overslept and it was *such* a long night last night."

Raquel nudged Evie, "And an even earlier morning... with Alex, I'm sure."

"Plus," Dee Dee gathered a fake yawn together. "I'm still so jet lagged. It always takes me so long to get over it when I travel. But look, look." She held up her bag of Noah's Bagels. "I bought some bagels."

"Oh, Dee Dee," Evie's mother stood up and took the bag. "How thoughtful. You didn't have to do that." She passed them on to Lindsay without saying anything which meant that the bagels would remain in the kitchen for the rest of the morning. There was definitely enough bread for one brunch. Besides, after Graciela's sour comment, Ruben's pan dulce didn't need any competition.

"Um," Dee Dee looked over the two tables uncomfortably. "Where should I sit?"

"Sit wherever you want, *mi ja*," Evie's mother said. "But I think Lindsay already made a place for you." She gestured to the only available seat that was across from Evie and Raquel. Dee Dee pulled out a patio chair and reluctantly sat down.

"So, what did I miss?" She kept her sunglasses on and focused her attention on the adults. She didn't look at Evie and Raquel.

"Here," Evie's father passed the basket of pan over to her side of the table. "Try some of my new bread from the panaderia. It's fat free."

“Fat free?” Dee Dee looked surprised. “Are you serious? Wow.” She eyed the last *hornito* in the basket.

But Raquel, seeing Dee Dee’s interest and waiting until the parents went back to discussing the Ruben Gomez’s new business venture, grabbed the remaining piece of pan and tore a bite off with her mouth. She crossed her arms and looked defiantly at Dee Dee. *Not* Raquel’s most mature move.

“Ay, que *glutona*,” Dee Dee put her hand on her chest. “It’s a good thing it’s fat free, Pansita, ‘cause the last thing you need is any more fat.”

Evie looked over at her parents but they were **clueless** to what was starting up, or actually, what was continuing from last night. She sunk into her deck chair and said nothing, and neither did Raquel. Actually, how could she? Her mouth was filled with soggy, semi devoured hornito mush.

“I’d rather... be... a glutton,” Raquel finally responded, cramming the last bits of the pan in her mouth, “than some... *pinche puta*... right, Evie?”

Evie could still not speak. She picked at her melon salsa.

“*Put*a?” Dee Dee narrowed her eyes at Raquel.

“Yeah,” Raquel continued, shifting her attention between Dee Dee and the parents. “Ordering Alex to take you to Sea Street, you being all up on Jose at the party. Evie and I were just talking about you, before you showed up late, *again*. Right Evie?”

“Oh, really?” Dee Dee looked at Evie wide eyed. “Is that what you were you saying, Evelina?”

The earnest way Dee Dee asked Evie made her feel guilty. It was one thing to agree to Raquel’s earlier smack spoken, but another to publicly agree to it. Besides, Dee

Dee seemed so defenseless. Was it the lack of her alien colored contacts that made her seem more vulnerable, human? Dee Dee's brown eyes patiently waited for Evie's answer.

"Well," Evie tried to find her voice. "Last night was bad, I mean, it was late and everyone was tired. And you were just saying yourself that you get jet lagged and—"

"*What?*" Raquel spat under her breath. She looked over at the parents, but they were not paying attention. "Evie, how can you fucking say that?"

"I'm not saying anything," Evie tried to back pedal. "I'm just agreeing that last night was craziness and that—"

But Raquel wasn't listening. She pushed her chair back and stood up. "Mom, I gotta get home." She looked down, towards Dee Dee. "I feel nauseous."

"Nauseous?" Evie's father was immediately concerned. "From what?" The last thing he wanted was a connection of nausea linked to his forward thinking, progressive pan dulce.

"Raquel," Kitty Diaz looked at Raquel firmly. "Sit down. You are being rude. We came together, we are leaving together."

"What?" Raquel challenged. "You mean we need to *cross the street* together?"

"Raquel..." Her father started.

"Oh, Kitty," Evie's mother interrupted. "If Raquel still isn't feeling well, she's more than welcome to leave. I won't be offended." But Evie knew that her mother didn't want Raquel, who was notorious for being so moody, around in the first place. God forbid she got all *(asco)* on the teak furniture.

Romy

"You heard her, mom," Raquel said. "Vicki doesn't mind." She got up and tossed her crumpled napkin on her plate. But before she left she made sure to lean over and give Evie a minor earful, "I knew you'd be weak. Thanks a fucking lot, *Evelina*."

"Oh, I am so sorry," Kitty Diaz started to apologize as Raquel left. "She's never been a morning person."

"Or afternoon or evening..." Charlie Diaz looked upward in exasperation.

"And who isn't a little tired the morning after such a wonderful celebration?" Frank de LaFuentesaid as he tried to soothe the situation. He looked at Kitty Diaz and winked. "*Que una fiesta!* We can't thank you enough."

"Oh, you are so welcome, Frank." Kitty smiled before looking at her watch. "Oh, but you know, that reminds me." She looked over at Evie's mother. "I hate to do this to you, Vicki, but we should get going. We have the rental company coming over to pick up all the tables and chairs from last night."

"On a Sunday?" Evie's mother raised her eyes in suspicion.

"Well, if they don't come today, we'll be charged an extra day."

"We should get going, too." Frank de LaFuentesaid pushed away from the table. "We still have a lot of unpacking to do."

"But it's still early." Vicki struggled to keep her brunch alive, or at the very least, end on a more **memorable**, positive note. "Why don't we at least take our drinks down by the pool? It's so nice out."

"Oh, it is," Charlie Diaz looked about. "But, ay, Vicki, it's gonna have to be another time. Kitty's right. We should get home to meet Party Rents." ▶ oh.

"Actually," Frank de LaFuente started. "Graciela wanted to see that talavera in your bathroom. It's similar to the tile we want for ours. Could we take a look at it?"

"Oh yeah," Kitty Diaz smiled. "Come on over."

"And we still have some *Tres Leches*." Charlie looked over at Evie's father playfully. "Some nice, sweet, *fattening* Tres Leches. No more pan *dull-ce*, eh, Ruben?"

As the four parents left the Gomezes to cross Camino del Rio **to go over** to the Diazes, Evie actually felt sorry for her mother. She could see the dejected look in her and her father's face. Their only consolation seemed to be that Dee Dee, strangely enough, stayed behind.

"I'm not leaving Vicki," Dee Dee said sweetly. She was still seated at the patio table scooping up melon salsa with hollandaise sauce. "Do you need any help? Cleaning up?"

"Oh, no, Dee Dee," Evie's mother smiled weakly. "That's so nice of you. But it's not necessary. I've got Lindsay today."

"And I really want to try the pan dulce," Dee Dee assured Evie's father. "I used to love going to the bakery, especially the original one on Colonia Road. Your pan is even better than what I had in Mexico."

Great. Evie thought. Add one more to the list of Ruben Gomez's culo kissers.

"Nah..." Evie's father shook his head, but then, "Really?"

"Yes, really," Dee Dee smiled, assuringly.

And with that, Ruben Gomez practically tripped over himself as he rushed to the kitchen phone. He wanted make to arrangements for someone from his bakery to deliver more pan dulce, sin manteca.

"That is so sweet of you to say," Evie's mother told Dee Dee once her husband was on the phone. "Ruben really needed to hear that."

"But I didn't just say it," Dee Dee insisted. "I meant it. I guess growing up in California, in Rio Estates, I just thought that's how all Mexican things should be. Does that make sense? Even if it's not considered *authentic*?"

"It makes perfect sense" Evie's mother laughed as she took a seat next to Dee Dee. "Whose to say what is authentic or not? Even in Mexico, you not gonna find a fish taco in Oaxaca that tastes like one in Ensenada, right?"

Dee Dee wrinkled her nose. "Uh, I don't really know. I don't like fish tacos."

"Oh, uh," Evie's mother didn't know what to say. "So, you must have had some fun experiences, adventures in Mexico City. I've always wanted to go there."

"Oh, you have to!" Dee Dee gushed. "People always talk about Paris or some other European place being so great and cultured and all, but nothing compares to D.F. You've never been?"

"No," Evie's mother admitted. "Before we had the girls, Ruben and I would always take trips down to Baja and then, as you know, we all went to Cabo...when you're mother was alive," Evie mother suddenly got a glassy look in her eyes. "That was always so much fun."

"Yeah, it was," Dee Dee said curtly.

As her mother and Dee Dee reminisced, Evie started to see past the blonde hair and mascara laden lashes and saw the Dee Dee she remembered as a childhood friend,

Where was
Evie's mother?
& Ruben born?

How old
is Dee
Dee?

her best friend. The de LaFuentes, like her father said, *were* like family and Dee Dee *had* been like a sister to her. Dee Dee made for a better Sunday morning sweetheart than the Saturday night chica from the night before. Also, the way her mother was talking to Dee Dee reminded how her mother can be – calm, caring and attentive. Why is, Evie wondered, that it was always other people who brought out the best in her parents?

Well,” Evie’s mother patted Dee Dee’s arm as she got up from the table. “I better go help Lindsay in the kitchen. It’s her day off and I know she’ll want to get out of here as soon as possible.”

“Are you sure you don’t need my help?” Dee Dee looked up.

“Oh, no, *mi ja*. It was just so nice to catch up with you. I knew it would be good to have this brunch, right Evie?”

“Uh,” Evie was caught off guard. “Right.”

When her mother left to join Lindsay in the kitchen, Evie realized she no longer had a buffer. It was she and Dee Dee, one on one.

“So,” Dee Dee pulled out her cell phone and checked to see if she had messages. “It’s nice to see Lindsay. Remember we used to have a crush on her son, Alfredo? He must be, like, married by now, huh?”

Who was Dee Dee trying to fool? Did she think Evie was just gonna forget about last night?

“So,” Evie crossed her arms firmly. “What happened at Raquel’s? At the party?”

“Yeah,” Dee Dee still didn’t bother to look at Evie. She was now text messaging someone. “That *Pansita* has always been so bossy and aggressive, especially to you, Evie. I don’t know why she attacked me the way she did.”

I know
like
this
this is
so true

"Well, for one thing, you were **macking on** her boy."

"I was what?"

"You were flirting, with her boyfriend."

"Her boyfriend?" Dee Dee looked up from her cell phone. **He** eyes widened.

Quien?

"Jose," Evie said matter of factly. "You know, the guy with Alex."

"I didn't know that was her boyfriend. He actually came up to me and started saying all those silly things first." Dee Dee paused for a beat. "Is...is Alejandro *your* boyfriend?"

"Alex? No. We're just friends. All of us, me, Raquel...there's another guy, too. Mondo. And," Evie added. "Raquel doesn't like being called **Pangita**."

True, Raquel had been chubby as a child, but now four years later, well, what could you say? *Real Women Have*. **(.)?**

"Oh," Dee Dee waved her hand aside. "I was only teasing. In Mexico, a little name like that would be taken as an endearment."

"Dee," Evie almost corrected herself, but then continued. "We're not in Mexico. And you know what? I'm tired of hearing about Mexico. Was Mexico so great that's the reason you never called? Or answered my emails? I mean, the whole universe doesn't **evolve** around Mexico. You never cared about Mexico when we were kids, growing up. Now it's all Mexico this and Mexico that."

"Well," Dee Dee went back to fidgeting with her phone. "I've *had* to care. I had no choice. And you know, it was actually nice to get away."

"Get *away*?"

True B
Here, for D

"Evie," Dee Dee continued. "I hate Rio Estates. When my dad told me we were coming back, you don't know how horrible I felt. To leave my school, my friends..."

"Well," Evie could feel herself getting more agitated. "I am so *sorry* Rio Estates doesn't compare with the cosmopolitan life you had in D.F."

"Evie, no," Dee Dee voice softened and she finally put her phone down. "It's just being back here, in Rio Estates, in this neighborhood. It's hard. It reminds me of... my mom."

Evie immediately felt horrible. "Oh, Dee Dee, I'm sorry. I wasn't even thinking. I didn't mean it that way..."

"I know you didn't it, it's just..." Dee Dee's voice started to crack. "You know," "I don't want to get into it, but maybe I did come on too strong last night. But I *was* excited to see you, Evie. Really." Dee Dee tried to regain her composure. "When I heard about the party I was thinking of all the ways I was going to surprise you and Raquel. I didn't know that right before the party I was going to get into a big fight with Rocio, my *Novio*, and—"

"Novio? You're engaged?" Evie interrupted.

"Huh? Oh, no. In Mexico," Dee Dee stopped herself, realizing she referenced Mexico again. "I mean, *novio* can also mean boyfriend." She suddenly laughed to herself. "I couldn't be engaged! My father would kill me. Remember that time I had a slumber party and **Pete Galindo** and all his friends came over to crash it? My dad was ready to pound them with a golf iron!"

Evie laughed. It had been so long since she had thought of that party. As she had told Raquel, Dee Dee's mother always threw the best parties, especially for Dee Dee. It

*True! but
prometho st: 13
Rance!*

*Mr. Galindo
Very cool
14*

was something Evie always envied about Dee Dee and missed about Margaret de LaFuente.

"Oh, Evie," Dee Dee said. "I'm so sorry we got off on the bad foot. You will always be my best friend. Even in Mexico, I always, always, talked about *mi amiga mejor* in California. Really."

"Really? You're not just saying that to get Gomez points?"

"Really," Dee Dee laughed. "You are *not* your father."

Evie laughed again and then she and Dee Dee got up from their chairs and hugged. An unlike the hug from last night's party, this was one *authentic*.

7

Monday morning, Evie decided to ride to school with Dee Dee. Raquel hadn't answered any of Evie's phone calls or text messages on Sunday evening and she wasn't feeling exactly thrilled about sharing a ride to school with her in Mondo's car. Villanueva was a good thirty minutes north east of Rio Estates. What would be worse? The silent treatment or a tongue lashing from Raquel? Either one would be long and excruciating

But as soon as Dee Dee beeped the horn of her VW Beetle and Evie ran out of the house to meet her, she immediately regretted her decision. Dee Dee's iTrip blasted

Reggaeton from the speakers which, according to Evie, might as well have been American Idol Presents. If that wasn't bad enough, the overwhelming stink of a highly fragrant rose sachet, hanging from the rearview mirror, took over the front seat. What was this? An FDS commercial?

"Hey, chica!" Dee Dee gave Evie's shoulder a squeeze. "Que cute you look! Your skirt matches your hair."

"Oh, thanks," Evie said. She didn't think what she was wearing anything especially cute, just her favorite silver metallic Havaianas and a batik skirt she found at Tilly's in the Esplanade, but she would take an early morning compliment just as quick as the next sophomore girl who questioned her cute quotient.

"I was so worried," Dee Dee held a lit cigarette out the driver's window. "When my dad and Graciela told me I'd be going to Villanueva I thought that I'd have to wear a uniform or something. In Mexico, you have to wear one if you go to a private school. But we can wear anything at Villanueva, huh?"

"Yeah," Evie looked over Dee Dee disapprovingly. "Anything."

Could Dee Dee be anymore Sangro? Was it her too tight designer denim or the super sized hoops that practically pulled her poor ear lobes past her shoulders? Evie caught a look of herself in the side mirror. *Could you be anymore judgmental?* What if all the students at Villanueva had to wear uniforms as Dee Dee incorrectly thought? They'd be sporting the school colors of black and red, or as Raquel says, the garter belt colors of midnight black and hootchie red. With a school dress code, even the Flojos would have to wear shoes every day (Zew) and how long would it take for any of them to figure out who was worth each other's time or not? Would someone like, say, Mondo, truly be Evie's friend?

"So, what are the people like at Villy?" Dee Dee took a pull from her cigarette.

"Lot's of cute boys, like Alejandro?"

"Uh, not really." *Alex cute?* Evie guessed some girls might think he was. No, Evie took that back. Alex *was* a cute boy, but then again, he *was Alex*. in crush context. → ?

"He was never your boyfriend?" Dee Dee asked. "He seems to really like you."

"Oh, that's just how Alex is. Besides, he's just a friend."

Dee Dee laughed and tapped the tip of her cigarette in the car's ashtray. "In Mexico, I didn't have any male friends. As soon as I met Rocio he didn't want me hanging around other boys."

"Are you serious?" Evie asked. "I wouldn't stand for that."

"Well, you don't have to worry about it."

"Why?"

"Cause, *Evelina*," Dee Dee bowed her head sideways at Evie. "You don't even have a man!"

Evie playfully punched her. No doubt about it, she had made the right choice to ride with Dee Dee. She was just as silly and fun as she used to be. **SHOW DON'T**

TELL

"Man," Evie looked over the dashboard and back seat of Dee Dee's Beetle.

"You're so lucky you got your own car. I'm really hoping when I turn sixteen and get my license that I get a car."

"Yeah, it was pretty easy for me," Dee Dee said. "I mean, I just cried and cried about leaving Rocio, and my friends, and about moving, so what could my father really do?"

Evie continued to look around Dee Dee's car and noticed that the dashboard flower vase, a nicety that all the new Beetles had, held a arranged bunch of unlit incense sticks.

Evie ran her finger over the tips of incense. "You've always liked the girly scented things."

"Yeah, I guess," Dee Dee nonchalantly took another drag from her cigarette. "But it's also so my parents don't suspect. They would kill me if they knew I smoked. So would Rocio."

"When did you start?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe when I first moved to D.F.? I don't smoke too much. Really, just socially."

"When you *first* moved?" Evie asked. "Dee Dee, you were still, like, twelve?"

"Was I?" Dee Dee teased.

Raquel → ?

As Dee Dee's VW Beetle exited the 101 Freeway and entered onto Highway 33, reality finally bit Evie hard...right in the ass. **WHAT BRING THIS ON?** *She* was going to *school* with *Dee Dee*. What could she be thinking? There was no way this was gonna fly with Raquel. Raquel was card carrying grudge holder. Right between her fake ID and JambaCard, you could actually see a laminate that logged long, hard residual resentment. The last thing Evie wanted was Raquel on her bad side.

"So," Dee Dee started as though she had just started to read Evie's mind. "Have you talked to Raquel since yesterday?"

Dee Dee
13 15
16

"Yeah," Evie went on. "She's hated horses or anything out doorsy like that since then. You know, I think that was the only time I remember I ever saw Raquel cry."

Really?" Dee Dee took another long slow pull off her cigaretter and looked over at Evie. "That was the only time?"

"Yeah," Evie said. "I think it was."

"Hmmm..."

"What?" Evie asked.

"Nothing,"

Evie realized they were already driving up the main road to Villanueva.

Dee Dee she put out her cigarette in the car's ashtray. "Wow," she looked ahead. "I almost forgot how beautiful Villanueva was."

"Beautiful?" Villanueva was where Evie had to spend most of her waking hours. To her, Sea Street was beautiful, her cozy bed on a Sunday morning was beautiful, even the cheap looking, white plastic dome that capped the Pacific View Mall was beautiful. Any place was more beautiful to her than school.

"Yeah," Dee Dee said. "In D.F. you don't get all this scenery, the fields, the oak trees *y mas*. Everything is so cramped and on top of each other. When my mom used to bring us up here to the stables, we'd always pass Villanueva. Who knew we'd actually be going to school here, together."

"Not me," Evie admitted. "With my GPA, I'd have been lucky to get into a C school."

"So how did you get into Villy?"

"Lets' just say," Evie said. "My father donated a *lot* of dough."

"I'm guessing not the same kind he uses for his pan dulce," Dee Dee smiled.

"Exactly."

"Ay!" Dee Dee suddenly cried out. "*Dia de los Muertos*?"

"Huh?" Evie asked. "What are you talking about?"

"There." Dee Dee's pointed her chin towards the front of the school.

Evie looked up and recognized two seniors from Student Council. Amelia Cleary and Laura Simon. They were on the ledge of the school's main marquee, straightening out large the black block letters that announced Villanueva's upcoming annual Day of the Dead celebration and dance.

"Oh, yeah," Evie said, casually DOING SOMETHING. "We have it every year."

"I can't believe you're going to have a dance for Dia de los Muertos," Dee Dee laughed to herself. "Que chiste!"


"Why is that so funny?" Evie asked. "

"In Mexico we wouldn't have a school *dance* for Dia de los Muertos. It's sorta weird."

"Why is it so weird?" Evie felt defensive. "We know tradition, but that doesn't mean we don't know how to have fun."

Sure, Villanueva had its own spin of Dia de los Muertos and, maybe it wasn't the same way Dia de los Muertos was celebrated in Mexico. Students were encouraged to dress as their favorite dearly departed, which may be your beloved Great Grand Uncle Gilberto who died from heartbreak or a famous playwright who committed suicide after a

career killing review. But nobody at Villanueva was ever that romantic. Everyone just went as either Kurt Cobain or Marilyn Monroe.

"Of course," Dee Dee tried to back pedal. "It's just in Mexico, we have church ceremonies, processions...to *really* reflect on the holiday. By November 2nd, the streets were flooded with ~~cempasuchitl~~." 

"Zempa- what?" Evie asked.


"Marigolds," Dee Dee smiled as she pulled into the student parking lot.

Ay dios," Dee Dee said as she drove through the rows and rows of parked cars.

"We are never going to find a space."

It seemed true. Only a small percentage of Villanueva's student body had resident status, the rest were day students, like Evie and Dee Dee. So nearly every student who owned a car wanted the opportunity to flaunt "

"Welcome to California," Evie smirked. "Or should I say, welcome *back*."

Dee Dee finally found an empty spot and pulled in. But when Evie looked over, she saw that Dee Dee had parked her Beetle just four cars away,  from Mondo's Maurader and Alex's truck.

Mondo's car, as usual, hogged up two spaces, and he and Jose were leaning lazily against Alex's truck's flatbed talking to Alex. Evie immediately regretted that she hadn't returned Alex's calls. She could have used an ally right about then. He had called two more times on Sunday. He sounded so concerned that he had hurt her feelings, but her pride wouldn't allow her to phone him back. What could he possibly have said to her to make her feel better? He had really betrayed both her and Raquel at the welcome back

"Oh, Mondo, *please*," Evie struggled to get her backpack actually on her back.

"This is my old friend, Dee, I mean, Dela. She just moved back from Mexico City." She then looked over at Raquel and lowered her voice. "She's Raquel's friend too."

Raquel heard her name and popped her head up to look over Mondo's dashboard. She squinted her eyes and when she saw Dee Dee and Evie, she immediately got out of the Marauder.

"Yeah," Raquel slammed the car door with her hip. "She's old, but she ain't my friend."

"Raquel," Dee Dee tilted her head innocently. "What have I ever done to you?"

"Oh," Raquel said slowly. "So now my name is Raquel?"

"Oh, yeah," Jose laughed. "Mondo, check it out. Raquel used to be called Pansy!" He pinched Raquel's side. She slapped his hand away.

"Yeah," Mondo looked Raquel over with a half smile. "I can see that,"

"Dude," Jose laughed even harder. "That exactly what I said!"

"Shut up you two." Raquel's anger was igniting all over again. "You're such idiots." She turned her attention back to Dee Dee. "Dee Dee, don't you have a nail to file?"

"Raquel – " Evie started.

"Don't you have one to pull out of your ass?" Dee Dee shot back.

"Oooh," Mondo said. "These kitties have claws."

"Yeah," Jose rubbed his palms together. "Maybe they'll kiss when they make up!"

"That must have been some party Saturday night," Mondo looked over Dee Dee, again. "Sorry I missed it."

"You didn't miss nothing," Raquel put her arm around Jose protectively. "And there's nothing to see here. Just another sloppy Sang-*ho*."

"A *what*?" Dee Dee asked.

"Raquel," Evie finally stepped in. "Come on. Please. We used to all be friends."

"Used to *is* the key word," Raquel bit back.

"That's actually two words," Jose piped.

"How about these two words?" Dee Dee looked at Raquel. "Fuck *you*!"

"Fuck *me*?" Raquel spat. "Hey, you're the one waltzing in with your blonde locks and fake lenses pretending to be a friend. But you know what? We didn't miss you, Dee Dee, and *you* definitely don't need you."

"Well," Dee Dee looked Evie and said sarcastically. "Thanks for the welcome wagon. I can't say you didn't try." She looked at Alex and then huffed away.

"Dela," Alex called after her. "Wait!"

"Oh, don't try and be all Mr. Boy Scout," Raquel said. "What, you got a complimentary BJ when you took her out to Sea Street after the party?"

Mondo looked at Alex with a wide grin on his face. "Dude, you took *her* to Sea Street? After the party?" He held up his hand for a high five, but Alex didn't recipitate.

"Can you be any uncooler?" Alex looked at Raquel.

"Actually, yeah. I can," Raquel smiled. "You want to time me?" (KEEP. IT'S A CHALLENGE, TO ACCOMPLISH A FEAT IN A SHORT AMOUNT OF TIME)

You guys, stop it!" Evie yelled. "God! Why are you acting so lame?" She glared at Raquel and then looked after Dee Dee.

"Dela," She called out. "Wait up!"

"Yeah, Evie," Raquel smirked. "Go after your little best friend."

Evie looked at her. **Says something**

Evie held the straps of her backpack and sprinted after Dee Dee, past the final three rows of parked cars and up the **stone** steps of Del Norte Hall. By the time she had pushed by all the other students and reached Dee Dee at the top, she was out of breath.

"Dela," she huffed. "Wait. Please!"

Dee Dee turned around. Her face and neck was flushed and streaked with stress.

"What?" Dee Dee snapped.

"Well, for one thing," Puffs of air came out from Evie's nostrils. "You're going the wrong way. Unless your first class is Boys P.E."

"What?" Dee Dee looked around Del Norte Hall. She looked flustered and confused.

"Dee Dee," Evie started. "Look, try not to trip. Raquel's just being a bitch. You know it, I know it, *everybody* knows it." Evie was surprised how rational she sounded.

FEELING? "It's just, look, let me just take you the ad building. It's way on the other side, but I can help you get set up and we'll get you an official class schedule."

"Is there anyway I can officially not have Pansita in any of my classes?" Dee Dee exhaled. "In my life?"

"Dela, you gotta stop calling her that. You are only making it worse."

diverse student body that didn't tolerate intolerance," At least, that's what the catalog claimed.

During lunch time students were free to come and go as they please, but since Villanueva was tucked so deep in the east hills of the county with only one road that led to one town that led to one Wendy's, ~~so~~ most students just remained on campus. The 30 minute trip took too long for a 40 minute lunch period. And really, how many square shaped burgers can you eat in a school year?

Evie calculated, between her first class, Spanish II and fifth period lunch, she had exactly **238** minutes to organize and strategize. How could she continue to be friendly with Dee Dee while not causing more of a riff with Raquel? Dee Dee, her past, has caught up with Raquel, her present. Could they all have a future together? She looked up at the classroom's clock. She now had roughly 235 minutes. Evie yanked harder at her blue locks

"Hey, Evie" Tracy Milne, another sophomore who sat next to Evie in Spanish, "You fixed your hair."

"Oh, yeah," Evie replied. Tracy didn't say it looked good, just that it was "fixed."

"Who was the blonde girl I saw you with this morning?" Tracy started to open her book. "Is she new?"

"Oh, her name's Dee." Evie stopped herself. "I mean, Dela."

"Oh, is she like an exchange student or something? She looks like she's from Sweden or something." (YES, DEE DEE IS BLONDE, WANT TO WORK ON HER TAN...)

She found Dee Dee and Alex, waiting for her at her locker. She was relieved to see that Dee Dee didn't seem as jolted as she had in the parking lot that morning. She was chatting in her trademark enthusiasm while Alex was propped against the lockers. He had one thumb inside of his front side pocket, while his fingers hung out. He held his books in the other hand. With his body leaned towards Dee Dee and the big, lazy smile on his face, Alex seemed to be listening intently to Dee Dee. And it hit Evie. *Wow, he is into her.* Of course, Alex was into girls, and when he was with Mondo and Jose, as Evie had witnessed at the ~~Díaz~~ welcome back party, he could mack like crazy. But as long as she has known Alex, well, all of last school year and over the summer, he had never had a girlfriend. But now, seeing the way he was with Dee Dee, Evie thought maybe that was going to change. She really didn't know how she felt about that. *Maybe a little, and just a little, envious? DEFINE BETTER*

"Hey Blues," Alex straightened up as soon as Evie appeared. "We were just waiting for you. I still gotta drop my books off, but I'll see you two at the tree, yeah?"

"~~Claro~~, porque no?" It was Dee Dee who answered, as she squeezed his arm. "Thank you again, Alejandro, for all your help."

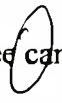
As Alex had walked away, Evie thought, *at the tree?* Was he kidding? Had he not witnessed what went down in the parking lot? God, Raquel was right. Dudes can be dense.

"So," Evie said as she turned the lock on her locker. "How's everything working out?"

"Yeah," Dee Dee put her forearm next to Evie's as they walked towards the cafeteria together. "I want to work on my tan. I am so pale! That's one thing I missed in D.F., going to the beach. Remember we went so much as kids?"

"Oh, yeah," Evie remembered. "And Raquel had that amazing beach umbrella? The orange one that her father got in Rosarito Beach?" Too soon for nostalgia?

Maybe it was. Dee Dee didn't respond, but rather, looked around the quad at the other students, taking it all in. **More than a handful of interested guys looked Dee Dee over while, Evie noticed, more than a handful of annoyed girlfriends tapped the back of their heads for realignment. CHECK**

"Hey Evie," Mark Torres greeted Evie, but had his eyes on Dee Dee  came up to them. Mark was a senior and rarely talked to Evie, but this afternoon had all the time in the world.

. "Is this your friend from Mexico?" He asked. "Alex mentioned her to me."

"Yeah, Dee -- Dela," Evie started. "But she's actually from here. She just lived in Mexico." She introduced Mark to Dee Dee. "This is Mark Torres. He runs the student TV show."

"Oh," Dee Dee smiled. "You have your own show?"

"Just a small one," Mark tried to play it down, but Evie could tell he was just bursting with pride. "It's local, but it's been the number one student run show in the tri-counties for the last two years. You should come on some time," Mark looked at Evie, uncomfortably. "You know, so, we could, uh, get her perspective on what it's like being a student from Mexico, that uh, used to live here."

You are so stretching.

So,” Mark continued. “Your name’s Deedela?”

“No,” Dee Dee laughed. “My name’s Dela. Dela de Lafuente.” Dee Dee looked over at Evie. “Evie just gets sloppy.”

“Yeah, well let me know if you need any help with anything, like a tour guide or something.”

“Oh,” Dee Dee squeezed his arm. “You are *too* sweet.”

appeared, but
Evie didn’t remember anyone being so willing and helpful when she was a freshman, navigating the overwhelmingly large the campus, which at the time, appeared. She quickly checked herself. *Don’t* hate!

As soon as they walked in the cafeteria, they were hit with the blow of central air and G^arated hip hop. Evie surveyed the scene. She didn’t see any of the other Flojos around and because it was a nice day (*duh*, California), most of the students were outside. That is except for one group -- the Sangros. They were at their usual table, at the far end of cafeteria, in the corner. DOING WHAT? Last year, Raquel had coined their table “the stable.” BECAUSE?

“Oh, God,” Evie lowered her voice to Dee Dee as they started to pass the Sangro Stable. “You have to watch these girls. They –”

“*Ay dios mio!*” Dee Dee suddenly cried out. “Alejandra?”

Huh?

“*Ay, chica!*” Alejandra looked over at Dee Dee and actually squealed. Then all seemingly six feet of her, rose from the stable. “*Que onda, mujer?!?*”

behavior?"

"What are you saying?" Raquel finally looked at Evie. "That he's stupid?"

"No, I'm just saying--"

"You know what, Evie?" Raquel clutched the strap of her shoulder bag tightly, disressing the leather even more. She finally faced Evie. "It doesn't even matter what you say because you've been *showing* what a lousy friend you really are...at the party, at your mother's little brunch and now, today. You show up to school with *her*? How do you think that makes me feel?"

"Raquel, she asked me if I needed a ride. What was I supposed to say? It's her first day of school and the way you just ^atook off yesterday, I wasn't about to ride with you and Mondo. You never called me back. I called you twice last night."

"Why should I have called you back?" Raquel huffed. "You know Evie, yesterday we agreed, *agreed*, that we would have each other's back. You said that she was not the friend we used to know. But as soon as she showed up at your house, batting her plastic blues, you fell for it. Just like always."

"Fell for *what* exactly?"

"Evie, she's been this way since we were little kids. She always had to get her way, she always had to have your attention. I was always the odd one out and you never cared."

"Oh my God, Raquel, what are you even saying? And even if that was true, we were just little kids. And if you wanna talk about the odd man out, I mean, what am I? It's alway you and Jose, or Jose and you. *Or*, it's you, Jose and Mondo and I'm just tagging along. Besides, you haven't even gotten to know Dee Dee."

blow, his
argument
flows very
well &
I love this

drove Raquel crazy. Just crazy and she immediately issued a threat to Jose, Evie and all the Flojos; If any of them even associated with Alejandra, as well as any of her fellow slutty Sangros, there would be consequences to be paid. And Evie, being a wide eyed Freshman, but more importantly, the best friend to Raquel, agreed to abide by such rules.

After their episode in the cafeteria, Raquel continued to not return any of Evie's calls or text messages. On Wednesday, Evie decided to call Raquel at home, on the land line, one last time. But she was curtly told by the Diazes housekeeper, Vanessa, that Raquel was *Occupada*.

Evie didn't quite believe her. She could hear Hidden Hand blasting in the background. Since when did Vanessa do her housecleaning to political heavy metal?

Evie also soon discovered that Raquel must have enforced a talk block on Jose and Mondo. Whenever Evie text messaged either, C St 2day?, her messages went unanswered. It was clear, so it seemed, that Evie was not welcome at Sea Street. It was odd for Evie not to be a part of something after school with her fellow Flojos. Sea Street was their hang out and after a few hours of surf lessons, she'd only have paddle ashore to deal with Raquel and her newly appointed velvet rope henchmen – Mondo and Jose.

"You can glance at Ms. Diaz, but do not speak, touch, or look her directly in the eyes. Keep your eyes drawn down at all times." Mucho bummer. HOW DOES EVIE FEEL?

Alex was not fazed by the Raquel induced drama. He was, however, concerned that Evie was going to give up her interest in learning how to surf.

"How are you ever gonna learn?" he asked on the phone one night that week. "You gonna be like everyone else in California, with the old school *Senior* Lopez pull

Evie shook her head quickly, "Me? With Alex? Please!"

"Evie," Dee Dee started cautiously. "Don't take this wrong..."

Uh oh. Here we go again.

"But have you had a boyfriend yet?"

"I've had boyfriends," Evie got more defensive.

"I'm not talking Dean Paulger and his Valentine that you got all gooey over (SPANISH) in Miss Temple's class."

"No," Evie said. "I know what you mean. I actually met a guy, just this summer and--"

"What guy?"

"Well, if you let me finish," Evie tried to think. What was ShaggyMA's real name? What *did* the MA stand for? For all she knew he could be Shaggy Married Already or Shaggy Mal Adjusted. Or worse, Shaggy Mammoth Monkey Ass. *Eew.*

"His name is Sean," Evie lied. "And he lives in Santa Cruz." There. Did that sound convincing?

"Santa Cruz?" Dee Dee's face turned sour. "Evie, that's, like, five hours north of here. How can he even be a real boyfriend?"

"Dela," Evie said. "You're one to talk. Rocio lives in friggin' D.F."

"Yes, but we were going to the same school long before I moved. We're totally devoted to one another and we've been intimate and we've already scheduled all our school vacations so we can be together. Have you even *been* with this *Sean*?" She threw Evie a quick glance.

"None of your business," Evie said.

"When we were kids, you and Raquel always tagged me as *la inocente*, guess I proved you two wrong," Dee Dee smiled smugly.

"Okay, Dee Dee. You've proven your point."

"You know Evie," Dee Dee continued. "I was talking to Alejandra and—"

"*What?*" As soon as she heard Alejandra's name, Evie became livid. "You were talking to her about *me*? Dee Dee, *don't*. You shouldn't be talking about me to anyone."

"Okay, okay..." Dee Dee heard Evie loud and clear. "You don't have to get your *chones* in a bunch!"

Evie looked out the car window. Why was it that everyone felt it was so utterly important to have *man* in your life? And that she was so into Alex, but why would they be secretive towards her?

* * *

Just to prove she wasn't so *posesiva*, Evie passed on Dee Dee's invitation to go swimming at her house.

"Are you sure you can't come?" Dee Dee asked again later on the phone. "I was thinking you could sleep over and we could make Elephant Eyes for breakfast. Like we used to do as kids."

"No, I can't." Evie lied. She didn't want Dee Dee thinking it mattered to her what she or Alex did on their own time, even though a breakfast of grilled toast with an egg fried in the middle was enticing. "I'm really tired. Besides, I owe some emails."

Okay, so his webiquette could use some work.

"How is she getting along at Villanueva?" Her mother put the clothes on the edge of the bed where she sat, uninvited.

"Who?" Evie asked.

"Dee Dee," her mother said.

"Oh, just fine," Evie answered.

And she meant it, in most definite sense of the word. Not fine as in "it'll do" or just some flip answer, but fine as in... *choice*, excellent. Dee Dee *was* getting on divinely at Villanueva. She had a renewed friendship with Evie, her stable of Sangros, Alex's attention, and she didn't even seem to give a rat's ass about Raquel or the inner turmoil she was causing for Evie because of it. Yeah, *que* fine.

But one thing that wasn't so fine, as Evie saw, was who had just entered the chat - LadyLeche. Ugh. Evie was a hater of sexed up screen names. Milk Lady? What did *that* mean?

LadyLeche: I got something to warm you up!

ShaggyMA: I bit u do

LadyLeche: U wanna bite me? Where?

"We should really have her over again." Evie's mother continued on about Dee Dee. "She's grown into one very lovely young woman."

"Uh huh," Evie said absentmindedly. She tried to regain Shaggy's attention.

RioChica: You should come to Sea St. You'd love it.

"You know," Evie's mother got up. "Sabrina called for you again. You should call her."

Evie rolled her eyes. The last thing she wanted to do was phone her sister and hear all about her super sized social life -- sorority sisters, love sick frat boys she's had to fend off and how she's oh so terrified that her precious GPA is dipping to a 3.8. She waited for Shaggy's response.

"Maybe I'll send her an email," Evie said.

"Evie," Her mother's voice lowered. "An email's not the same as a phone call. You should call your sister. She sounded a bit homesick."

Well, I'm home sick too. Sick of this home!

But ShaggyMA was already in the throes of LadyLeche's fleshy language. They both simultaneously logged off, indicating to Evie that they probably both took their conversation and libidos to a private chat room. Hmmph. So much for thinking his first love was the sea.

She felt **deflated**. She couldn't even attract the attention of an anonymous online male. Was her font style or size not alluring enough? Should she upgrade from Times New Roman to something with more cleavage and curves?

"Okay," Evie turned around to face her mother. "I'll give Sabrina a call."

"She'd like that," Her mother smiled as she finally left the room.

But just as Evie was about to log off, she heard her buddy list alert go off again. Shaggy? No. Evie was surprised to see it was SexyMexy08. What was Raquel doing on

her computer on a Friday night at, Evie looked at the screen's clock, 9:13 pm? She was always, *always*, with Jose on Fridays. It had been a full week of school and neither one of them had even said a word to each other, unless you count what happened at the salad bar. Evie was sure that Raquel knew that she was online. They were on each other's buddy lists. She waited. Maybe Raquel would send her a message? Most likely in all anger driven CAPS.

Evie waited and waited. Raquel did not send anything to her. Evie finally figured she would have to be the one to say hello. After all, they were on each other's buddies list for a reason

RioChica: Hi

Too Cas? She deleted the message and started over.

RioChica: Hello Raquel

Too formal. Maybe something more upbeat and silly? That'd be more Raquel's style. And after their argument on Monday, it might be a better ice breaker. She deleted and started over.

RioChica: Oh-lah, chica! Que onda?

Oh my God! What was she thinking? Super Sangro! She quickly deleted the whole thing. Sweet and sentimental was the way to go.

RioChica: Hey, Rocky, I miss you.

Remember the time--

But it was too late. Raquel logged off. Shit! Evie took too much time thinking for the perfect message. What was the quote Mrs. Cleary had used **in Comparative Lit?** “He who hesitates is...” Well, something about how wasting time was not good.

Evie turned off her computer and grabbed P.Kitty off the ground.

“It’s just you and me tonight, precious P.” Evie snuggled her face into his fluffy gray } fur. “Let’s go get us a snack.”

She carried P. Kitty and headed downstairs to find **anything that wasn’t a fruit or a vegetable** when she noticed Lindsay in the den. She was folding more laundry and watching her favorite TV show, *La Tormenta*.

“Hey, Lindsay,” Evie started. “You’re here late,” She looked at the TV. “What’s happening now?” She asked in reference to the night’s episode. Not that she was so interested, but it’s always polite to ask when you’re barging in on someone else’s *novela*.

“I’m taking tomorrow off and I want to get this done. Oh, wait. Shhhhh,” Lindsay didn’t take her eyes off the den’s TV screen – “Tell you at commercial.”

Evie moved some laundry to the side and stretched out on the couch. Great, even Lindsay had her own Friday night gig going.

“You’re not going out with your friends?” Lindsay finally asked when a commercial came on. It was with Esai Morales with “an important announcement

hooked up with Jose, right? Even if she did feel like the third wheel at times.

Evie gave up on P. Kitty's finicky mood and before she knew it, she, herself, was caught up in the torrent of *La Tormenta*.

The night's episode was about a beautiful, big breasted, wasp waisted brunette who had consistently ignored the advances of a dapper banker. He was the owner of pin striped suits and a thick, furry moustache. He had offered her his unconditional love, sparkling jewels and even a house by the sea, but the beautiful, big breasted, wasp waisted brunette wasn't interest in any of it or him. One night the dapper banker was alone, drinking sherry in front of the grand fireplace of his mansion. He was distraught that he would never win the love from the beautiful, big breasted, wasp waisted brunette but then, all of a sudden there was a tap at his door. What was this? Was it she, the beautiful big breasted wasp waisted brunette? No, it was a new neighbor who has just moved in down the road. She was a beautiful, big breasted, wasp waisted blonde and she needed help. His help. She couldn't light her pilot light on her new stove. '*Puedes ayudar con mi fuego?*' she asked in husky spanish. By the end of the episode, the dapper banker with the moustache and the pin striped suits had fallen head over heels in love with the beautiful, big breasted, wasp waisted blonde. And the beautiful, big breasted, wasp waisted brunette? She was forever alone...to lead the life of an old maid, with her mean, unattentive cat.

"Ay," Lindsay sobbed. "*La tormenta...*"

Evie looked up at Lindsay, then down at P. Kitty

"Mom!" she cried out in a panic. "Can you drop me off at Dee Dee's?"

When they were all kids, the de LaFuentes's house was on the end of Camino del Rio, right between the Gomezes and the Diazes. But now four years later, the de LaFuente's new home was on Calle Cortez, a somewhat posher street in Rio Estates. The home addresses were actually hand painted on oval ceramic plates and two large Royal Palms, at the street entrance, made for a grand introduction to the tree lined cul de sac.

Evie's mother pulled up to the de LaFuentes house where a number of shiny late model cars were already parked.

"Well," Her mother looked up in surprised envy. "I know Frank had done well in D.F., but *this* well?"

She was right. The de LaFuentes new home was large, with two prestigious columns on each side of a **custom hand carved** front door. In the middle of their circular brick drive way, spotlights showcased the family namesake, a fountain, three tiered with flowing water. The de LaFuente's former house, like the Diazes and Gomezes, had been painted adobe beige, but now their new home was a light peach stucco, fresh and different than all the other houses. There was also enough foliage on the front lawn to recreate an entire native Mexican desert. From full sized Agave plants to over sized (**type?**) cacti still packed in wooden shipping crates, the plans for a future landscaping extravaganza were definitely in the works.

"This must all be Graciela's doing," Evie's mother assumed with a slight air of disapproval. "Margaret was never so show offy with appearances. All this desert stuff... didn't Frank say she was from the North?"

"I dunno," Evie answered. She could really care less. Her mother was getting wound over a few measly plants?

Because there wasn't any room in the driveway to park her Saab, Evie's mother ending up parking down the slope on Calle Cortez. She looked up at the de LaFuente's home again and turned off the engine. "Maybe I should go in a say hello," she thought out loud. "I haven't really talked to Frank since my brunch."

"Mom, *no*." Evie pleaded. She knew her mother just wanted to check out their new digs. Besides, she didn't want her to know that Dee Dee's parents were out for the evening. "I'm already late. Please, can't I just have some time with Dee Dee? By myself?"

"Okay, Evie." Her mother put her key back in the ignition "Okay."

Evie grabbed her overnight bag and sprinted up to the house as quick as her Havianas could take her, before her mother could change her mind.

The de LaFuentes doorbell announced Evie's arrival with the somber chimes of **church bells**. Moments later, a young woman in jeans and a Garfield sweatshirt opened the door. She was in her mid twenties and Evie assumed she was the de LaFuentes housekeeper.

"Hi," Evie greeted. "I'm here to see Dee Dee?"

"Quien?" The woman's eyebrows creased downward.

"Oh," Evie corrected herself. "Dela."

"Oh, *si*," the young woman nodded as she let Evie in. "Soy Marcela."

Evie soon learned that Marcela didn't speak much English. But she didn't really

Denise and Alejandra.

There was Fabby, who Raquel had nicknamed Flappy, due to her flappy middle aged lady arms, sitting on the edge of the pool. Charlene, who Evie thought was the prettiest Flojo with her long hair and long legs, was kicking it on the top step of the pool; and there was Denise, whose father was a plastic surgeon in Mexico, floating on, appropriately, a plastic purple float. Alejandra was just entering the pool house. Evie felt her mouth drop **to the concrete**. Her first instinct was to sneak back into the house, call her mother and make her drive back and pick her up as fast as her speedometer allowed.

But it was too late. Dee Dee had already seen her and waved her outside.

“Evie!” She called out. “You came! Come join the party!”

“Well, I just came by to—” Evie started. But it was no use. She couldn’t think of a reasonable excuse quick enough. And to her surprise, Marcela had already shut the sliding door closed and pulled the blinds back in place.

Dee Dee sauntered over and like all the other Sangros, she was wearing a micro bikini (hers, hot pink) and large gold hoop earrings. The suit was so small, practically child size, and for a minute Evie thought that maybe it was the same Garanimals bathing suit that Dee Dee had worn as a kid.

“*Mira*,” Dee Dee held up a bottle in a paper bag and smiled slyly. “Denise brought some Silver Patron. You want a shot?”

“Uh, not really.” Evie could detect a tinge of liquor on Dee Dee’s breath. “I really can’t stay long.”

Dee Dee looked over at Evie’s Weekender bag and tugged on the canvas strap. “But what’s all this for? Aren’t you staying over?”

“Well...” What could she say? Her mother had already left.

“I thought Alex was here?” Evie scratched the side of her neck nervously and looked around.

“He is. There, with Charlene,” Dee Dee motioned with her chin. “She can’t swim either.” Alex was in the shallow end of the pool with Charlene who wore a metallic gold bikini, Metallic gold? It looked like it belonged more in a Mystikal video than in a Rio Estates backyard pool party. Charlene flailed about in the water as Alex desperately tried to balance her with his arms under her back. Evie did a double take. Wow, Katie’s C-cups overfloweth. And Alex? His neck was bright pink. That’s one thing that Evie knew about Alex, When he got nervous, his neck turned the color of a Barbie convertible.

“Nice suit. Flojo,” Alejandra approached Evie and Dee Dee. She was swirling the ice in her Styrofoam cup.

Evie instantly felt dwarfed between the towering, platform heeled Dee Dee and Alejandra. Was this a bathing segment of a beauty pageant? Evie looked down and wished she had put on her nicer flojos. She even noticed that the blue nail polish on her toes was flaking off. Maybe she was truly a Flojo -- too lazy to even touch up her toes. Flojo. Sigh. She could only imagine how Raquel would react in the same situation.

“Now you be nice,” Dee Dee reprimanded Alejandra with a sideways glance. “This is my house, and my friend.” She threw her arm around Evie. The half dozen or so thin gold bracelets clinked on her wrist. “I told you that Evie’s been my best friend since we were little kids. My very, *werry* best friend.” Dee Dee cooed in baby voice. She pressed her cheek against Evie’s. Was it the Patron that made Dee Dee lay it on so thick? All Evie could do was smile uncomfortably. Okay, so Dee Dee *did* have Evie’s back, but

THIS SCENE: EVIE AND THE SANGROS SHARE THE NIGHT TOGETHER.
THIS IS THE NIGHT THEY "CLICK." A LOT OF TALK ABOUT BOY⁵, ALEX, A
LITTLE BIT ABOUT RAQUEL.

Notes: At first Evie couldn't believe that she was spending an entire Friday night
with Sangros. Sblita: Alex had already left.

Friday night was usually the Flojo night to chill. Just to kick back in front of
Raquel's plasma screen or even by Evie's pool.

But after a while Evie started to actually have fun. **Soon enough everyone's
guards were dropped and judgements were tossed aside.** Girls, no matter what kind of
bathing suits they wore, were girls. Soon enough they were all yelling and laughing,
filling up Zip Loc baggies with water from the kitchen sink or the garden hose and
slamming them at one another. () started dunking heads in the pool and () showed off her
pathetic athleticism with a belly flops from the diving board.

They compared tattoos, navel rings and, as two of the Sangros peeled off their
bikini tops, fearlessness. Yes, just typical girls, as a topless Alejandra and Denise grabbed
hands, screamed and jumped into the pool together. **SHOW THIS**

The next afternoon all the girls are in Dee Dee's room.

It's a typical lazy Saturday afternoon. Nobody awoke until noon and nobody got out of bed until after 1pm. By 3pm everyone was still lounging in their matching cotton camisoles and boy bottoms, enjoying the music of Maldita (iPod), the saga of Laguna Beach (TiVo) and the post consumption of Elephant Eyes (DiVoured). — 2 Mike?

"I can't believe I ate three Eyes," Evie put her fist to her chest and let out a long, low belch. It was less out of necessity and more to shock the room.

Dee Dee crinkled her nose and waved her hand in front of her face. "Evie, gross! How can I work under these polluted conditions?"

"Polluted?" Evie asked. "You're the one who lived in D.F. You should be used to dirty air."

"And L.A. isn't polluted?" Alejandra took offense.

"We don't *live* in L.A.," Evie reminded her. "This is Rio Esates."

"Yes," Alejandra said with an air of arrogance. "Unfortunately."

Amid spiral notebooks, loose papers and a few school books, Dee Dee lay across her chenille bedspread, re-doing Evie's Spanish homework. That was one of the perks of having Dee Dee back from Mexico. Not only did Evie get another best friend, but she got a best friend who had similar enough handwriting to hers and superior conjugation skills to whip through her Spanish II homework.

"Hey," Dee Dee asked Denise who was sitting on the carpet painting her toe nails. "Would I use *por* or *para* in this sentence?" She read the sentence outloud.

pool? “Yeah, I guess I am in need of a paint job. “

“No,” Denise laughed when she saw Evie looking at her feet. “She means your hair.”

“My hair?” Evie touched the side her head as she looked at herself in Dee Dee’s vanity mirror. Her hair had been blue for a few weeks and she had a good amount of black roots showing, but with all the Raquel and Flojo drama she hadn’t really thought about her appearance. She turned her head to one side. “I hadn’t really noticed.”

“Well, it’s *very* noticeable,” Alejandra finally moved away from the lipsticks and went over to Evie. She looked at her through the mirror. “How about not just a touch up but something completely cool and *en la moda*?”

“*En la moda*?” Evie asked. She didn’t like the sound of that. “I can tell you right off I am *not* getting braid extensions.”

“No,” Alejandra slapped her hand in the air. “We’re are not talking those cheap *trenzas* that turistas get in Acapulco.” She fluffed the top of Evie’s hair. “But what if you went with a different color, right, Dela?”

“Like *what*?” Evie became more suspicious.

“Some highlights?” Dee Dee offered cheerfully.

“*No.*” Evie pulled her head away from both Alejandra and Dee Dee. “No way,” At Villanueva, highlights were the bona fide mark of a Sangro. It was one thing getting to know the Sangros, accepting the Sangros, but to look like one of them. No way. She had her own style, her own fashion sense, besides, Raquel would have a fit and really never speak to Evie again. “I’m *not* going blonde. You gotta be kidding.”

“Not really blonde,” Dee Dee assured her. “We could dye your hair back to

Which were the golden words? Evie wondered. 'Dee Dee did it' or "It was Dee Dee's idea?" She would definitely make a note of that. *But Dee Dee thought it would be okay to take your Saab to Tijuana, so we could go night clubbing, and then when we met those men, they were just so nice that we decided to share a hotel room with them.*

"You know," Evie's mother smoothed her own damp hair. "I used to be blonde."

"I remember Dad saying something like that." Evie yawned again. "I don't think I've seen any pictures of you with blonde hair."

"Evie," Her mother tapped under Evie's chin. "Cover your mouth when you yawn." She went on. "It was during my Teena Marie phase, just for a short time. God, maybe I should go back to blonde. What do you think, Linds?" She looked at her reflection from the kitchen cupboard's glass door.

"Oh, si, *Senora*," Lindsay agreed as she brought Evie a small glass of orange juice. "You would look even *mas linda*."

Evie threw Lindsay a look. *God, can you be anymore mas falsa?/hdbladora hipicritora?*

But Lindsay just innocently smiled back. Apparently she could be.

With her mother's enthusiastic nod of approval, Evie felt even more unsure about her new hair color. The last you wanted was your own mother biting/lifting your style. What if her mother *did* dye her hair blonde? What was next? Entry to the Mother and Daughter Look Alike Contest at the County Fair?

As Evie went through her closet in search of clothes so she could showcase her new look, she couldn't help, in the back of her mind, wonder what the other Flojos would

→ T.M. was blonde?

→ NOT needed, 4?

think of her hair, especially Raquel. At Villanueva, Evie's always been known as her little shadow or, as of late, the freaky Flojo with the blue hair. Still, what better day than a Monday to introduce individualism/liberation, right? After all, she wasn't bland blonde or just blonde blonde like Dee Dee and the Sangros, she was *Honey Blonde*.

Alex was the first Flojo to see Evie. She and Dee Dee walked up behind him while he was at his locker and Dee Dee covered his eyes with her hands.

"Can you guess what's behind Door Number One?" She laughed in his ear.

"Hey..." Alex slowly turned around.

Dee Dee uncovered his eyes and Alex paused for a moment when he looked at Evie. His face crinkled in disapproval. "What did you do to your hair?"

Not the reaction she had hoped for.

"*Que quapa, no?*" Dee Dee put one hand on her hip like a game show model and used the other to display Evie, as if she was a brand new Chrysler up for grabs.

"I dunno," Alex continued to look Evie over. "But if that was the look you were trying for."

Trying for? As if Evie was attempting to do something but didn't quite accomplish it?

"It *was* the look I was trying for," Evie snapped. "And the one I achieved."

"Don't trip, Eves." Alex frowned. "Dee Dee just asked me a question."

"And I just gave you an answer," Evie was embarrassed, but didn't want to show it.

"What's up with all the changes?" Alex looked at Evie's ears. Sure, she had *las*

E-vie!" Her mother called from downstairs, announcing that Dee Dee had finally arrived.

Evie didn't want to give Alex's guilt tripping another thought. She tossed her cell back in her purse, slipped on Havaianas and grabbed her Weekender to meet Dee Dee downstairs.

"Hola, Vicki," Dee Dee hugged Evie's mother as she entered the Gomezes foyer. Dee Dee looked up at Evie who was coming down the stairs. "Ay, lo siento, Evelina! Rocio kept me on the phone and I couldn't switch over to my cell—"

"Yeah, yeah." Evie stopped her before she could go on.

"How are you, *mi'ja*?" Evie's mother kissed Dee Dee's cheek and rubbed her arm. "Evie tells me you're doing just great at school."

"Mom," Evie tilted her head in annoyance. "She wants to be called Dela. I've told you that."

"Oh," Evie's mother looked embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Dela."

"It's no big deal, not with you anyway, Vicki." Dee Dee put her arm around Evie. "But, yes. Evie's been a big help at school and I've already made a ton of new friends, *otras chicas* from Mexico, too."

"Oh, how wonderful." Evie's mother smiled. "Is that who you're watching videos with tonight?"

"Uh huh," Dee Dee said. "But it's gonna be an early night, because we all have to study tomorrow. Plus, they live on campus and they have to be back at school by 9pm."

"Oh, of course." Evie's mother looked completely charmed. Good girls who study and have an early curfew -- what mother wouldn't want friends like that for her daughter?

"Is Raquel also going?"

"Oh, definitely," Dee Dee said quickly. "Right Evie?"

"Uh," Evie was taken by surprise. "Yeah."

"And Gracie's gonna order in from California Pizza Chicken," Dee Dee added.

"Now *that* sounds like a nice night," Evie's mother looked tremendously pleased.

As Evie and Dee Dee left the house and got into the Beetle, Evie turned to Dee Dee.

"Why did you tell my mom that Raquel was coming?" Evie asked.

"Oh, that was just to throw her off," Dee Dee lit up a cigarette, before starting up her car. "Don't you want her thinking that everything is all good and regular, like the old days?"

"I guess," Evie felt weird. It was one thing for her to lie to her mother, but awkward to hear someone else do so, especially Dee Dee. "So, are we going to the Alejandra's dorm? Are we gonna hang out there?"

"No." Dee Dee started to pull out of the Gomezes drive way. "Didn't you hear Ally? Weren't you paying attention? She wants to celebrate, something special."

"Which is?"

"You'll see." Dee Dee smiled slyly as she drove onto Camino del Rio.

The next thing Evie knew they were soon on Ventura Road, the main highway

“Dee Dee,” Evie looked around. She felt like an eyesore with her LeSport Weekender and Havaianas among all the adult like Vuitton luggage and Prada pumps. “This place is for high rollers. I came here for my cousin’s wedding and rooms were expensive. My dad had a fit.”

“Yeah, it *is* pricey,” Dee Dee agreed casually. “Specially the Presidential Suite.”

“The *Presidential* Suite?”

“Yeah, it’s over five grand.”

“*What?*” Evie balked. “How do you know that?”

But Dee Dee didn’t respond. She had already seen Alejandra and the girls. She waved them over.

“Hola, *clicas!*” Alejandra kissed both Dee Dee and Evie on their cheeks. “We just got here, too.”

“Yeah,” Denise said. “Basilio went to get another golf cart for us.”

“Golf ⁰cart?” Evie laughed. “What, we gonna do a ten hole?”

But no one paid attention...to the supposed guest of honor.

“Oh, there he is,” Alejandra looked over and called out. “Hola Basilio! *Que onda, chulo?*”

Chulo?

Basilio was an old man. Make that, a very old man. Small, wrinkled, and missing a row of front teeth as well as a row of acrylic hair from the air piece he wore on his head. He pulled up in a golf cart, followed by another cart behind him. It was driven by another man, seemingly in his early thirties and with, seemingly, all his own teeth.

“*Bueno, bueno,*” Basilio rubbed his hands together in excited nervousness as he

stepped out of the cart.

"You have the room for us?" Alejandra asked.

"*Si, si,*" He wiped his forehead and looked over at the blonde team of valet parkers. "*Pero,* we can't have any problems. Not like last time."

"Now, Basilio," Alejandra gave him a sideways glance and put her arm around him. His perspiring face came up to her breasts. "What have I told you? That was *not* my fault and I told you my father would pay for it and didn't he? Didn't he pay for the entire hot tub?"

"*Si, si,* I know. *Pero, mis jefes,*" He looked over again at the main entrance of the Inn. "I can't have any problems."

"Oh, Basilio," Alejandra smoothed the few strands of his hair that lay across his furrowed brow and looked right at him. "Am I a trouble maker? Do I cause problems? Should we all just go home now?"

Basilio looked alarmed. "*Ay* no. No, Alejandra. Here, follow me. I have your room ready."

"El Suite Presidente?" Alejandra asked.

"*Si, claro.*"

Basilio got in a golf cart and Alejandra and Denise and Fabby got in with him.

"Come on," Charlene said to Dee Dee and Evie, as she got on the second cart.

Both carts puttled slowly down the narrow strip of asphalt, a private employee's road. They passed the main restaurant, one of the Inn's olympic sized swimming pools, the () tennis courts and the renowned Chumash Indian sweat house. They finally reached the last building, separate from the rest of the Inn. It was ^a two story, Hacienda style

bungalow, painted off white with green shutters on every window.

“Oh,” Dee Dee opened her mouth in awe. “It is so cute! Oh my god, Como Guanajato!”

“Yeah,” Denise said. “It may look all cute on the outside, but inside it’s laid.”

Basilio got off his golf cart and walked up stairs to the suite. All the girls followed.

“*Mira,*” Basilio handed Alejandra a set of plastic cards. “Here are the keys. Two extra for your sisters.” He looked over at Fabby and Charlene.

“Oh, you are a doll,” Alejandra cooed. “Too sweet for words SPANISH Oye, mi’jo, one last thing...”

“Si?” Basilio asked.

“This time, can you make *sure* you keep the buckets of **champagne coming?** Last time we had to wait.

Si, si.”

“And a late check out,” Charlene added as took one of the cards and let herself in the suite. “We don’t wanna be rushed out of here tomorrow.”

As soon as Basilio left, Alejandra took charge of the multi room suite. She immediately pulled the cord of the overhead fan and pulled back the heavy plush drapes of the main french doors. The doors let out unto a private terrace, incased with a lattice/trellis of blooming dark red bougeanvilla → ?

“Ooh,” Alejandra stepped out to the terrace and Evie followed her. Below them was a spectacular view of the sleepy Ojai Valley and above, a blanket of twinkling stars

spread out across the jet black sky. "I might just sleep out here," Alejandra inhaled deeply and stretched her arms out. "Como naturaleza! SPANISH"

"Not me," Fabby did something. "I'm gonna sleep in the meditation loft."

"If anything," Denise started. "Evelina should sleep up there."

"Up where?" Evie walked back into the main suite.

"There," Denise pointed to a recessed enclave/alcove, above the living room. A ladder, made of thick tree limbs tied at the joints led up to the private sleeping area. There were a dozen or so () candles ready to be lit and pillows, the color of California poppies, tossed about carefully to present that careless look.

Fabby picked up the cordless phone. "I'm going to order an in-room massage," She grabbed the service list off the () coffee table. "with a Pixie Tangerine body scrub."

"We're already in October," Denise opened up the fully stocked liquor cabinet, behind a mahogany wood bar that had with three cushioned stools. "They won't have Pixie Tangerine."

"So, what would they have?" Fabby looked over the in-room service list.

"Melon Pumpkin," Alejandra answered as if being the one to know all the Inn's information had become tiresome for her. "Hey," she looked at Evie and Dee Dee. "Do you guys wanna see the master bathroom? It's got a sunken bath tub and a snail shell shower that you won't believe."

"Wait, wait," Evie was feeling overwhelmed. "How did you get this hook up? With Basilio?"

"Yeah," Dee Dee said. "I'm curious as well."

"Oh," Alejandra gave a deceptive grin. "I've got my ways..."

Evie wondered if Raquel knew that Mondo dealt dope with the Sangros. Well, business is business, and dealers don't discriminate.

Dee Dee checked her phone.

"*Dela*," Alejandra whined. "Que rude! You are here, with us. Aren't you going to party with us?"

"I usually talk to Rocio on the weekends," Dee Dee said. "And I don't want to miss his call."

"You know," Alejandra started to roll herself a joint. "You gotta get yourself a side kick.

"Why?" Dee Dee said. "I like my phone."

"No, a *side kick*," Alejandra said ~~in~~ *un sancho*. "This 'Novio en D.F.' bit is dry already."

"But I love Rocio," Dee Dee protested. "Is it our fault that he is so far away?"

"It's nobody's fault," Fabby said. "But come on, be realistic."

"Yeah, it's not about love, *Dela*," Denise agreed. "You don't think he's getting action while you're out here?"

"*What?*" Dee was horrified at the thought.

"Pu-leeze."

Dee Dee looked around the suite nervously. "Evie, do you mind if I go up to the mediation loft? I'm gonna call him."

"Oh, brother!"

"Yeah, sure," Evie said. "I don't care. Just move my bags and stuff to the side."

Dee Dee climbed up the branch ladder into the loft. Soon she was out of sight, but

The girls got up and went their separate ways.

Evie grabbed her Weekender and trudged up to the meditative loft. Dee Dee was passed out on the luxury sleeping pad. She was still in her clothes and still holding on to the phone. God, she was getting carried away.

Evie went through her bag looking for her camisole to change into when she noticed the red light on her cell phone was blinking. God, she hoped it wasn't her mother. She flipped open her phone and saw it was Alex. He had sent her a text message just a few minutes earlier. Strange, it was already after midnight and he usually goes to bed early the night before DP. What, more guilt tripping about her not going surfing? She flipped open her phone to read his text.

U up?

She wrote back, Ys.

A few minutes later, he texted back.

Srry abot 2nte. U mad?

She responded. No, nt really.

Can i make it up 2 u?

Evie was confused. What?

Alex texted again. i wnt 2 make it up 2 u,

She texted back. don't worry. No problem.

She tossed her phone on the sleeping pad and started to change. She was surprised to see the cell's red light blinking.

Yr not mad at me?

Thght u fell aslp.

She wrote back: No.

No? God, can't she be a little bit more creative?

Alex: I dn't like fightin w/ u

Evie: Me 2.

Alex: Wsh u wre goin tmorrw

Evie: Me 2, sriry.

Evie chest suddenly felt warm. It tingled. He wished he could *be with her*. He wants to be with her...tomorrow. Wait, was she reading too much into his texts? Had he ever been this way with her before? She tried to think. Alex has always been super nice and sweet to her, but he was that way with everyone. He was that way, she noticed, with Dee. Sigh. She felt a bit dizzy with nausea. Maybe she was reading too much into his words?

Alex: Ill cll aftr DP

Evie: O K

Alex: Sleep sweet...Evelina.

Sleep sweet? Alex had never, *ever*, said (or in this case, texted) anything like that to her. And he called her Evelina. Was he just hiding behind the security of a text messaging? Behind the safety of the simple numbers, symbols and letters from his cell phone?

Evie's head was light and her mouth felt dry. Alex? *Alex*? She started to think about him. **Examples.**

Wow, Alex *could* be the one. How about *that*? Evie felt like her whole face was

going to crack with excitement.

She turned to her other side and held her cell phone in her hands. The back screen lit up, creating a red glow in the darkness of the, what, 400, 500 thread count, sheets. She went through their message history, reading and re-reading what he had typed to her.

Wsh u wr gng tmrw

I wnt 2 mk it up 2

In bed.

Bed. She wasn't imagining it. She reread his last text.

Sleep sweet.

No text short hand with the latter. He wanted to be clear and direct with her. He wanted her to sleep sweet. She snapped her phone shut and turn to her side. She held her phone close her chest and closed her eyes. She would sleep sweet. Alex was into her and maybe, yes, she could be into him too.

* * *

It was already in the afternoon, right after Dee Dee had just dropped her off after their night at the Ojai Inn when Alex phoned. Her cell rang as she walked across the drive way to her house.

"Hey," she said, holding her phone between her left cheek and left shoulder. She was juggling her suede shoulder bag, her Weekender and all the things she brought back with her from the Ojai Valley Inn Gift shop: body salts with lavender and vanilla, (58 dollars) oiled scented candles with blown glass holder (95 dollars). The wonderful feeling that Alex may possibly be into her? (*priceless!*).

"Hello?" Alex asked again. Just his voice suddenly excited her. How did *this* happen? He used to be just Alex," now he was *Alex*.

"Hey..." Evie breathed eagerly into the phone. She was still on a high from his texting from the night before. She reread the text history between them about a million more times.

"I can't -- you," Alex said. "You keep fading -- and out."

"What?"

"I —you. Fading in – out."

Great. After checking and rechecking her phone all morning and afternoon he finally called and they can't hear each other.

"Let me call you from the house line," she told him as she started to unlock her front door. "I'll call you right back."

"What?" he asked.

"I'll call you right back."

"What – say?"

Grrrr!

"I call back, NOW!" Evie was frustrated, to say the least.

Evie went inside her house and ran upstairs to her room. She shut the door behind

her.

"Evie, are you home?" It was her mother, asking from her bedroom.

"Yeah. She threw her Weekender and all the **bags** on the carpet. Her phone was missing from it's cradle. "I'll be out in a sec."

"Did you have fun?" Her mother was now coming down the hall.

"Uh huh," Evie answered. She looked around for her cordless phone.

"Evie," her mother stood on the other side of the closed door. "Why are you being so evasive? Did you color your hair again?"

"No," Evie called out. "You can come in. I'm just looking for my phone."

Her mother opened the door and came in. She immediately noticed the bag from the Ojai Inn. "What is all this?"

Shit.

"Oh," Evie tried to sound nonchalant. "Dee Dee gave it to me."

"Dee Dee?" Her mother opened the bag and looked over the items.

"Yeah," Evie went on. "She went with Graciela and... it was just a lot that she didn't want." Where was her cordless?

"Wow," her mother held up the jar and read the label. "That was very generous of her. You know this mud is from the Dead Sea, from Israel. It's very expensive."

"Uh huh. I guess."

"You know," her mother said. "I think it's really great you are making new friends."

"Yeah, me too." Evie continued to search for the cordless.

"Not that I have any problem with Raquel." Her mother opened a tube of organic carrot cream and tried it on her hands. "And you know I just adore Alex."

Yeah, me too mom. Now help me find the phone so I can adore him some more!

"Do you know where my cordless is?" Evie asked.

"How would I know where your phone is?" She put the tube back in the bag and

GREAT
Phon 8

looked around. "How would you know where anything is in this room?"

"Mom, *Please*. Evie begged. "Help me find the phone. I have to make a major important call."

"A major important call? Evie, you've been with all your girlfriends all night. Who could you possibly need to call so urgently?"

"Mom," Evie was on the verge of an emotional breakdown. She could not find the landline and Alex was waiting. "Where is my cordless?!"

Evie went into the bathroom and looked around. She yanked up her vintage Senor Lopez from the floor, scaring poor P. Kitty, who was napping under it. He shrieked away in terror.

"Ooh," Evie looked after him. "Sorry, P.!"

"Oh," Her mother started. "It's Lindsay's birthday tomorrow. Did you know that?"

"Nuh uh." Evie came out of the bathroom. *Where* was her phone?

"Your dad and I want to take her dinner tonight," her mother went on. "You need to come."

"Okay," Evie rummaged through the piles of clothes strewn about her bedroom floor. "I'll be there." She lifted her Hawaiian fabric pillows and Dean Miller Baja Trip sheets. Still no phone.

Her mother finally chipped in and *finally* lifted up some spiral notebooks. And yes, the cordless phone was under one of them.

"Of course," her mother held the receiver out to Evie. "It would be here, under your notebooks. You never touch *them*."

"Okay, mom," Evie grabbed the phone eagerly. "I have to make a call."

"Okay, okay, Evie," her mother held her hands up, feigning surrender.

"Remember, no plans tonight. Lindsay's husband and sister are coming also."

"Okay, okay." Evie held the phone to her side and walked her mother out. As soon as she was out of her bedroom, she shut the door behind her.

Evie grabbed her pillows off the floor and slipped her flojos off. She propped the pillows against her headboard and lay back onto them. She wanted everything to be perfect when she returned Alex's call. It was going to be their first conversation since their sexy/texty from the night before, since Alex confessed his true feelings. Or, more appropriately, cnfssd hs tru feelins?

She sped dial his number. But now his line was () busy. *Busy?* On a cell? Maybe Alex was calling her?

When she clicked off, she saw he had just left her a message. She immediately called him back, but got his voice mail. And cell where supposed to *assist* with communication? Normally, not reaching Alex wouldn't be such a big deal. Evie would just catch up with him at school on Monday, but now she had to hear his voice.

The next best thing? She listened to his message.

Hey, Eves, I thought -- call -- right back. Anyway, -- leave with -- dad. So...I guess -- I try -- later.

Later? Evie cringed. She replayed the message. It was so hard to make out what he was saying. What was up with his phone? Did he mean later as in later *that* night? But she had to go to dinner with her family...she would miss his call! Maybe he meant later, as in *later* over the weekend? Or maybe he meant much later? As in Monday, at school?

She tossed her cell phone on her bed and turned to her side. She felt dizzy with agony. She desperately wanted to talk with Alex. It had been so terribly long, she grabbed her cell phone again and looked at the time, since she had last spoken with him. But she didn't want to call him *again*. She refused to appear so needy. That's one thing she learned from the girls, she would have to wait, and wait until he called back, *later*.

Alex, unfortunately, didn't call back the whole rest of the afternoon. And then, double unfortunately, Evie had to leave with her family to celebrate Lindsay's birthday. As she and her parents drove to the Elephant Bar to meet Lindsay and her husband Jack and her sister Eileen, Evie checked her phone. What, Evie wondered did people do before cell phones? When they were expecting a very important phone call. Actually *wait* until they returned home?

At the Elephant Bar, it was difficult for Evie to be in a celebratory spirit, even with Lindsay, who in a great mood for someone, as she playfully cried on Jack's shoulder, who was turning sixty three years old. "Una vieja!"

Reads odd;
Remember?

"Mi'ja," Lindsay's husband, Jack, said to Evie. "Lindsay tells me your *amigita*, Dee Dee, is back. How nice for you. I bet you missed her."

"Oh, yeah," was all Evie could say.

"I remember when all you were little girls, you, Dee Dee and Raquel. You were the best of friends."

Yeah, we still are."

Seeing the other couples in the restaurant with their hands intertwined and exchanging romantic glances with each other, made Evie ache. She looked at her phone.

Alex *still* hadn't called.

"Evie," Her mother firmly tapped her foot under the table. "*Put* your phone away. You are being rude."

Rude? And kicking someone in public wasn't?

Nonetheless, Evie reluctantly put her phone down, but didn't put it away. She simply put it on vibrate and discreetly placed it between her legs. Sangro Rule Number Two, *Get it where you can.*

Funny!

* * *

The next afternoon, Sunday, Evie went over to Dee Dee's to lay out by the pool. Saturday's weather had been disappointingly overcast and to make up for precious lost tanning time, she, as well as the Sangros *met* up at Dee Dee's. The end of every chaise lounge was pointed directly toward the sun, as if such positioning would help them obtain a *tan* faster.

"What did you do last night?" Dee Dee asked Evie. The straps of *her* bikini top was untied and hung at her sides.

"It was Lindsay's birthday," Evie told her. She kept her eyes closed under her sunglasses. "We all went to the Elephant Bar." She couldn't stop thinking about Alex. He still hadn't called her back and it really bothered her.

Maybe 'later' meant 'later,' as in *after* the weekend? She was going crazy interpreting his cryptic messages. Why couldn't he just be more direct? 'I will call you at 9:15 pm, tonight.' And then he would have done so and that would have been that. Done

Evie leaned up from her chaise and checked her cell.

“What’s with you?” Dee Dee shaded her eyes as she looked over at Evie. “You’ve been checking your phone all day.”

“Maybe she’s waiting for Lindsay to call her,” Charlene rolled her eyes.

Yeah,” Denise said dryly. “They’re gonna hit the night clubs later tonight.”

“Hey,” Alejandra said. “At least she’ll be able to buy you liquor. Make her good for *something*.”

“Yeah, I’ll have her get me a bottle of ().” Evie felt a twinge of shame as she laughed with them. She thought a lot of Lindsay. Lindsay was like family. But as soon as she saw that she had no new messages on her cell, her spirits just fell even more.

After the afternoon sun slowly withered below the Pacific Ocean, or more appropriately, the stucco walls of Rio Estates, shade enveloped the de LaFuente’s back yard. The tanning session at Dee Dee’s came to an end and the Sangros, after comparing tan lines, gathered up their things and headed back to their dorms.

Were they
not at Dee Dee's
house?

“Ay, you got too dark, Alejandra,” Dee Dee winced as the girls were leaving.

“Maria Felix was my guera!”

“It doesn’t really matter,” Alejandra said calmly as she pulled her car keys from out of her bag.. “My costume is so amazing, no one is even going to bother with my tan.”

So then
why get
a tan?

“O-kay,” Dee Dee wanted to make sure Alejandra knew she wasn’t so convinced.

After the Sangros left, Evie told Dee Dee that she still didn't have a costume for the dance.

"No worries," Dee Dee said as she gathered her bottles of suntan oil and some Teen People magazines off the deck table. "I already have our outfits for the dance."

"Our outfits?" Evie started picking up the glasses and soda cans from around the pool.

"Oh, just leave those," Dee Dee said. "Marcela will come out and clean up. So, yeah," she continued. "Ally's not the only one with such *fabulous* connections. Grace has all this great stuff from Mexico, all these fancy embroidered clothes, crinblines, hats, some jewelry. She used to be an actress, in the Mexican soaps."

wouldn't Delia be more formal if her name was Grace?

"Really?" Evie wondered if Lindsay would know of her. "Which one?"

"Oh, just about all the *telenovelas*," Dee Dee bragged. "But you know how the stories just run for a limited time and she just had minor roles. She was always the *amante* (SPANISH, MISTRESS) and I guess she was good, because she was given a lot of the left over costumes and that doesn't always happen for actresses with bit parts."

Graciela, a seductress? *recents?* *Imagine?* What until Evie told Lindsay? *huh?*

"Anyway," Dee Dee continued. "You, Alejandro and I *have* to go to the dance together. I have it all planned."

"Alex?" Evie asked. "When did you talk to Alex?" Her stomach suddenly felt jumpy. When did he call Dee Dee? Why hadn't he called her?

"I haven't talked to him...yet," Dee Dee admitted. "But he'll do it."

Evie couldn't help but feel unnerved by Dee Dee's statement. *Yeah, like you got him dancing in the palm of your hand.*

"I got it all figured out," Dee Dee went on as she opened the sliding glass door to her house. "You'll be Frida Kahlo, Alex can be Diego Rivera and I'll be Cristina, Frida's sister. Que cute, no?"

"What?" Evie balked. "Uh, *no*. Dela, I'm not gonna be Frida Kahlo."

She caught her reflection in the sliding glass doors and tousled her blonde bangs.

"Evie, *yes*," Dee Dee walked into the kitchen. "You *have* to, to make it work."

"Dela," Evie followed her. "Frida is so played out. Everyone goes as Frida."

"Maybe," Dee Dee put her magazines on the counter. "But I bet nobody here knows how to do her right. You should see the stuff that Gracie has. You won't believe it. We'll be different than anyone at the dance. Even Alejandra."

"No, *you*'ll be different. Nobody ever dresses ^{as} at Cristina. What does she even look like?"

"Oh," Dee Dee pulled her hair out of her pony tail. "She was very beautiful."

Oh, great. Dee Dee was gonna be all the sexy one and Evie was gonna be stuck with an ugly unibrow and manly moustache. In front of Alex? *No way*.

"Uh, no thanks," Evie said. "I mean, thanks for offering the costume and everything."

"Evie," Dee Dee opened the fridge and looked through it. She kept her back towards Evie. "You *have* to go as Frida. Nobody will know I'm Cristina unless there's a Frida and a Diego."

"Dela, nobody is gonna know anyway," Evie protested. "It's not that kind of dance, or school for that matter."

Dee Dee suddenly got quiet. She got a soda from the refrigerator and popped it

open. As she drank from it, she looked away from Evie and said nothing.

"Dela, why don't you dress as Frida and I'll go as Cristina?"

There, a compromise.

"I already had the outfit for Cristina tailored to fit me," Dee Dee said softly. "The dance is already a week away and I thought for sure you would want to go with me.

Remember how much fun we had, dressing up for the Marina Park Beauty Pageant?"

"Yeah," Evie sighed. She headed to let Dee Dee down. "Okay, I'll try to think about it. We'll figure something out." *hated?*

"Well, I hope you do. I still have to tell Alejandro." "You want a soda?" Dee Dee offered.

"Yeah, okay. " Evie helped herself to a Kiwi Apple Snapple.

"What's the Snapple Fact?" Dee Dee asked as Evie twisted off the cap.

Evie looked at the cap and read it out loud. "The shortest distance between..." *spell it all out.*

"What does that mean?"

"It means, Don't push friends into something they don't want to do," Evie smirked.

But really, Evie wondered, why was Dee Dee so eager to always have Alex in the picture? He has been practically her personal escort at school, her private swim instructor and now her date for the Dia de los Muertos Dance? Why *even* have Evie along? Then she remembered, didn't Diego have an affair with Frida's sister, Cristina? Yes. She was sure of it. And *that's* a Snapple Fact.

Dee Dee headed towards the bar and soon disappeared into the thick of the party. Evie suddenly found herself feeling uncomfortably alone. She looked after Dee Dee, but soon lost sight of her. Hey, wasn't *she* the one who was going to bail on Dee Dee?

Within a short time more fancy dressed people arrived who Evie didn't know and with all the extra body heat, it soon felt as if the entire oxygen supply from La Pantera had been sucked out. Everyone was soon started fanning themselves with the plastic dinner menus and wiping their foreheads with the thin cream colored cocktail napkins.

None of the guests made attempts to meet Evie on their own and she soon began to feel even more out of place. Just about all the other girls -- Fabby, Denise, Charlene -- appeared to be engaged in an exclusive conversation. Alejandra was no [?]where to be seen.

I know
the
foolish

Evie finally saw Dee Dee again, wedged tight between two unknown revelers in a small booth, laughing and looking like she was having a grand old time. Evie was about to make her way towards Dee Dee when she suddenly noticed the abalone shell, dangling precariously from the thin cord around Dee Dee's neck. It upset Evie all over again. She would definitely rather be alone than be with Dee Dee, that's for sure. (Spanish saying-
mario

That was something, Evie wistfully remembered, that Raquel never did -- just take off and not come back. Whenever she went out with Raquel, it was always the two of them, side by side, meeting, or rather listening to Raquel make fun of, people. But at least they did it *together*.

Evie walked around the dimly lit lounge, trying to not look so aimless.

"Hey, Evie!" It was Fabby calling out to her.

"Yeah?" Evie asked eagerly.

“Have some pastel!” Fabby handed her a small plate with a slice of chocolate cake on it. “And please,” Fabby looked around. “Try not to look *tan seriosa*. This is a celebration, *chica!*”

Evie took her slice of Fabby’s birthday cake and tried to look less *seriosa*. As long as she looked like she was enjoying the birthday cake, she *was* part of the celebration, **whether or not anyone talked to her**. However, when she was finally scraping the side of her desert plate with her fork, she knew it was time to find a new focus for the evening. Fortunately, that’s when she saw it - the old jukebox in the far back corner of the lounge. It looked like the same grand gaudy jukebox she remembered as a kid. A bit smaller, of course, but that’s what happens when you grow up, things shrink up on you.

Evie went over to the jukebox and flipped through the choices that covered everything from Los Tigres del Norte to Green Day. The old juke had been updated with CDs rather than the vinyl 45s that once slid out onto a turntable. She finally found something she wanted to hear. She put in two coins and pressed down on two separate buttons, G and 4.

“What did you pick?”

Evie looked up and found a boy looking over her shoulder. He looked down at the selections with her.

Oh,” She glanced at him, making sure she didn’t appear to be looking him over. He looked appealing enough. Short dark hair, dark eyes, yellow tennis shirt, a small mole

ladies to throw Papa a kiss, right here on each cheek.” He tilted his head up.

Alejandra put her arms around Jose and puckered up. She was getting ready for the timer, but when the camera flash went off, Jose turned his entire head towards Evie and pressed his face into hers. He slid his tongue deep into her mouth and at the same time, moved his hand higher, around her chest and squeezed her breast.

She felt a dangerous tingle shoot across her body.

“Jose!” Evie jerked away.

“Oh, Evie,” He leaned back into Alejandra and just laughed. “Don’t be such a prude.”

“I’m not a prude,” Evie wiped her mouth. “You’re an asshole!”

“Hey,” Alejandra pouted. “What’s going on?!” It was obvious that she hadn’t seen exactly what Jose had just done.

Evie started to get up from the booth’s seat.

“Where you going?” Jose held on to her hand.

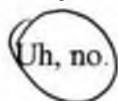
“Out of here,” Evie crossed her arms, covering her chest.

“What’s wrong, Evelina?” Alejandra asked. “Camera shy?”

“Yeah,” Evie glared at her. “*Exactly.*” She looked behind her, at the party. I gotta go to the bathroom.”



Alejandra put her skinny arms around Jose again. “Okay, come back, yeah?”



Evie stepped out as Alejandra started to close the booth’s curtain.

cross Evie's mind to call her mother. Her mother always told Evie that if there was ever an emergency, any type of emergency, she could always call home and she would go and pick her up. No questions asked. Was this an emergency?

Evie figured it really wasn't, so she flipped open her phone and dialed 411. She was surprised to get an actual live person.

"Can you connect me with a taxi service?" she asked the operator.

Living in a three auto household and having friends with cars, Evie never had the opportunity to use a taxi in Rio Estates. The only time she used a cab was when the whole family visited Sabrina at Stanford and they all made shopping trips into San Francisco. Her mother, always overwhelmed by the one-way, vertical streets, would, to Evie's delight, spring for a taxi.

NOTE:
MS, 10076

"I'm sorry," The operator didn't sound so sorry. "We can't recommend a business. You have to give us a name."

"Okay, um," Evie thought out loud. "How about Yellow ... Yellow Checkered Cab? Service?" An obvious business sounding name. There had to be at least one listed in all of Ventura County.

"Do you have a street address?" The operator asked impatiently.

"Uh, do you have anything downtown?"

"I'm sorry, but I need an address."

Evie clicked off. She looked at her cell. She was losing time. Should she just call her mother? She walked back in La Pantera and peered into the back lounge area. Guests were still **dancing** to the horrible () and waiters were still taking orders. The party was far from ending. She checked the time on her cell phone. It was nearly midnight. She had

"I sent you two text messages tonight. You never replied."

"What? Alex, I didn't get any messages." She pulled out her phone from her bag and checked her text history. "No," she told him. "Nothing."

"Well, I sent them."

"What did they say?"

"Nothing" Alex looked straight ahead, at the road. "It doesn't matter now."

"Alex," Evie looked out his truck's window. "I'm having a really tough time here. It's like I just don't know who my friends are any more."

Alex was quiet for a long time before he spoke up. "Maybe they don't know who you are."

"What is that suppose to mean?"

"I dunno, Evie. You tell me."

"I have *no* idea what you are talking about."

"Okay, well, first you try to be a badass," Alex started. "With your blue hair and everything, then you hook up with Dee Dee and Alejandra and that crew and then you try to be like them."

"I'm not trying to be like them!"

"Oh, really?" He looked over at her hair and then at her sandals. "You could have fooled me." FLOJOS.

"Alex," she pulled on the side of her blonde hair. "*This* was *my* decision."

"It would be cool if it really was, but I don't think it was. Like I've said before, I don't care what you do with your hair, but I don't get it. You're smart and one of the coolest girls I know and I don't know why you are letting everyone lead you around."

Evie sat back in her seat and crossed her arms. Why was Alex lecturing her? Who gave him the authority to issue reality checks? What ^{did} he know about being a good friend? Look what he did with the abalone shell he had promised to give her. Yeah, nice friend. She looked out the window and could feel her eyes begin to well up. Do not cry. Do Not Cry

"I mean, when's the last time you've even been out to Sea Street?" Alex continued. "Let alone try to surf? Have you even tried out the new board I helped you pick ^{ed} out? You were going on and on how you wanted to surf and I took all this time to help you pick out ^{it}."

"Oh, sorry if I wasted your time, Alex."

"No, it's not that. I'm just saying I spent the time helping you because I was actually looking forward to doing something with someone ^{with} you." He shook his head. "Maybe you need to take a long good hard look at herself in the mirror."

"I need to take a good look at myself? What about you, Alex?"

"Me? Evie, just remember who is driving you home. Just remember who *you* woke up in the middle of the night and who *you* called to get up and come out and drive *you* home. I really like you Evie, but sometimes you can be so self absorbed."

"Self absorbed? You know what, Alex?" She unsnapped her seat belt. "Don't do me any favors." She motioned to ^{the} Pollo Loco up ahead on the boulevard. "Just drop me off here."

"Oh, Evie, come on. I'm not gonna leave you here. Don't be silly."

"No, I mean it." Evie was near a breaking point. "I don't need a fucking lift from you. You call yourself a friend? Giving things you promise to me to someone else!"

She looked down at her feet and saw that she had at least three blisters, large, pink and full of. How could this night have gone so wrong? Why does it seem, lately, that every night goes badly?

She flipped open her phone. The time was 12:23 am. She would never make home in time for her curfew. She punched in her home phone number.

"Mom," she said as soon as the other end picked up. "Can you come get me?"

13

The next morning Evie still couldn't shake off her funk from the night before. She brushed her teeth and gargled with mouthwash as soon as she got home, all to get the residue of Jose out of her mouth. Her eyes were swollen from an entire night of crying and she wondered if her parents, whose room was just down the hall, had heard her. She was exhausted.

It was all a blur after she got out of Alex's truck. Her mother had picked her up at El Pollo Loco and, thankfully, stuck to her promise of "No Questions Asked." She didn't even point out that it was almost 1 am by the time she picked up Evie. Evie wondered if the "No Questions Asked" rule applied the morning after. God, it would be just like her mother to start ragging on her first thing in the morning after such a horrendous night.

Good Flow.

Evie's cell vibrated. *Alex?*

But she saw it was Dee Dee. Evie looked at her cell. Dee Dee *must* 've known about Alejandra and Jose and Evie felt oddly betrayed. Jose wasn't her boyfriend, but

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

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

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

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

"I thought you said he was her boyfriend."

"A boyfriend is a friend."

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

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

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

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

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

Evie knew it was rude to cut her mother off like that. She watched her measure out the plastic daises, making sure each one had a similar distance between each other

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

She got to thinking about Alex. It took the threat of Dee Dee just to make her realize how important he was to her. She started thinking of all the sweet little things he did for her, walking with her into the Bard party, finding the shell and (at first) wanting give it to her. He was always so nice to her parents and when her grandma Sally came to visit last summer, he tried so hard to impress her with his Spanish. She really liked the way he never let other people's issues get in the way of what he thought was right. That's one of the reasons she was confident enough to let him teach her surf last summer. Even as she tumbled off her soft fop and dealt with the Sea Street lineup of aggro short boarders who don't appreciate girls getting in the way of their waves, she knew she'd be okay with Alex around.

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

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

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

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

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

Coward.

She called him again.

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

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

Nice? Guys don’t like to be called nice. What should she have said? That was so muscular and strong of you to pick me up? “Well, anyway, I’m just calling because I’m sorry about last night. *Duh! She already said that!* “And I’m hoping you’ll call me back and I --.” Beep.

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

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

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

"Hey, so are you } or are you not into going to Charlene's dorm?" Dee Dee asked Evie. "She having an after party."

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

"It's on the DL," Dee Dee said knowingly. "Oh," she put her hand to her ear. "I lost an earring. Shit. Gracie will kill me. I gotta go back in and look for it."

"Are you serious?" Evie asked.

Yeah, they are the ones she were from *El Cuerpo de Deseo*.

"Let me go with you."

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

Evie took the keys and headed out to Dee Dee's car, where everyone else had the made the parking lot into one big tailgate party. But this tailgate, being Villanueva students, belonged to rides worth sixty grand, at least.

"Evie?

She looked up. It was Raquel.

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

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

"Lying? When did I ever lie to you?"

"Don't be an idiot."

"Yeah, I'm always on idiot, Raquel."

"Because you can be." > *Wh?*

"Come on, Jose."

"Don't tell him what to do." (4)

They argued and Raquel takes off into the darkness

MUCH LONGER

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

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

"Me?" Evie protested. "I didn't say anything." (eye icon)

"Yeah, right." He came right up into Evie. She leaned back, as far as she could into a parked car to give him more room, but he moved closer into her. Soon both their bodies were just inches away and his face was almost touching

What? The Fuck, Evie?

What? *She* tried to sound tough. But inside she was dying. He wasn't going to hit her, was he? She could actually feel his anger cutting through the cold air and *hitting* *breathing* into her face. > *huh?*

(eye icon) "You know, somebody's gotta teach you a lesson?"

He was going to hit her. Evie closed her eyes and braced herself. *He is going to hit me.*

Just then, her cell phone rang. Cutting the tension on both ends.

"Uh," Evie said slowly. "I gotta get this. It's my dad."

Jose back up, but not a lot.

Her phone rang again.

He's here. He's picking me up and he probably can't find me."

Just then, Dee Dee came out of the gym.

"Jose!" She came over to the both of them "What the hell are you doing?!" With what seemed to be all her strength she pushed Jose away. "Jose, you will be so sorry if you lay a hand on her! I swear!"

"I wasn't gonna do anything," he suddenly backed off. "She ain't even worth it."

"It didn't look that way." Dee Dee stood between him and Evie.

"Man," He waved them both aside. "I do not need this **hen party**." He rubbed his hair with both hands and turned to leave.

"Josito," Alejandra called out. "Wait up."

"Alejandra," Dee Dee snapped. "How could you not do anything?"

"Oh, Dela," Alejandra crossed her arm. "You are over reacting. He wasn't going to do anything to Evie."

"You could have fooled me." Evie finally exhaled. Her body was still shaking.

"What's going on?" Dee Dee asked.

"Jose pissed cause Raquel found out about him and Alejandra," Evie said. "She was just here."

"Raquel was?"

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

“What? Dee Dee looked at Alejandra. Is that true?”

“Dela, I do not *chase* men,” Alejandra sniffed. “I don’t *need* to.

“How could you be after someone else boyfriend? Don’t you have enough attention?”

“Oh, come on, Dela. This stupid dance is so over. We’re all going to Charlene’s dorm.”

“Not me.” Dee Dee crossed her arms.

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

But Dee Dee put her hands on her hips which infuriated Alejandra even more.

Alejandra made it very clear to Dee Dee that she would no longer be welcome to her friends and stormed off to find Jose.

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

“In a dark hall?”

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

“I didn’t, but I had seen them last night.”

“Last night?” Dee Dee asked. “*Donde*?”

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

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

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

“What?”

"Your shell necklace, the one you wore last night. Who gave it to you?"

"My necklace? Nobody. I got it in Veracruz."

"In Veracruz? Are you serious?"

"Yeah, why would I lie?"

"It's just that it looks exactly like the abalone shell Alex had found for me at Bard Beach. We ^{were} at a party there a while ago."

"At Bard Beach?" Dee Dee raised her eyebrows. "Well, no, Alex didn't give me any necklace. I got mine in Veracruz. They sell them all over the street. But, I'll have you know," she feigned snobbery. "It's *not* abalone. It's mother of pearl and I chose the necklace over the mother of pearl paperweight with the wiggly eyes glued on."

Evie laughed.

But what's the big deal with the necklace?

Ah... nothing."

"So," Dee Dee looked around the parking lot. "Where do you think Raquel went?"

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

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

"Actually, yeah." Evie said.

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

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

"Ballsy of me?" Dee Dee said. "What about you going to parties out on Bard

I saw that one coming away.

"It was?" Raquel asked, guard coming down.

"Yeah," Dee Dee smiled softly. "I remember, at Santa Clara cemetery. I was sitting with my family. I tried so hard not to cry. I really wanted to be strong for my dad, but when I looked over and saw you, all crying and everything, I almost lost it. I was incredibly touched. I had never seen you cry before. It's like you never get sad."

"Oh, I get sad." Raquel started. "But, I dunno..."

Evie bit her lip. She didn't know quite what to say. She remembered Margaret de LaFuente's funeral. The crowded mass at Santa Clara church, followed by a car procession to the cemetery. She herself cried, as much as her mother and sister did, but she now remembered how much Raquel just balled.

"Dee Dee," Raquel said. "I really, really liked your mother. I mean, loved her. I really thought that she was so cool and she was always the nicest of all the moms. Like, I never felt judged, you know what I mean."

very
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esp. coming
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"Yeah," Dee Dee said. "I don't like talking about it. I'd rather not think about my mother. You know, I just wanna think happy thoughts."

"But you can think happy thoughts... about your mother," Evie said.

"I guess..."

"You can guess all you want, but I *know*," Evie said. "Have you ever thought, I don't know, about using Día de los Muertos to honor your mother?"

"No," Dee Dee said. "I really don't want to think about it."

"Yeah?" Evie asked.

"I actually went back to the altar. I bought a sugar skull and put her name on it. I put her paintbrush on the altar. Remember she used to paint?"

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"Yeah," Raquel laughed, wiping away her tears. "My mom was so jealous! She can't draw worth shit!"

"My mom too!" Evie said. "You should see these planters she's been painting. It's so embarrassing."

They all laughed.

"Hey, let's go. I have an idea," Raquel said. "But you totally have to trust me. It'll be good. "We can go in my mother's car," Raquel said.

* * *

